



Donald Trump's victory

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After an election campaign that lasted 597 days and cost \$2.6 billion, Donald Trump has ridden a wave of anti-establishment anger to become the 45th President of the United States.

His victory confounded the pollsters and shocked the self-important pundits who had forecast his defeat. They immediately laid the blame for their failure on the supposed ignorance, or sheer stupidity, of the American working class in the so-called 'rustbelt' left behind by de-industrialisation. This tells us more about their own prejudices than about voting behaviour.

In reality, Trump drew most support from those on more than \$50,000 a year – a far cry from the millions getting by on welfare and food banks.

Nonetheless, it is true that Trump did win working class votes that would once have gone to Hillary Clinton and the Democrats. He took states like Ohio, Iowa, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan that Obama won. What explains this? Like any successful campaign, the answer is to be found in his central slogan, 'Make America Great Again!'. This summed up the feelings of millions that, particularly since the crisis of 2008, their lives, and the prospects for their children, have got a lot worse.

For millions of workers, Trump's promises of creating jobs through infrastructure investment and 'bringing back' manufacturing industry were what mattered. His background in business appeared to give credibility and his lack of experience in 'Washington' was a positive advantage. As in other countries, Trump's reactionary racist and sexist attitudes remain widespread and for many were no barrier to supporting him.

Against that reality, Clinton's insistence that 'America IS Great!' simply proved her membership of an elite that has done very nicely out of globalisation and the pumping of public money into banks and stock exchanges. As they say, 'She just doesn't get it?.'

Exactly the same point was proved by Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democrat candidacy. Despite all the experts, and the dirty tricks of the Democrat establishment, he was also able to draw mass support by giving expression to a working class reality of housing repossessions, unemployment, declining real wages and a bleak future.

The tragedy is, of course, that Sanders then capitulated and advised his supporters to vote for the candidate of the very establishment against which he had campaigned. Once again, the strategy of voting for the 'lesser evil' has shown itself to be useless. Sanders may have thought he was nudging Clinton to the Left and boosting her chances, in fact, he handed a gift to Trump.

He should have stuck by his supporters and stood as an independent candidate. Irrespective of whether the billionaire property speculator or the establishment insider then won the Presidency, he could have laid the foundations for a new working class political movement even if, at first, under reformist leadership.

As it is, those who followed his advice now find themselves defeated while those who opted for Trump now identify themselves with the victory of a thoroughly reactionary populist movement.

'Make America Great Again' may have proved an effective slogan but, as a programme for government, it is obviously

completely vacuous. US corporations source goods from China for a very good reason, if Trump wants to slap tariffs on them he will face opposition. US infrastructure, much dating from the 50s or even 30s of the last century, certainly needs investment but, again, there is good reason why it has been lacking, it costs money. Where is that to come from?

Internationally, Trump's victory is destabilising. The USA may not be as completely dominant as it once was but it is still the biggest economy and the most powerful military force. Any turn to protectionism, which is at least implicit in Trump's programme, would have very serious repercussions on world trade and the economic stability of other countries, most notably China. Equally, his inclination towards disengagement from regions of conflict could alter the international balance of forces, destabilising both allies and rivals.

In government, Trump will, sooner or later, disappoint his working class supporters. The great danger is that forces further to the Right will be able to take advantage of that to build a more organised movement, committed to direct action to scapegoat those accused of preventing America becoming great again ? Mexicans, muslims, emancipated women, trade unionists or whoever.

All that, however, is only one side of the story. Within hours of Trump's victory, protest demonstrations were already taking place in cities across the country. The forces that were radicalised by the Occupy Movement, Black Lives Matter, Fight for 15 and the Sanders activists all still exist. Although they may be shaken by Trump's arrival in the White House, and Republicans retaining control of Capitol Hill and, no doubt, dominating the Supreme Court, they are not going to go away.

Within their ranks, and more widely, socialists have to draw the lessons not only of the election campaign but of other struggles in recent years. In particular, it must be clear that nothing progressive is possible within the Democrats but, just as important, amorphous non-political movements and networks cannot possibly serve to stop Trump in his tracks.

The trade unions, starting with those who supported the Sanders campaign, need to break finally and irrevocably from the Democrats, the second party of the US ruling class. They need to launch a campaign amongst workers for a new type of party altogether. So, too, do the left wing organisations, two of the largest of which, the International Socialists and Socialist Alternative, made the serious error of supporting Jill Stein and the Greens, a non-working class party that cannot possibly act as a rallying point for workers.

The Sanders campaign gave an indication of what is possible but stopped short of what is essential; a workers' party rooted in the trade unions and drawing in the activists from the various movements. Such a party must put itself at the head of all campaigns against Trump's reactionary policies, fighting to unify them around a programme that can really solve the problems facing the great majority in the US at the expense of the minority whose control of the economy threatens not only their future but that of the whole world.

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