

Optimism or Pessimism...? (continued)



March 3
Ron and Rod

Thanks for your replies. I am thinking still and scratching my head.

To continue on my pessimistic rant a bit. It seems the far right (too broad a term perhaps), but we could look at someone like Milo Y for example.

I think it is profoundly telling that Milo--a third rate intellectual--was never defeated politically by anyone in the left or revolutionary left. His political performance in my opinion grasps and surpasses what the left/ far left thinks the nature of politics is. It is not Noam Chomsky laying down boring facts for 3-5 hours.

It is important to note in the ways that the developing alt-right is far ahead of the game compared to the developing stuff on the left. For example the alt right understands clearly that politics is war between friends and enemies. They understand that there are plenty of Black, Latino and Asian conservatives who hate immigrants, Muslims, 'criminals', etc. Or another way to put it is that a lot of immigrants hate a lot of other immigrants. Or that a lot

of Black people hate a lot of other Black people, etc, etc. My sense is that the progressive left is still in denial that so many Black, Latino, and Asian people voted for Trump. The alt-right has a better handle on identity than the progressive left and arguably the revolutionary left. The alt-right has devastatingly critiqued the stuff on safe spaces and politically correct culture.



I have long believed that the far left no longer captures the most creative, talented, smart etc people of society. I see it in NYC all the time. The smartest working class kids have different plans. Instead of joining the far left, they are desperately trying to become part of the middle class. On one level no big surprise. But perhaps my point is that the far left's culture is as stifling and stagnant as a classroom in a public/ charter school. People actually do not have fundamentally better experiences or more freedoms in left spaces than they do in the rest of society. Gone are the days when the left played the role of 'first encounters' between races or allowed people to experience something new. We are generally too rigid and conservative.

There is something to the idea that we need a 'alt-left' that I occasionally hear people joke about.

Either way, I appreciate both your responses and I am certainly

thinking through them. Thanks.

Solidarity,

Shemon

March 3
Shemon,

I believe that Milo was essentially run out of Britain by left liberals who annihilated him politically. I think that you give him far too much credit. And, further, he ran himself into the wall in this country a week or two ago.

Rather than looking to the "revolutionary left ", I think that we have to accept that a new left needs to emerge from new mass movements, and these show signs of emerging.

Jack

March 3
Shemon,

There are a number of things that might be said in response to your email.

1. I think you are conflating Trump voters with strength of the alt-right, which I think you are greatly overestimating. Many people, including those who previously voted for Obama, voted for Trump, and for all sorts of reasons. It would be a grave mistake to see them as hard-core supporters of the alt-right. Moreover, many of these people are having second thoughts about Trump. See this article from the Washington Post a few days ago:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/these-iowans-voted-for-trump-many-of-them-are-already-disappointed/2017/02/26/18f86b86-fa8d-11e6-be05-1a3817ac21a5_story.html?utm_term=.0bb1798d3f82

2. Trump is highly unlikely to fulfill his campaign promises. He will not bring back the coal industry. He will not revive the old manufacturing industries and bring the old high-paying union jobs back to the Rust Belt. His/the Republicans' replacement for (mostly likely, amendments to) the ACA will force people to lose medical coverage, pay more for what they get, etc. His travel bans) will lose in the courts. (So too, I believe, the Republicans' moves to stifle dissent.) A protectionist trade policy, if Trump can even get it through

congress, will result in fewer jobs and higher prices. As this becomes clear, I expect his support will begin to erode, although some of his hard-core supporters may move further to the right, not to the left. And I leave aside the continuing political crisis and overall chaos and incompetence that have characterized his administration.

3. As far as the longer term trend is concerned, the younger generation is liberal on a broad range of issues - racial/ethnic, gender/LGBT, immigrants, the environment - and I think this cohort will grow proportionately (as older people die off) and will continue to stay liberal if not edge to the left. Trump and the Republicans may roll back some of the gains of the past few decades, but I do not see a long-term reversal of the broader trends.

4. Yes, I agree that the left, in its vast majority, is not an asset. Many leftists, including a big chunk of the anarchist movement as well as the "socialist" left, are really more militant liberals than anything else. (Many people who call themselves revolutionaries will continue to vote Democratic, on the basis of supporting the "lesser-evil", and will therefore constitute a tail for the Democratic Party rather than pose an alternative to both parties and therefore to the system as a whole.) I also believe that a significant percentage of explicitly revolutionary leftists are authoritarians/totalitarians at heart, whatever they may call themselves. This is reflected in their continuing commitment to/illusions in Marxism, which is, underneath the libertarian rhetoric, totalitarian, not libertarian. (If socialism is inevitable, then freedom does not exist ontologically. A "socialism" that "necessarily" results from the "laws of motion" of capitalism and the "logic" of history will not be socialism but state capitalism. This is reflected in Marxists' call to "nationalize the means of production in the hands of the state.") Like Jack, I hope that a bigger and better, more libertarian, left will emerge out of the developing resistance. However, I am not greatly optimistic about this, given the continuing (if not growing) strength of Marxism both on campus and on the left more broadly.

5. As far as the chance of a libertarian revolution is concerned, I don't expect to see one in the foreseeable future, perhaps even in my lifetime. (Speaking personally, I see my job as keeping the idea of an anarchist/libertarian revolution alive for a later generation.) But, as I said in my earlier email, I think it is too early to be pessimistic about the existing situation, generally, and the (hopefully, growing) movement, more specifically. When people start struggling, a lot of things can happen, and relatively quickly.

Ron

March 4
Hi Ron and Jack

Once again thanks for the engagement.

Jack, that is helpful about Milo. I was not aware he was run out of Britain on a political basis. That is good to hear.

Jack and Ron I strongly agree with your point about looking to the 'rev left' and that hopefully something new will emerge out of the mass struggles--fingers crossed. I would like to see deeper engagement from the Utopian on that point.

As a positive contribution to the list I submit this Paul Mason presentation regarding mass struggles.

<https://vimeo.com/79520188>

Even when Mason is awful wrong, I am willing to give him my ear at least.

I understand both your concerns about my over estimation about Milo. However Ron, I know very clearly the diff between Milo supporters and Trump voters. I have been following developments like a hawk. I have watched the town hall meetings where Republicans are being yelled at among other things.

Ron on your point number 2, I am well aware of it and have argued that in my own writings for a long time now. Aware of point 3 as well. I agree with you on point 4 that 99% of Marxists are Stalinists or liberals. I have a front row ticket to that show in NYC. And that a large part of anarchists are the same.

On the possibilities of revolution, I have to keep thinking about what you write. My initial thoughts are that it is revolution or bust, but I would say that about any period in world history considering my "ultra leftist" deviations :)

Shemon

March 4
Hi Shemon,

Here's the latest on how Yiannopoulos is dealt with in Britain:

https://www.buzzfeed.com/jamieross/people-want-to-disqualify-milo-yiannopoulos-from-being-elect?utm_term=.ktYYYYDQRpB#.mg0VVw5BrX

Jack

March 5
Shemon,

While I am not optimistic on the overall chance of revolution in my lifetime, I do feel that there now exist two factors that might make such a revolution possible that were not necessarily present in the past. One is modern productive technology, which might provide the material basis for all the world's people to live in some reasonable degree of comfort if society were organized differently. Two is the existence of the world-wide communications network that might make possible the emergence of a truly global human consciousness, and that therefore might offer the chance that human beings can move beyond the sectarian "us vs. them" mentality that I see as the major cause of social classes, hierarchy in general, and states.

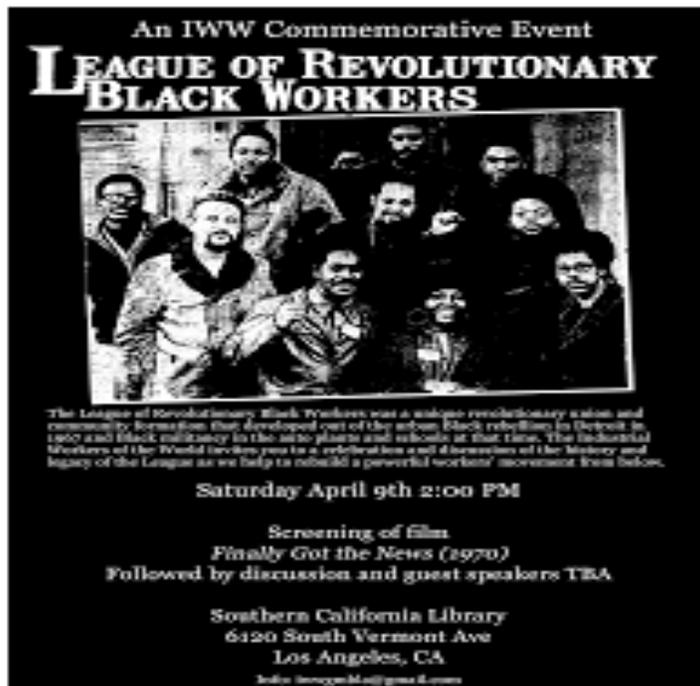
Ron

March 8
All,

Great discussion thus far. I wanted to add some of my own local observations.

First, I think the developments in the DNC are important. In the run-up to the election for DNC chair, there was a growing polarization between Tom Perez, the "New Democrat" candidate, and Keith Ellison, who represented the Bernie wing of the DP. The result was a compromise, with Perez winning but nominating Ellison for Deputy Chair. To me, that seems like a holding pattern whereby Ellison will be groomed to move a bit close to the "center" of the New Democrat political approach for the next four years before being succeeded by Ellison or someone else close to Bernie's position. In Detroit, several avid Bernie supporters I know joined the Democratic Party and participated in its local convention. In other words, the Bernie energy is being sucked up into the

Democratic Party machine and this compromise about the DNC chair seems likely to keep the Bernie dissidents close to the Dems, whereas they likely would have been alienated if Ellison had been entirely shut out. For this reason, I think we'll see the Dems shift a bit to the left in the next several years. Given the instability of the Trump administration less than two months since the election, as well as the policies it is attempting to implement, I think the Dems have a good chance of winning the White House back in 2020, and may make substantial gains in the House and Senate as well.



The other big observation I've made is the growth of an uncritical Leninism among academics. Just today I saw some goofball post a picture on Instagram of a shelf at his house with a bust of Lenin. Maybe it's ironic. More substantively, the best and most insightful people I've come across in the academy are no further to the left than Bernie Sanders, now or in the 1970s. One person I know pretty well has devoted the last seven years of his life to a dissertation singing the praises of Ken Cockrel and Justin Ravitz. Cockrel was a leader of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (who did some good deeds but were basically Stalinists) and Ravitz was the country's "first Marxist judge." In my own research, I gained access to his personal papers and saw that, as judge, he took it upon himself to prosecute a war on drugs against unemployed black youth in Detroit. I get that the Stalinists kept

better records but it'd be great if the knowledge these folks produced didn't simply support the same old order.

I hope that these observations aren't too obscure. The purpose of noting them is to suggest that, from what I've observed, there is a growing enthusiasm around the Democratic Party and a dearth of criticism of Democrats among people that should know better.

In spite of this, I find myself more enthusiastic than ever about the potential for a mass movement to develop, and out of it a "new" left. I have been active in the founding of a local group called Solidarity & Defense, a rejuvenation of an old group that fizzled several years ago. In that effort, I've worked alongside cadre of the First of May Anarchist Alliance (M1) that many of us are familiar with. The meetings are tedious, with the group and people close to it attempting to stage-manage people's participation along what amounts to a basically liberal approach to race and identity. But the reason I continue to participate is because of the movement that is developing. If the group succeeds in having an impact, it will do so in spite of itself and because lots of people want to get involved in serious oppositional activities right now. If that happens, the old politics of the left will be totally swept away. I can easily imagine sitting in a room in another couple of months that includes the five or six M1-aligned people along with fifteen or twenty new people, mixed race, multi-gendered, of various sexual orientations, motivated by a desire to get shit done that will overwhelm the stale arguments now current in the movement. The Milo stuff is helpful in this regard because what he represents is that the old identity categories and ways of approaching race, those aligned with liberalism, have indeed proven unable to make sense of people's lives. Lots of people are searching for something new. Out of this energy, we may see the emergence of a new and exciting left that we may even be enthusiastic to be a part of.

Mikey

March 8
All,

Some thoughts, based on Shemon's original comments and the responses to them:

The issue is not whether there will be a revolution in the near term, which seems unlikely. (Which is a different question than whether a workers/popular revolution will be *eventually* possible. As I have written before, I do not agree with the communizers/*EndNotes* argument against working class revolution's possibility.) The issue is whether there is beginning a new wave of mass radicalization, similar to (but different from) the thirties and the sixties. This seems to be happening. That there is also a rightward development does not contradict this; the movement is bipolar, shall we say.

Of course the left movement is overwhelmingly liberal and pro-Democratic electoralism. What else should we expect at first? As Shemon and others point out, there is almost no Left, no socialist groupings.

However, the Sanders' movement showed that there is an opening for "socialism." And the lack of socialist organizations has a positive side (as the relative collapse of the CP helped the revolutionary left during the 60s). It leaves openings. The only "left" that is mentioned is usually the anarchists. These tend to be atheoretical and insurrectionist, aside from the pacifists and gradualists who are simply reformists, but they too provide an opening.

The marches and demonstrations have already had victories. As one example, if not for the "resistance" the Republicans would probably have already repealed the ACA, with no nonsense about replacing it. But the popular rebellion has forced them to commit to "replace" it and keep some of its benefits, which they have been so far unable to do. What will happen I don't know, but we should not overlook the benefits of the popular movement. Similar for the Muslim ban.

The issue is whether there will develop a left/antiauthoritarian wing of the popular movement, and what might be done to build one.

A note on ethics, religion, and socialism. A good deal of interesting material was written on this topic by Eric Fromm that is still worth reading.

Wayne
