

# **Does Trump Represent Fascism or White Supremacy?**

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*How should we understand the impending presidency of Donald Trump? What should we be prepared for? While some have framed Trump's victory as a sign of resurgent fascism, our guest contributor argues that we should see it as the latest development in a much older phenomenon, which is not an interruption of democracy but intimately interlinked with it.*

*There are many ways to conceptualize the relationship between democracy and fascism, and this is a dangerous time to take anything for granted; we will be publishing more on this subject shortly. In the meantime, this is a useful contribution towards analyzing the dangers ahead and how to ready ourselves for them.*

## **Fascism is Obsolete, Whiteness is Here to Stay**

Long before Donald Trump's recent electoral victory, but in a chorus that has grown deafening in the last month, people have been talking about the possible return of fascism. As terrifying as Donald Trump is, it is nonetheless important not to level just any criticism against the president-elect. And though the misogynist mogul's favorite epithet, "just disgusting," fits him like a glove, the charge of fascist is inaccurate.

Since we're interested in an analysis that enables more effective resistance, and not simply in spewing, Twitter-like, any insult with a chance of sticking, it behooves us to examine just which right-wing model Trump is following.

I would argue that fascism was made definitively irrelevant by the Second World War and its aftermath, during which it was conclusively absorbed by democratic capitalism. Since 1945, when the victorious allies dismantled the Nazi state and recruited the elements they found most useful, fascism has been nothing more than a second-string linebacker in a game that is democratic to its very core. The future, of course, is full of surprises, but it would take much more than a Trump victory for fascism to be tenable or necessary again in a central capitalist country like the United States.

One of the very few actual neo-fascist parties to appear on the political scene in the last decade is Golden Dawn in Greece. True to the original model, they combined a political party and a terroristic street movement, recruiting within the police and military to create party-specific loyalty, and forging connections with national capitalists and the mafia, in order to create a dual power capable of intimidating or overriding the checks and balances of democratic institutions and non-partisan media. Many people predicted Golden Dawn might seize power, and imagined a return to fascism. Golden Dawn imagined the same thing, and this utter naïveté, their ignorance about the historical moment and their role within democracy, proved to be their demise. As long as Golden Dawn acted to push public debates to the right, to create scapegoats for Greece's social woes, to kill immigrants and attack anarchists or other social radicals, they were tolerated. But once they revealed that their designs on power were actually sincere and that they were willing to use violence against non-marginal elements in society, the democratic powers stepped in and cut them short, arresting the leadership and excluding the party, at least partially, from the public debates that shape acceptable opinion. Nowadays, fascism doesn't stand a chance against democracy, and any gang of neo-fascists who fail to grasp that their role is simply to be a tool within the democratic toolbox is in for a rude shock.

In Spain, one of the other European countries hardest hit by the crisis, the neo-fascist or crypto-fascist parties have collapsed in recent years, and from Italy to the UK, the extreme right has

followed a model that actually relies on and encourages democratic mechanisms. Structurally speaking, the progressive populist party SYRIZA in Greece actually has more in common with the fascist model than the Republicans under Trump (organic connections with extraparliamentary groups that have a powerful capacity for street mobilization, a unification of extreme left and extreme right discourses, a national vision of socialism, intense patriotism and militarism).

Fascism is not just any extreme right-wing position. It is a complex phenomenon that mobilizes a popular movement under the hierarchical direction of a political party and cultivates parallel loyalty structures in the police and military, to conquer power either through democratic or military means; subsequently abolishes electoral procedures to guarantee a single party continuity; creates a new social contract with the domestic working class, on the one hand ushering in a higher standard of living than what could be achieved under liberal capitalism and on the other hand protecting the capitalists with a new social peace; and eliminates the internal enemies whom it had blamed for the destabilization of the prior regime.

Trump showed contempt for democratic convention by threatening to intimidate voters and hinting that he might not concede a lost election, but his model of conservatism in no way abolishes the mechanisms that are fundamental to democracy. In another four years, we'll be subjected to the electoral circus all over again. Trump did appeal especially to cops and border guards, but in no way began inducting the police into a para-state organization designed to cement his hold on power. He gave shout-outs to the militia movement and tickled the fancy of the Ku Klux Klan, but has done nothing to centralize those groups into a paramilitary force under his command. He promised a new deal for the working class, but will not even take the first steps towards instituting it, and whatever his intentions he will prove utterly unable to reward the owning class with social peace. He will make life harder for those he identifies as the enemies of society (Muslims and immigrants, especially), but he will not eliminate them.

There is, in fact, nothing fascist about Trump.

Trump's rise to power is entwined with a social force that predates fascism and that has outlasted it. Though it remains to be seen exactly what model of conservatism the brash egomaniac will implement, his encouragement of whiteness, as a reactionary mechanism for social control, is abundantly clear.

In the centuries between Christopher Columbus and George Washington, and in laboratories as far flung as the plantations of Ireland and Brazil, in the mass deportations from Spain and in the mass enslavement in Africa, the white race was created to categorize and control the subjects of a globalizing world order. In the face of insurrections that saw kidnapped Africans, poor Europeans, and besieged indigenous people fighting together against their common enemy, the colonial powers passed laws and erected concentric layers of religious, cultural, economic, judicial, institutional, and biological barriers to break the solidarity of the oppressed. Whiteness became the projection of European Enlightenment values, the new normal, and the peoples who did not fit into it were racialized and forced to occupy lower orders on the social hierarchy. Those who did not accept their place were disappeared, one way or another.

Historically, racism is a globally unified phenomenon, but it has played out differently in different corners of the world. In the colonies that would become the United States, whiteness took on a vital paramilitary role from an early date. A small minority of major landowners, who brutalized their workforce and carried out constant genocidal warfare against the native populations, had to deputize a poor but privileged middle stratum, convincing these armed citizens to fight their wars for them and remain ever vigilant against uprisings or border raids.

The privileges, depending on your point of view, were either paltry or game-changing. They included the psycho-social privilege of being considered human, which was a pretty big deal for commoners coming from Europe, where the aristocrats hadn't really ever had use for the category of "human" and had rarely if ever sought the common ground with their subjects that whiteness provided. Another principal privilege was the right to own property. For the majority of whites, this meant one of two things. Being entitled to sell their lives one back-breaking day after another for money, in the employ of the rich, or being entitled to win access to stolen native lands, which they would clear-cut, plow, and farm for a few years before falling into debt, being bought out by the big landowners, and moving farther west to repeat the process. The point of this story is not to generate sympathy for whites, but to illustrate how easily people, then as now, can be duped.

Economically, it wasn't a great bargain for most whites, unless you compare it with the forms of exploitation or dispossession reserved for Africans and Native Americans. The abstract right to own property rarely translated into personal enrichment, but it guaranteed not becoming someone else's property and not having your entire community obliterated and dispersed in an act of conquest. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz documents the key role white paramilitary rangers played in the constant and total warfare against native peoples in her *Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, and the role of poor whites in the patrols that surveilled enslaved Africans and hunted down fugitives—patrols that eventually evolved into modern police forces—is exposed in books like *Our Enemies in Blue*. Simultaneously, poor people of European origin who broke with whiteness to fight in solidarity with other oppressed peoples were punished with the full force of the law, and any kind of fraternity or mixing between whites and other peoples was discouraged and even criminalized.

Whiteness today continues to fulfill its paramilitary role in a diffuse, informal way, completely different from how fascist movements manifest. The ideological diversity—some would say confusion—and the many contradictions of the militia movement reflect this lack of central organization. What is most clear from these armed citizens' groups—who alternately identify Latino immigrants, Muslims, or the federal government as their chief enemy—is that a great many low- and middle-class citizens feel called to protect and serve. Who exactly has deputized them is unclear, but they overwhelmingly identify with their whiteness, or, in the case of the few blacks and Latinos in the movement, with their Americanness, which from the beginning has been another, seemingly more inclusive iteration of whiteness.

Race also played a big role in Trump's victory. Beyond the fact that a disproportionate number of whites voted Republican, studies showed that identifying with their whiteness or feeling racially threatened by other groups was a marked factor that made people of European origin more likely to support Trump.

Although the billionaire's narrative of victimization—which the media has compliantly disseminated—is frankly pathetic, whiteness in the United States is indeed facing a crisis. Not because "whites are becoming a minority" or any other paranoid supremacist fantasy, but because in the last few decades, the paramilitary functions of whiteness have largely been absorbed by an increasingly powerful government that can do with judges, prisons, and urban redevelopment bureaucracies what yesteryear it had to do with lynch mobs—to such an extent that, paradoxically, even a black man can be put in charge of the whole apparatus. While I don't think that Obama's presidency changed the situation for people of color in the US, except in a

psychological way that I, as a white person, cannot appreciate, it is clear that racists across the country have come out of the closet since Obama's entry into the White House.

The media in general have suggested that Trump's appeals to whites were so effective because of the economic situation: working-class whites have felt threatened as their privileges and their social standing decline, so the story goes. Yet the racial gaps in wealth and standard of living have grown since the crisis. If economics were the bottom line, white Americans would feel more secure, not less secure, after Obama's presidency. White privilege, in this sense, continues to pay its dividends. I would argue that it is actually the paramilitary function that is an ingrained part of whiteness which is in crisis, and which mobilized large numbers of whites for Trump. (Conversely, the fact that blacks became poorer under Obama probably kept some of them away from the polls).

The border militias represent one expression of the paramilitary mentality. Another expression, the pro-cop movement that has sprung up as a reaction to Ferguson, contains an instructive paradox. The resistance that gained attention with the Ferguson uprising has been a major source of instability for the US government, and has also called into question the historically sacred right of the police to kill people of color. White reactionaries have answered the call of duty to defend an oppressive system, and in general these pro-cop activists have been associated with the Trump camp. They have attacked Black Lives Matter protestors and tried to restore the police's tarnished image. But they have also entered into conflict with law enforcement.

Contrary to the pacifist white-washing of would-be Black Lives Matter leaders, shooting cops has been a part of urban black resistance before, during, and after Ferguson. Though the media will only talk about the Martin Luther Kings and not the Robert Williams, African American resistance has more frequently tended towards the strategy of self-defense and autonomy than democratic integration over the last three hundred years, and the tension can be seen today between different strata of black communities. However, it is also true that more cops are shot by white people, and that there has been an explosion in anti-police ambushes by white right-wingers. Often, these shooters express a desire to protect America or to defend traditional values with their attacks. Some of the most reactionary defenders of whiteness, it seems, believe that an increasingly authoritarian government is not allowing them to play their historic role.

When American society seemed stable and "American values" globally triumphant at the end of the Cold War, the apparent obsolescence of whiteness provoked little concern. But with economic precarity on the rise, forceful protests by black, Latino, and indigenous people spreading across the country, and systemic instability causing growing anxiety, white people are waiting for a call to arms that isn't coming. Their traditional spokespeople on both wings of the political elite—the old-school reactionaries who reminisce about segregation as well as the enlightened progressives and their flocks of white knights—have not been speaking to their crisis. In fact, the liberals in government can even contemplate disarming them, so obsolete have they become. Though the conservatives still speak in favor of gun rights, it has been a long time since they have mobilized the citizens to confront the latest threat, internal or external. Whites are in crisis not because they are losing economic privileges but because the growing power of the State usurps their paramilitary prerogatives. And for the outright reactionaries who see through the lens of delusional race fantasies, it does not help that the symbol for all this state power, Obama, was perhaps the most authoritarian president in recent memory, measured in terms of surveillance programs, drone killings, deportations, prosecution of whistleblowers under the 1917 Espionage Act, number of FBI informants, giving insider support to Hollywood films that portray torture as

necessary in the so-called War on Terror, protecting secret CIA prisons from judicial oversight, and so on.

Though the State does not actually maintain a monopoly on violent force, as a rule it aspires to. In a government ruling over a volatile society in which the gravest contradictions are internal (for example, having internal colonies rather than external colonies), those in power will not hesitate to mobilize a part of the population as paramilitaries. But as its institutions grow in strength and resolve the contradictions that previously threatened it, the State will tend to disarm the population, to turn lynching into a bureaucratic affair, and genocide into a dry policy question. Citizens will have fewer chances to participate in their democracy, and as cynical as it might seem to speak of murder and vigilantism as forms of civic duty, the history of democracy from Socrates to Birmingham bears this view out. Military service, which means killing enemies of the State, all euphemisms aside, has always been the foremost mark of the citizen.

Just as corporations have adopted methods from the cooperative movement in order to create happier workers, governments sometimes let their citizens play at being cops and hangmen, if it makes them feel a little more invested in power. But the more power rationalizes, the harder it is to manage the participation of non-specialists who have not received the proper bureaucratic training, and for patriotic whites facing the Twilight of America and imagining themselves the heirs of the pioneers, ride-alongs with the local police fall a little short. This is the nature of the crisis of whiteness.

Before Trump, the Tea Party movement began speaking to the crisis of whiteness, and was rewarded with an outpouring of support. The Donald simply named the anxiety more explicitly, and spoke from a larger platform.

Whether the Republicans or others will try to organize these paramilitary citizens to help the State overcome its present instability remains to be seen, though the cynicism of democratic politics would lead us to predict that the president-elect wasn't even sincere in his hate-mongering; he will continue to fan bigotry but will probably not encourage or allow white supremacists to coalesce into a dual power. Hate crimes will increase, but those who carry them out will probably remain disorganized.

If there is a growth or a centralization of paramilitary groups, people in the US who don't want to live in a vigilante, racist society will have to seriously address the question of self-defense. The Democratic solution—avoid direct conflict, call the cops for help, and hope for an electoral shift in four years—is no solution at all. It falls short because four years is a long time to delay questions of survival and dignity, because the prospects of a Democratic party administration making things better is questionable, and because the very cops who are supposed to protect us are overwhelmingly supporters of Trump and often have ties to the militia movement.

However, even if the Republicans had lost the elections, Ferguson made it evident that the question of self-defense is still fundamental, especially for black people but also for all other people of color, all poor people, and all people who resist state power. A white supremacist could easily ask, "Who needs lynch mobs when you have the cops?" This is not to trivialize the terror that paramilitaries and vigilantes are sowing with growing frequency and boldness, but to illustrate that racism does not come from the extreme fringes of society. It is in fact the cement of the very institutions that police us.

Self-defense is the crucial consideration that the media and the politicians refuse to address, and that we urgently need to turn into a mature practice.

A popular response to Trump's victory also needs to address the role of whiteness. It should be clear by now, fifty years after the supposed victory of the Civil Rights movement, that the progressive proposal of a culturally sensitive, tolerant whiteness is no solution, only a deferment of the problem. Whiteness needs to be unmasked for what it is, and extirpated. And this is something that no political party can do. What politician could institutionally and culturally take up George Washington's mantle while also acknowledging that Washington was the greatest slave-owner of his day and the architect of a genocidal campaign against the Six Nations, who dubbed him "Town Destroyer"?

Whiteness was created to destroy solidarity among the oppressed and to encourage loyalty to the rulers. In the struggles a half century ago, whiteness operated on the Right and on the Left. Among conservatives this meant donning white robes and among progressives it meant controlling the agendas of the reformists in the movement via selective funding and media coverage. With the wave of uprisings that ignited in Ferguson, the costumes have changed but the roles are the same. The cottage industry of white guilt counseling, with its army of passive allies, reinforces a white identity. On the streets of Ferguson and other cities, we saw how it also completes the paramilitary function of disarming people of color and preventing white people from directly taking part in the rebellions where racial divisions start to finally melt down.

In the days before the election, many people carried out a frenetic activity on social media, guilt-tripping whites into voting for Clinton on the grounds that not voting was a privileged position since the election results would hurt people of color more. That this was nothing more than shameless manipulation on behalf of the Democratic Party was revealed by the election results: people of color themselves were not motivated by the potential benefits of a Clinton victory to turn out and vote in large numbers. The online activists—large numbers of whom are educated whites who access power by claiming to be allies to supposedly homogenous oppressed groups—clearly do not speak for communities of color. Just like everyone else, they speak for themselves, in line with their own particular interests, and the election results show that guilt-ridden whites constitute their primary constituency. People who shared a preference for guilt-based, identity-reinforcing, passive politics were in the streets of Ferguson working side by side with the cops to restore order, and they were on the social media before the elections canvassing for an elitist Democratic Party. The nature of their participation in social conflict should be expressed widely and clearly before the next time they mobilize their powerful, paralyzing rhetoric.

Whites can fulfill their historical role without using racist language, and when a white supremacist society speaks through a black police chief or a black mayor, telling people to go back home, to get off the streets, it is still reproducing the same racialized system.

Whiteness is a war measure. There are a thousand forms of mutiny, but all of them require the recognition that a war is going on.

## **Different Global Futures**

We should all consider the possibility that a Trump presidency will be nothing more and nothing less than a Republican presidency. It is never one man who rules, but rather a sprawling bureaucracy. There is more institutional continuity than change between one administration and another. Even in a coup d'état, that replaces a democracy with a dictatorship, there is a surprising amount of institutional continuity. Trump is a bombastic figure, but he cannot rule alone.



Even if he has the intention of completing his electoral promises, he cannot do anything that the existing institutions are not designed to do, and he can do very little without the support of the Republican Party.

Of course, these are not meant to be comforting words. As Adolf Eichmann's trial revealed, a bureaucracy is a thoroughly monstrous thing, and the same bureaucracy can give out identity cards or pack whole populations into cattle cars, practice euthanasia on the infirm or operate gas chambers. To cut through the hypnosis of shock politics a moment, it is worth noting that the US already has built a wall on the border with Mexico, and that for Muslim immigrants without money, it is already extremely difficult to get into the United States.

In his first weeks as president-elect, Donald Trump has already begun backsliding on his key promises, as he shifts from winning an election to constructing a government. He is taking part in the exact same process that Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, or Jill Stein would have had they won. My argument is merely that, in preparing for a Trump presidency, we should distinguish between the garish horrors of a racist, misogynist showman on the campaign trail, and the silent horrors of a state churning out policy decisions.

As such, predicting the results of a Trump presidency based on the proclamations of a Trump candidacy is a dodgy affair, but elections are one of the few times the State gives us a sneak preview of its evolving strategies, and the gap between election and inauguration in the US is particularly long. So, if there's any chance that speculation can help us prepare, it's worth a shot.

Having already touched on whiteness, I want to address the following issues: democracy, geopolitics, economic exploitation, and ecocide.

I would argue that, in the last decade, many of the most important social movements were co-opted and defeated by democratic means, and that this will not decrease in a world where the US is governed by Trump.

It is understandable why many people would want to claim the word "democracy," despite the historical inaccuracies or outright amnesia such claims entail (especially when they are phrased as "reclaiming," as though democracy were ever something other than what it is today). *People power* can be an enticing concept, especially if you don't unpack the meanings of either of those two terms, and in general, it can be easier to communicate with folks if you rely on mainstream vocabulary. To most people, *democracy* is simply a synonym for *freedom*.

However, critiques of democracy are being voiced with increasing frequency, while the populist communication tactics of grassroots democratic movements have backfired time and again. Huge, horizontal movements were re-institutionalized in Greece, Spain, Egypt, and elsewhere, as progressive or just plain clever politicians rerouted calls for change and better democracy to the ballot box. Claims to democracy function as a lever or sometimes even an assembly line whereby extra-parliamentary, horizontal movements can be bundled along straight back into the furnace of institutional, representative democracy.

Nor is this a left-wing phenomenon. Right-wingers in the UK and Italy have been using popular referendums, an even more directly democratic tool than the vote, to push their agendas. In the US, ultra-conservatives in a number of states have used referendums to discriminate against queer and trans people, or to restrict access to abortion. In fact, the very Tea Party movement whose remnants Trump mobilized to ride to power was in many ways a democratic protest movement that appealed to the founding values of the US government and raised their cry against the corruption of the political establishment. The amphibious nature of this concept and the fact that

both the far left and the far right are clamoring for it should be a cause for concern. It's probably the reason why they try to paint the Trump candidacy as a fascist phenomenon.

In the context of the transition from a black to an openly racist president, it seems pertinent to ask, why do people have such a big crush on a governmental system that arose in a slavery-based society? It makes sense why right-wingers would love democracy so much, but what about people who claim to oppose capitalism, white supremacy, and ecocide?

In the immediate future, claims to democracy will continue to erupt, motivating and then institutionalizing social movements. But the shock felt by establishment figures at Trump's surprise victory opened a window onto an alternative future. Just because democracy is currently the dominant strategy for maintaining power and keeping people down doesn't mean it always will be.

When investor insecurity caused markets to tumble the morning after Trump's victory, multiple Western media outlets remarked, without a trace of condescension or judgment, the pronouncement by the Chinese state Xinhua news agency: that the Trump victory showed how democracy was broken. During the electoral campaign, more than a few of the middle-tier newspapers in the US highlighted the absurdity of at least parts of the electoral system and suggested that a technocracy would be more rational. So much of our lives is organized by technocratic institutions already, why not get rid of the spectacle of a bunch of politicians who might not be in the least qualified to run anything?

Parallel to such growing skepticism, investors around the world have surely noticed how the centralized Chinese state has been much more able to weather the crisis and prevent the bursting of its gargantuan real estate bubble than democratic Western states. For now, with Trump abandoning his more extreme positions and investors starting to settle back down, bold talk of unmediated authoritarianism has subsided, but it is a possible future to consider. As long as investors can make their money in the current system, they will reject extreme changes, but if the American-backed model of liberal democracy fails to make the world safe for capitalism in the next round of crises, claims to democracy might become anachronistic as well as self-defeating.

This brings us to the question of geopolitics, where a Trump presidency is already bearing fruit. It is unlikely that Trump will be able to abolish NAFTA; for that he would need the cooperation of the entire Republican Party, which on the whole is solidly neoliberal, just like basically every other political party in the world with more than 10% support. It seems that the TPP has already perished in the face of the upcoming Trump presidency, but there are good odds he will renege on his promises and resuscitate a Pacific free trade area before China absorbs the entire region with its own deal, the RCEP. Protectionists cannot carry out more than a few token measures before they risk destroying the economies they command. More than ever under capitalism, the larger an economy is the more it is integrated on a global level. If Trump attempted a trade war with China, he would ruin the US economy. The only solution under the existing system is to run the rat race even faster, lowering trade barriers (things like environmental protections), cutting labor costs, increasing production. It is far more realistic, today, to propose abolishing the entire industrial system and currency-based economies altogether than to propose reforming or limiting capitalism. Trump, therefore, doesn't have many options. He will either go with the program, or ruin the US economy and cause unemployment to skyrocket if he manages to break with the political establishment out of sheer stubbornness. We can predict that he will be another free-trade president, who at most implements a system of incentives to mildly increase the number of domestic manufacturing jobs.

Most acutely, if Trump succeeds in delivering on his racist promise to deport even larger numbers of Latino immigrants (and this will be a huge challenge, because Obama was the deporter-in-chief, breaking all previous records and deporting 2.5 million people at rates nine times higher than deportations twenty years ago), this would likely cause economic hardship in their countries of origin to skyrocket.

Trump's approach to Russia and China also bears scrutiny. In one of his few points of consistency, he has foreshadowed a thawing out of relations with the Kremlin. As for China, he has used bullish language in describing his plans to confront the main competitor of the United States economically, labelling them a currency manipulator, but he has also been erratic in his support of key US allies in the region, originally suggesting Japan and South Korea should be left to fend for themselves. His blunt support for Taiwan is probably a reflection of his total ignorance of the nature of diplomatic relations with that country. Trump is a hawkish isolationist, so his foreign policy is hard to predict, but the US military would need to be able to project more force and more effectively in areas like the South China Sea, a zone of primary importance to the world's new largest economy, in order to thwart the expansion of the Chinese state. Anything less than total commitment to this priority, which a Clinton presidency would have inherited without question, will not be enough to prevent the regional balance of powers from changing.

We can accept it as a given that two countries cannot end their antagonism if their geopolitical interests remain in conflict. At most, they can improve diplomatic communication. The US and Russia have been in a bitter conflict for regional dominance ever since the EU and NATO grew to a point where they could attract countries that Russia might reasonably expect to remain within its orbit, like Ukraine or Georgia (in the latter case, establishing closer economic and political relations with Washington rather than joining any Western territorial organization). The only way for this conflict to end is if Moscow or Washington decides not to pursue dominance in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. And Moscow is actually in the stronger position, with no reason to step down. Since the end of the Cold War, governments throughout the world have not been forced to align with one of two superpowers. They can do like Egypt does, and court both Russia and the US, receiving massive amounts of military funding, and, with less dependence on a single power, more autonomy to pursue their own regional interests. Turkey provides an excellent example of how a country that could once be described as a client state can now play alliances and redraw a regional map, destabilizing the situation from a US perspective and thwarting US pretensions of being the sole global architect. In this competition, Russia and (in other parts of the world) China have a huge advantage, because at no point do they have to be more powerful than the US—they simply have to keep growing and extending their influence, as it becomes exponentially more costly for the US to maintain control.

If Trump's plan for Syria is any indication, he would be willing to reduce US pretensions in the Middle East, allowing Russia's preferred leader to remain in place and settling on the less ambitious plan of rooting out ISIS. A similar approach in Asia would see him maintaining US guarantees on the territorial integrity of Japan and South Korea, but not trying to check Chinese expansionism or uphold the Exclusive Economic Zones that favor Western allies. In other words, Trump might be smart enough (from a chauvinistic perspective) to ease off on the increasingly expensive, increasingly ineffective Cold Warrior strategy of militarily projecting US global predominance that both Republicans and Democrats—including Hillary Clinton—have preached like the gospel.

The thought of an immature, foul-tempered real estate mogul having access to nuclear weapons is terrifying, but a Hillary Clinton presidency in which the US tried to maintain its military dominance in a world which made those pretensions increasingly impossible might very well have been more likely to spark a nuclear war. In the end, it shouldn't be a surprise that in an insane society, a person reckoned as sane can do the most harm.

Of course, we have no reason to believe that Trump will stick to his guns, or that the Republican establishment won't succeed in reining in their candidate and securing the continuity of American foreign policy. At the least, the possible implications of Trump's proposals should be considered, but if he continues to recruit neocon warriors into his Administration, his presidency will resemble that of George W. Bush in foreign policy matters, engaging in ill-advised ventures to expand US dominance that actually result in increasing instability. His final decision for Secretary of State may give some indication of what path he plans to take, or he might continue to break the mold. It is also likely that a Trump cabinet will be less stable than the average.

The theme of economic exploitation is important to address precisely because there is nothing surprising to say about it. Trump's protectionist rhetoric aside, neither candidate was ever going to put a stop to the endless roulette of hyper-exploitation and hyper-precarity that most people on this planet are subjected to. And no one outside the political mainstream has been effective at communicating an engaged critique of this state of affairs. Until we do so, a nauseating procession of Tsiprases and Trumps will ride economic insecurities to victory, changing nothing.

Ecocide, under Trump, will proceed a little more quickly than under Clinton, though I have a hard time seeing the importance of setting the Doomsday clock to start the countdown from 10 instead of from 9. We can safely consider a whole slew of international climate change agreements stillborn, which is a good thing, since they were a joke from the moment they were conceived. When the problem, in the crudest terms, is reducing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (leaving aside all the equally important matters of preserving as much wild space as possible so species have buffer zones), the world's attention was redirected towards efforts to increase the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere *at a slower pace*. How so many intelligent people could have dedicated themselves to such a farce, I do not know, though the CEOs of all the environmentalist NGOs made a bundle in the process. No institution of the existing world system has shown itself capable of even taking the first steps towards stopping climate change and mass extinction, and with a Republican victory in the country that is most responsible for climate change, they won't even pretend to try. But now the farce is dead, and the choice is clear: governments and capitalism versus the planet and all living things.

## **Why the Left Shares the Blame**

The left-wing supporters of Bernie Sanders were livid: Clinton manipulated her way to the Democratic candidacy, only to fumble the election, when polls showed all along that Sanders had a better chance of beating Trump. However, they should be happy their idol won't have to go to bat, because he would have been an even bigger disappointment than Obama was. There is currently no compromise that capitalism is capable of making that will better the lot of the working poor. SYRIZA collided with this cold reality in Greece, and though the US has an easier time of getting creditors than the small Mediterranean nation, in the long run the equations are all the same. Specific policies can make a small but important difference in individual lives,

without a doubt, but the bulk of the problem will remain unchanged or only get worse no matter who is president.

The validity of this judgment has been recognized across the world. After progressive governments in Greece and in France became the executors of major austerity programs, the prospects of far-left parties tanked. Many of these parties were connected to recent social movements like Podemos in Spain; they had been predicted to make sweeping gains, and then suddenly the dream was over. In the US, people of color and poor people were so underwhelmed by the results of Obama's mildly progressive agenda that they did not come out in large numbers to defend the continuity of his programs. Low voter turnout among those exact demographics cost Clinton the election.

It was every bit as much the false promises of the Left as the racist populism of the Right that got Trump elected. The Left is moribund, organized labor is dead, single-issue politics and identity politics are mere adjuncts to neoliberal parties with a progressive veneer. The Left can do nothing to significantly mitigate the rampages of capitalism, improve the lots of immigrants and people of color, or stop the normalization of right-wing policies.

Historically, the term *Left* referred to the left wing of government, where the populist, anti-monarchist bourgeois delegates sat in the National Assembly during the government of the French Revolution. To this day, the Left and the Right are both governmental forces. They have no place within a truly anti-authoritarian movement that believes in the self-organization of society rather than the conquest of central power. If there is such a thing as an extra-parliamentary Left, it is merely an adjunct that operates from the margins on party politics, eventually rerouting street movements back into the halls of government.

It is true that terms change their meaning over time, but there is plenty of reason to believe that the Left still plays this exact same role, despite the horizontalist intentions of its more radical partisans. This is not at all to say that this is the only role of people who participate in radical left politics. Rather, I would say it is a key element that holds them back. An analysis with a critical view of the Left, that recognizes the importance of recuperation in the process of social control, is necessary if we are to make sense of the missed opportunities, the vanishing victories, the demoralizing slumps, and the loss of momentum of the past few years—defeats that belong to all of us. In the face of an aggressive right-wing onslaught, new ideas are worth more than familiar mistakes. The time of pragmatism is long past. In the far-flung camps of anti-austerity movements, environmental movements, no borders movements, and anti-police brutality movements, the pragmatists have little or nothing to show for their attempts to meet the institutions halfway or to seek change within the existing power structure.

One of the reasons to reject the Left that transcends semantics is the urgent necessity for a total rupture with the existing power structure. We need to understand that the businesses, the governments, and the institutions that are responsible for policing, climate change, wars, borders, wage slavery, debt, evictions, and so forth are the enemies of the planet and all who live here. If bargaining with the devil is a risky proposition, bargaining with an institution of power is a tragic waste of time. In a world where the rich and powerful systematically piss on us and say it's raining, we desperately need a consciousness of antagonism. Even more than a class consciousness, we need a consciousness of living beings—seeing as the proletariat, the bastard child of capitalism, tends to reproduce the very values that brought it into being. The history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows class to be more of a unifying mechanism than the motor of a revolutionary dialectic. By basing the very identity of the exploited on industrial production,

employment and thus economic growth, and inclusion within Western civilization, class politics provided sufficient common ground between workers and rulers for forward thinking capitalists and statesmen to disarm anti-capitalist rebellion through labor unions, the complexification of ownership and management structures, and the identity and duties of the citizen. The ecological crisis, the continuing legacy of colonialism and slavery, and the extremes of alienation produced by social technologies all converge to signal that the problem of exploitation cannot be addressed merely by changing our relationship to the means of production, since the problem arises from the logic of production itself.

In the first section, I argued that whiteness creates an identification with democracy, with Western civilization, with the project of colonization and domination, and that we must reject this. Just as we cannot reform whiteness but must break with it definitively, a rupture with the Left would create a protective distance from the loyalty to the existing institutions that has defeated our struggles time and time again.

Exactly at the moment when radical, self-organized social movements are at a loss for how to go forward, previously rejected left-wing formulations reemerge to draw people's energies back into another doomed attempt at reform. It is often after people have conquered the streets or won some victory that was previously unimaginable that the reformist setback occurs. These moments of stagnation, of strategic uncertainty, are of vital importance for movements against capitalism: when we discover that occupying factories or plazas, creating assemblies in every neighborhood, and burning the police stations and banks in every city is not enough to put the power over our lives back in our own hands, this is the only time that we can collectively discover what revolution really demands. We actually are capable of organizing our own lives free of all coercive authority, but we need the patience and persistence to transform our rudimentary models of self-organization into the complex networks in which all the needs of everyday life can be satisfied. And we need to defend these initiatives every step of the way from efforts of repression or co-optation.

The plateaus that follow our initial victories could be the moments that truly revolutionary movements emerge, but instead they have become turning points where people give up on self-organization, hold their noses, and once more deposit their hopes with the latest progressive political party. And when those parties don't deliver, the right wing sweeps in.

In both Spain and Greece, large numbers of people who had rejected party politics but still saw themselves as part of the Left were seduced into supporting SYRIZA, Podemos, or municipal politicians like Ada Colau. And this tended to happen at the moment when they saw no other easy way forward, when prior explosions of social strength had still not toppled an oppressive power structure. In Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia, progressive governments absorbed and subsequently institutionalized what had been incredibly active, combative, and fecund social movements, paving the way for a redoubling of neoliberal policies and capitalist development projects.

In the US, where voter turnout is lower, party loyalty less common, and the Left is represented more by NGOs than by any political party, the dynamic takes on a different form. Under a conservative presidency, the diffuse Left focuses on single-issue harm reduction projects, like trying to minimize the number of immigrants dying on a border that was designed to kill. As an election nears, the NGOs and Democratic operatives present in all of these movements swiftly revise the agenda and mobilize activists for an electoral victory, which, after the years of a Republican administration, seems like a necessary evil. Under a centrist presidency (e.g., Democratic), the

conflicts between self-organizing elements (from anarchists to unaffiliated locals) and power-holders (NGOs, party operatives, self-appointed community leaders) rise to the surface as the former try to address the problem using direct methods and the latter counsel patience, impose an exclusively symbolic template for protest, and use the media and police to divide their opponents, separating a silenced but legitimate mass of constituents from the “outside agitators.”

The model really has more in common with the crude party machines of the 19<sup>th</sup> century than with the refined methods of social democratic recuperation honed in Europe, but it is nonetheless highly effective, and will continue to be so as long as people on the ground have no means of distinguishing sincere social rebels from the professional activists and party operatives who inhabit the Left. The North American situation shows that a firm rejection of party politics is not enough. The most active players in pacifying the social conflicts that are so close to boiling over belong to the extra-parliamentary Left and do not coalesce into new political parties like MAS, Podemos, or SYRIZA. It is enough that they prevent frontal assaults on the Democratic Party and its various reform efforts to keep these social movements from generating the autonomy they need, and with the nonprofit-industrial complex raining down money and constantly defining the landscape of the conflict, groups that are two or three organizations removed from the Democratic Party or any mainstream NGO can unwittingly become the mouthpieces for the latest strategy of pacification.

The Left and the Right are the two hands of the State, but they are by no means equal. In Spanish, *tener mano izquierda*, using the left hand, means being subtle, clever, avoiding direct conflict. The purpose of the Left, from the State’s point of view, is to co-opt and institutionalize rebellious popular movements. This is why the right wing can make secret deals with Iran, flirt with Russia, or out the identities of government spies with no lasting consequences, whereas the Left is always being scrutinized for signs of treason. The loyalty of the Left is always in question, in the mainstream, and they have to constantly prove their loyalty and their effectiveness by bringing more captives to the bargaining table. The extreme right in the US is responsible for far more domestic killings than all the leftist and jihadist groups combined, but they will not be treated as terrorists. Instead, the media and police will present them to us as extremists who got carried away, and keep the problem from being spoken about in a systematic way. People who actually rebel against the social order or criticize the pillars of state power will be prosecuted as terrorists and locked away for decades—even if, like Marius Mason, they’ve never hurt anybody.

The Left exists to harness the anger of the oppressed. When they went too far in the French Revolution, heads rolled, and the Jacobins who had tried to conduct rather than suppress popular rage were sent to the guillotines for their excesses. Those in power are all too aware of the danger of promising justice to the plebes. The labor union movement worked wonders in drafting a new peace treaty between Capital and Labor—many of the very first laws legalizing labor organizations specifically mentioned the need for an instrument that would allow the peaceful resolution of labor conflicts. That peace treaty has become obsolete, and soon the ruling powers will need a new one.

In the US, desegregation plus the destruction of black communities through federal urban development policy and the so-called War on Crime created a new peace treaty for race relations, held together by a discourse of tolerance and color blindness on the part of whites (amounting to a belief that if you close your eyes, racism will go away), and on the other hand the ascendance of a small minority of blacks into managerial positions in government (whereas before they had been excluded from government but enjoyed a high degree of economic autonomy in many cities). This

peace treaty is also starting to fall apart, but thanks to the long period of liberal color blindness, historical continuity has been broken, and today only radicals can trace how slavery directly morphed into the present system (people at the center typically respond, *What, you're still talking about that?*).

Key figures in the Democratic Party, currently facing an internal shakeup, are drawing a lesson from the electoral loss: they have gone too far to the left, and need to concentrate on appealing to “the working class,” a shameless euphemism for non-college-educated whites. Any other party in their situation would be doing the same thing. Due to the paramount democratic pressure to achieve electoral victory, only an outside party with no chance at immediate dominance could break with this dynamic to provide an independent voice, and their critique would be predicated on their continuing minority status. Instead of building up a new momentum only to see it institutionalized again, or worse yet, drafting a new peace treaty between a white supremacist system and its various subjects—between owners and owned—we should be thinking in terms of survival, self-defense, rupture, and revolution. It is hard to think of a historical moment when the psychological pressures of moderation were more counterproductive. The existing institutional channels for reform can give us nothing.

The struggles of the future cannot be about scaring white supremacists back into the closet, promoting technologies that—taken out of context—cause less pollution, bringing political correctness and superficial equality to long-standing patriarchal institutions, or seeking to balance the needs of Capital and Labor. The problems that Trump makes terrifyingly visible were already there. We need to abandon any identification or illusion of shared interests with the dominant system, attack oppression and exploitation at their very foundations, and start building the world we want, making no compromises with the system that never saw us as anything more than resources or means to an end.



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