

Commentary

Not My President!

The New Resistance—The rise of a U.S. movement which rejects the legitimacy of Trump's presidency

By Wayne Price

In demonstrations across the United States, protestors have raised signs saying, “Not My President!” Obviously they are not denying that state machinery has given Donald J. Trump the position of head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, ruler of the mightiest and wealthiest state in the world. What they are denying is Trump’s *legitimacy* for the position, his *moral right* to claim the presidency.



Under the capitalist system, electoral democracy serves several purposes. One is that it permits factions of the ruling capitalist elite to struggle over their different programs (based on differing interests) and to make final decisions—without civil wars or establishing a dictatorship (both of which can be costly).

Another major purpose of capitalist democracy is that it fools the people into thinking that they run the country. It lets them think that they are free people, not subjects of a very rich minority. It distracts them from the fact that the day after an election, most adults go to work (those who have jobs) and take orders from

unelected bosses. This goal requires that they see the government as legitimately representing the voters.



That became an issue even before the end of the campaign. Expecting to lose, Trump insisted that the election was “rigged.” He refused to say whether he would accept the results if he lost. Politicians and pundits, Democrats and Republicans, were aghast! They cried that it was contrary to the whole system to not accept the election results. It was essential to peacefully hand over power. They reminded us how George W. Bush had lost the popular vote to Al Gore, but that the Supreme Court majority had given the election to Bush—and that Gore, as a loyal supporter of the system, had not fought it. Even earlier, Richard Nixon believed that he had lost to John F. Kennedy only because (Nixon told close friends) the Daley machine in Chicago had fraudulently over-counted votes for Kennedy. But Nixon did not make a fuss. That was supposedly the American way!



The Rigging of the 2016 U.S. Election

The most obvious aspect of the unfairness of the 2016 election results is that Hillary Clinton won the popular vote. She won almost 3 million more votes than Trump. Due to the distribution of the votes, however, she lost in the archaic Electoral College. In the 18th century, this was originally created to be a buffer between the

voters and the election of the president, to be a compromise between large and small states, and to strengthen the power of the slaveholders. The distorting influence of the Electoral College is increased by the “winner take all” rules of almost every state, so that Democrats in Texas and Republicans in New York might as well stay home. No other capitalist democracy has such an indirect system; in all others, the “popular vote” is just the “vote.” Despite its obvious injustices, the establishment has never made an effort to alter or abolish the Electoral College.

Another major distortion of the election, was the vicious efforts of the Republican party to suppress the votes of African-Americans, Latinos, young people, and other sections which tended to vote Democratic. This was the first election since the Supreme Court ended federal oversight of electoral changes in formerly segregationist states. The Republicans went all out in trying to suppress the votes, especially of Black people. They limited early voting, made new requirements that voters have state IDs, closed voting sites in Black neighborhoods, dropped people from voting lists, and justified all this with lying claims that there was a problem of “voter fraud.” The Democrats fought back, winning court cases



and limiting the suppression, but the suppressors did their best to work around these rulings. This is not to mention the long-term results of the high rate of incarceration among African-Americans and Latinos, followed by the denial of the vote to thousands of ex-prisoners, as well as the many legal residents who cannot vote.

Then the Republican head of the FBI, James Comey, interfered in the election. Eleven days before the final vote, he announced that the FBI was going to investigate a new set of emails which might

have been sent by Hillary Clinton, implying that they might include illegal material. At the time of his announcement, he had no information whatever about the emails, but many voters got the impression that the emails' case was being reopened and that Clinton had done something wrong. A week later, he announced that nothing had been found—but the damage had been done (considering how close the vote was and also that early voting had already started).

"It is enough that the people know there was an election. The people who cast the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything."

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Joseph Stalin
(1878–1953)

Meanwhile, agencies of the Russian government had hacked the emails of the Democratic and Republican Parties—but only published emails from the Democrats, in order to embarrass them and to help Trump get elected. Despite the evidence, Trump denied Russian involvement and urged the Russians to do more hacking of Clinton's records. Republican leaders refused to issue a bipartisan statement with Democrats denouncing the intervention in U.S. elections. (But U.S. outrage is hypocritical, since the U.S. military and CIA have often intervened in foreign countries to overthrow governments, elected or not.)

These negative effects are in the context of the generally undemocratic and unfair political system of U.S. "representative democracy." The flood of big money into politics has only increased since the "Citizens United" Supreme Court ruling. The gerrymandering of districts distorts the House of Representatives as well as the state legislatures. The Senate has two Senators from each state, no matter the size of its population, elected for six years. Supreme Court justices are chosen for life. And so on.

The Character of President Trump

The distortion of the electoral process is compounded by the nature of the new president, Donald J. Trump. Hillary Clinton is just another establishment politician, close to Wall Street and to hawkish foreign policy advisors. She and her husband had gotten rich while in politics. Her only positives were that she would have been the first woman president, and that she was not Trump. But Trump is something else, something way out of the box. Personally he is vile and disgusting, the type of man whom most decent people would not want to meet their families. A sexual predator, pathological liar, bully, cheater of his workers and contractors, corrupt, and racist.



Politically, his policies are reactionary and dangerous. He denies the very reality of climate change, which threatens the survival of humanity. While not personally a fascist, he has opened the door for fascists and works with them. Even just in terms of competence, for a politician he is uniquely ignorant of how the U.S. government works, at home and abroad, and is unwilling to learn from others. He could set off an international crisis just from ignorance and arrogance.

Whatever the results of the election, millions of U.S. citizens will not accept such a person as their national leader.

Working Class Vote?

Yet a little less than half the voters did vote for Trump. (Somewhat less than half the eligible voters did not vote at all.) They had mixed

motives. Some were out and out white supremacists. Many feared Latino immigrants and Muslim and Arab immigrants. Many hated Hillary for good and bad reasons, because she was an establishment politician and also because she was a woman. But also a great many reacted against the economic stagnation of the last decades, the end of the post-World War II prosperity, the lack of good jobs, the off-shoring of industry to low-wage countries, the loss of the "American dream."



Trump's victory, such as it is, is sometimes blamed on the "working class." But the working class is much broader than older white male industrial workers. It includes African-Americans and Latinos, who are mostly working class and who hated Trump. It included young workers, who rarely supported Trump. It included many of the "better-educated," many of whom are white-collar workers (such as teachers). It included a lot of working people who did not vote for either Trump or Clinton, out of disgust for both. Overall, it was not so much that Trump brought out new white working class voters, but that Clinton lost many voters and voting groups which had previously voted for Obama. The Democrats really had very little to say to working people. Around 1970 the Democratic leaders had deliberately decided to stop looking to the working class and the unions, and to focus on the "professional" middle class. (See Price 2016.)

It is usually safe for the Republicans to whip up their traditional base of small businesspeople, lower middle class people, better-off and prejudiced white workers, and religious fanatics. Even at their most hysterical, such forces do not threaten the capitalist system.

This time, however, these got out of control. They nominated, and then elected, someone who was completely unsuited for the job of president. Still, they did not threaten capitalism.



But it has always been dangerous for the Democrats to whip up their traditional base of the working class: workers who are white and People of Color, male and female, straight and LGBT, U.S.-born and immigrant. The workers' interests clash with those of big business. Their needs require lowering the profits of the capitalist class. Their numbers make them a majority of the population (if we count everyone who works for a wage or salary, without being a supervisor). They have an enormous potential power outside of the voting booth. The workers run the machines and processes of production, transportation, communication, and all services. Democratically organized, in unions or councils, they could stop the society in its tracks and even start it up in a different way. As far as the Democrats are concerned, this must not happen; the working class must not become aware of its power.

It is for these reasons that the Republicans can be vigorous to the point of nihilism in mobilizing their base to fight for their views, but the Democrats have been mild and compromising in their efforts, capitulating to the right again and again. However, the very results of this election show the limitations of the Democrats' methods, especially of channeling all opposition into elections. We cannot beat the greater evil by relying on the lesser evil.

Not Our President!

The limited, distorted, and corrupt system of U.S. "democracy" has

produced this abomination of a Trump presidency. Now the political establishment is mostly trying to make its peace with Trump, if he will let it. The “Never Trump” Republicans have lined up for jobs in the new administration. President Obama has been making nice to Trump, saying that we must all hope that he “succeeds, because if he succeeds then we all succeed.” (We hope he fails.) Others are asking the public to keep an open mind. Meanwhile Trump has been appointing ignorant, vicious, crackpots to important posts in his government and tweeting inane and hostile comments.



We anarchists and revolutionary anti-authoritarian socialists do not regard any president as “legitimate,” nor any government or state. Undoubtedly it is better to live under a capitalist limited democracy than under fascist or Stalinist totalitarianism. But either way, the people live under the rule of a tiny minority (the “one percent,” more or less), which takes the lion’s share of society’s wealth. The government is supposed to be democratic, but there is no pretense that the economy is anything but a set of top-down corporate dictatorships. A participatory, self-managed, radically democratic society would be drastically different from any form of capitalism and any form of state.

But a movement has been growing—one which at least rejects the legitimacy of this new president. Right after the election results were known, demonstrations broke out all over the country. People are organizing anti-Trump groups in communities across the land. People have declared that they will resist any efforts to round up immigrants or to put Muslims on lists. Under pressure, city governments have announced that they will not cooperate with such measures, even if they lose money. Working class issues continue, particularly the unionization of fast-food workers and the

fight for the \$15 minimum wage. Black Lives Matter continues. The Standing Rock anti-pipeline struggle of Native Americans and environmentalists has won a recent victory but continues to fight. The issue of anti-fascism has been revived in people's awareness.



Dark days are ahead. The people of the U.S., working class and oppressed, are facing perhaps the greatest crisis of our history. The failed U.S. political and economic system has produced this evil Trump administration. Millions will not accept it. Anarchists and other revolutionary libertarian socialists will not accept it. We will encourage massive popular resistance in every area and in every way possible.

Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote.

-Ben Franklin

References

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Written for www.Anarkismo.net