

USA: ?Top Cop? Kamala Harris: The New Face of Oppression and Repression

Marcus Otono Thu, 20/08/2020 - 21:52

Marcus Otono

With the selection of Senator Kamala Harris who, as California's chief prosecutor, liked to call herself the state's Top Cop, Joe Biden has driven the final nail in the coffin of the brief ?socialist? rebellion by Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and their followers.

The virtual Democratic National Convention opened with speakers who included a former Republican Ohio Governor John Kasich, former Hewlett Packard CEO Meg Whitman and ?.. Bernie Sanders. Sanders' speech unreservedly endorsed Biden even claiming his opposition to Medicare for All was a tactical difference over ?the best path to get to universal coverage?. So much for the Political Revolution he promised during two runs for the Democratic nomination. Activists of ?our revolution? are reported as sickened by the Convention. Well they might be, but they have only themselves to blame. To add insult to injury, AOC, has been given only a 60 second video slot later in the proceedings. Such is the inglorious end of the campaign to push the party to the left by self-proclaimed ?democratic socialists? within America's second capitalist party.

The selection of Harris emphasised that what was underway was a return to the old agenda of the Washington Consensus ? whose results provided the basis for the rise of Donald Trump's form of right-wing populism in the first place. It allowed him to demagogically attack globalisation and the flight of US workers' jobs to China or Mexico. Biden has made it clear he will carry on, if not toughen, Trump's anti-China policy.

Harris, who might well be called on to fill the 77 year old Biden's shoes before his first term is over, would pursue fundamentally the same neoliberal pro-Wall Street policies we saw under Reagan, the Bushes, and then Democrats Clinton and Obama too. These amounted to forty years of ?socializing? the costs of the economic crises while ?privatizing? the profits. By closing down and offshoring industries, the rich have gotten obscenely richer while the rest of us scramble over the scraps which fall from their groaning tables. Trump's vulgar ostentation is just an exposure of what most of the billionaire ruling class does more circumspectly. The Harris selection shows that nothing is going to change this.

Kamala Harris ? Identity, Optics and Policy.

Harris was born in 1964, the eldest daughter of immigrants, albeit hardly typical ones. Her father was a Jamaican economics professor at the University of California at Berkeley and her mother was a scientist and researcher from India. The Democratic leadership chose her because she checks several of the identity ?boxes? that they use to secure their voting bases amongst the racially oppressed and to show how progressive they are. She's a woman and has a skin colour that is the consequence of African ancestry from her father and Indian from her mother.

Looking at her long political career, many in the Black community questioned whether this qualifies her to represent them. As a child in the school system of the 1960s/70s, at the tail end of the Jim Crow years, it's a certainty that she faced discrimination based on her skin color. Although it should be noted that she was brought up in California and not in the South or the northern city ghettos. While growing up, she spent time in Jamaica with her paternal family and in India with her maternal side. She also lived in Toronto, Canada for a while as a child. So, she is well travelled and multi-cultured.

The Democratic Party's reliance on 'identity' as a vote catching strategy is always a delicate dance trying to address, at least verbally, the needs of different oppressed communities, especially when there are frictions between their privileged leaders struggling for limited resources. Harris was chosen in large part as a payoff to the most loyal voting bloc that the Democrats have had through the years, older black people and especially older black women. Her personal history, however, shows that she has little in common with the working class backgrounds and struggles of most Black women to whom she is supposed to appeal.

It is ironic that, during a year of massive social unrest against police terror targeting Black people, the Democrats have picked someone most of whose professional career as a lawyer has been as a prosecuting attorney at either the local or state level. Kamala is pro-cop to her bones. In her 2009 book, *Smart on Crime*, she called for more police, claiming that; 'virtually all law-abiding citizens feel safer when they see officers walking a beat' and that 'police officers are a reassuring sign of a community's commitment to order, calm and safety'.

Of course, this year, with the wind blowing in the opposite direction she said the idea that 'putting more police on the streets creates more safety is just wrong' and called the Black Lives Matter Movement 'the heroes of our time'. The Democrats also had the family of George Floyd appear on a Convention video to honor the victims of racist violence and initiate a minute of silence. But, at another point, they 'balanced' this by honoring cops who had fallen in the line of duty and were obviously the good apples in the barrel and they showed a video of cops embracing BLM demonstrators. In fact, this sort of thing is an insult to the BLM movement.

It is true that Harris has herself been an object of hatred by cops since, as San Francisco's district attorney in 2004, a police officer Isaac Espinoza was killed by a gang member using an assault rifle, she said she would not pursue the death penalty for the killer. After that, cops demonstratively turned their backs on her at successive Pride parades in the city. Doubtless the Trump campaign will roll out her 'anti-cop' record in the coming campaign, with all the added venom they reserve for black people and women.

It is true that she has also, at least verbally, made an effort to blunt the hard edge of the law for working class and oppressed communities, but it's clear from looking at her record that, even if she sometimes talks the talk, the walk she walks all too often panders to the current legal power structure. Just a few examples from her career:

- While talking about not supporting the death penalty as a prosecutor, she has failed to support not one, but two, separate California referendums to overturn it.
- She backed criminalizing working class parents (mostly black and Latino) whose kids skipped school.
- She refused to order investigations into police shootings of black men in 2014 and 2015 and then, also in 2015, failed to support a bill in the California legislature that would have mandated a special prosecutor to investigate police use of deadly force.

- She initially opposed DNA testing that could have gotten a man off Death Row although, after the New York Times exposed the case, she did change position.
- She argued against releasing non-violent prisoners from California jails, arguing through her lawyers that it meant prisons would lose an important labor pool for putting out the numerous California wildfires that happen every year; in effect, endorsing slave labor for a dangerous line of work.
- She has also made opportunistic political decisions during her runs for Senate and Presidency like first supporting Medicare for All, and then backing away from that support.

Whichever way the political winds blow, she sets her sails in that direction in order to further her career. Expecting Kamala Harris to be on the side of the working class is an exercise in delusion. Kamala will be on Kamala's side and that means on the side of the ruling class. Always.

But appearances are what is most important to the Democratic leadership. They think that all a Democratic candidate for president or vice president in 2020 has to do is to be "not Trump?". Then they want the team to check as many of the "identity" boxes as possible for the left whilst attracting anti-Trump Republican voters with moderate, indeed conservative, policies.

Continued Oppression and Repression of Dissent

The replacement of Trump and Pence by Biden and Harris will make a difference only to a minority of the population of the United States. Obviously, they will not indulge in Trump's gratuitous racial and misogynist insults. Bourgeois figures who represent the "normalcy" of the neo-liberal world view of the last four decades will return to prominence in Washington, DC. The bureaucrats and upper and middle management, often called the technocrats, who support this elite will regain their influence and access to power, and a portion of the wealth generated by the policies of global capitalism.

Even if the "New World Disorder" of right-wing populism represented by Trump disappears from international affairs, demonizing other world imperial centers like Russia and China and regional powers like Iran, with wars just a shot away, will not stop. They might even increase. Biden has no fundamental difference with Trump when it comes to reasserting America's "greatness" against its rivals. One thing that can be said about Trump's populism is that it came with a fair amount of isolationism. Despite his bluster, he has not notably expanded the military adventurism of the United States during his four years in office, whereas Democratic presidents have taken the US into a number of wars.

For the majority of the working class, however, nothing much will change. Immigrants will continue to be detained and deported as they were under Obama. Black people will still be killed by police terror without any significant consequences for the state terrorists. Austerity will still be demanded in order to cover the losses of the "too big to fail" bankers and financiers and the costs of the coronavirus. The stagnation of wages and benefits and the assault on workers' rights, especially the right to organize, will continue.

The "recovery" from the consequences of the current and coming "Greater Recession" will be slow to non-existent for the working class, while the ruling class will continue to be protected by our taxes and by the government's printing presses. Homelessness will increase as the economy tanks and renters are thrown out of their homes and mortgages are foreclosed on.

The military will continue to eat up a huge portion of the Federal budget, while Medicare for All will be subjected to penny-pinching "analysis" by elected representatives paid with campaign contributions to protect the current "for profit" healthcare system. In short, the oppression that is a fact of life under capitalism for most of us will continue on apace.

Federal agents in Portland, Seattle, Chicago and other cities have violently clashed with demonstrators, kidnapped protestors off the streets in questionable fashion and increased surveillance of social justice protest leaders in concert with local police officials and politicians. True, a Democrat in the White House is unlikely to resort to such blatant use of executive orders, but it was not an aberration that the Occupy protests in 2012 were crushed by Democratic mayors under a Democratic president and administration: neither will Biden address the root causes of police impunity.

Since the Great Recession, capitalism has shown that it has no answers for the problems that beset us. The Covid-19 crisis, along with Trump's right-wing populism, has accelerated many of them. This situation is true for both parties of the bourgeoisie. The ruling class is divided between a group that demands an iron fist to protect their assets and a group that pines for the globalism of Bush and Obama, a velvet glove over the iron fist. Neither can claim to speak for the vast majority that have lost so much during the last decade plus.

Yet, while the ruling class proves that it cannot continue to rule in the same fashion as in the past, the working class and oppressed in the US are proving that they refuse to be ruled as in the past. The very definition of a pre-revolutionary situation.

Irrespective of the hyperbolic calls by the Democratic Party for a vote to 'save' the country from authoritarianism and the 'fascism' of Trump, electing Joe Biden and Kamala Harris won't change anything of substance enough for the rest of us. A vote for Biden is not a vote for 'change' except in the most short term and superficial meaning of the word. It's the culmination of decades of 'lesser evil' voting. If victorious, it could even enrage the Trump movement to claim that they were robbed and to evolve into a real fascist organisation that attacks workers and the racially oppressed fighting for their rights.

The important lesson is to stay in the streets no matter who wins in November. Organize and unite the various fronts of resistance, break the unions, the social movements, women, black, latinx and Asian youth away from the Democratic party and organize a workers' party to represent our class interests. Our actions and not our votes are the only thing that can save us. And that's not hyperbole, that's a hard fact. Stay strong comrades.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/usa-%E2%80%9Ctop-cop%E2%80%9D-kamala-harris-new-face-oppression-and-repression>