

Change We Need

An Anarchist Perspective on the 2008 Election

Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists

November 2008

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The election is over. Barack Obama will become the next president of The United States. The news of Obama's victory resulted in spontaneous celebrations across the country. The energy was infectious and everywhere conversations seemed to contain a positive outlook that people in the U.S. have not known for many long years. Words like change and hope are being used, and it seems widely assumed that the election of Obama will herald a new age of social justice, an end to the wars, and significant reduction in the racism the plagues U.S. society. But as the energy and media spectacle dies down, we would like for you to consider the election from a different perspective. It is our belief as Class Struggle Anarchists that elections in a capitalist society in fact can never bring true justice and security to the average working person. We do not believe that such elections can with any degree of permanence prevent wars, or deal effectively with racism, sexism or environmental degradation.

We stand in solidarity with the hopes for profound change of the millions of people who voted for Obama. However, we also recognize that the capitalist system is in a serious crisis which is dragging down all working class and oppressed people and which even the best-intentioned high office-holder is incapable of solving. The aim of this piece is to provide a perspective on the crisis and an outline for solutions.

The presidency of George W. Bush has been by almost any reasonable standard a complete disaster. Lies, wars, a financial crisis and deep recession, and the building up of a police state are just a few of Bush's dubious legacies. Some of these were already obvious two years ago as the electoral season opened and the liberals and reformists began their campaign against these issues. However, glaringly missing from their attacks was why these problems existed in the first place.

It is our belief that economic inequality, war, racism, sexism and environmental destruction are inherent in any capitalist society. Consider for a moment the vast wealth that our society creates, everything from crops to advanced medicines. However, the access to this wealth is unequally divided, determined by supposedly free markets. It is assumed by the politicians and corporate media that these supposedly free markets are a natural part of life. Markets, however, are set up by people; they can also be modified or undone by people. As anarchists, we believe that the production and distribution of society's wealth should be decided democratically, by people, and not by a market mechanism which in fact is controlled by a few.

Democracy

Anarchists are absolutely for democracy. The concept that people should come together and make decisions is the backbone of our ideology. However, we do not view the U.S. system of democracy as being representative of those ideals. The Republicans and Democrats exist as two rival factions battling over our consent to be ruled. Both promote rhetoric of common interest with ordinary people, but we feel this is an illusion. The politicians in this nation exist to provide a stable platform for the rule and exploitation of the majority of working people in America by the minority of capitalists; that is, the owners of the property on which we produce the wealth. We build, guard, clean and work in the offices and plants, we transport the goods, and we sell them, but the capitalists own them and pocket the profits. The interests of these two groups are not the same. The boss class wants to get as much from the workers as it can. They want to pay us as little as possible and sell us everything they own as dearly as they can. Unchecked

these conditions have led to uprisings. Don't believe it? Look at our own history! The abolition of slavery, 8-hour day, the right to form unions, overtime pay, child labor laws, the end to legal segregation, the right of women to vote and to choose, and the right of gay and transgender people to be themselves was won not at the ballot box, but by people organizing, striking, boycotting and taking to the streets. The liberals in elective office passed the laws in response to the movements and to head off what could become a revolutionary upsurge.

Implications of the Election

Without a doubt this election has been historic. We see two reasons. A Black man has been elected to the highest office in the U.S., a country founded on the mass kidnapping of Africans and the theft of land from the Indigenous people who already lived here. Second, Obama's campaign was marked by some of the most widespread mass organizing in years.

The US is a nation deeply scarred by racism, and despite what some pundits might believe, it is clear to any working person that racism is nowhere near dead. Racial oppression is a complicated issue, and we do not mean to simplify it. However, a discussion of why racism and white supremacy have been so intractable in US society would have to consider how race has consistently been used as a wedge by the ruling class in its rhetoric and its policy decisions to keep the working class divided along racial lines, and so prevent the class from realizing its full potential as a force capable of self-organizing and overcoming its oppression. The election of a Black man to the presidency of the US represents a real shift in the attitudes of Americans, and we applaud this. However, racism is not just about attitudes. It is integral to the system of exploitation of working people. This systemic racism is what leverages the advantage of the ruling class, and with the increasingly evident magnitude of the economic collapse we are heading into, the ruling class will be aggressively seeking opportunities to defend its advantages. The way forward is for working-class people to organize in their own interests and to champion the aspirations of those who are oppressed by racism. We see social justice movements, neighborhood associations and cop-watch as examples. These sorts of bottom-up movements stand in complete contrast to what will be the top-down efforts of even an Obama administration to address social problems. Such efforts may alleviate some of the symptoms but they will leave the root causes of the problems untouched.

The other significant element of the election was the unprecedented grassroots mobilization that supported Obama's campaign. Under a banner of change and social justice many thousands of people volunteered, donated money, and did the labor of making the campaign run. We view this trend with great excitement. Imagine what could be gained if that focus on grassroots organizing was taken into the communities we lived in, into direct action on our on behalf instead of appeals to power.

We urge for this energy and creativity to go into movements independent of politicians. We encourage the support of unions, neighborhood democracy, resistance to police brutality, support for political prisoners, models for mass education, and also a movement with teeth. Above all, we must struggle for what we need, not what the system is willing to give us.

In addition, we must all be on the watch for expressions of racist hatred and organized fascist movements in the months and years following the election. The truth is that many white Americans are still openly racist, and there are groups that will exploit this, and real anger of social

issues, to create violent movements. The news of a Black church burned in Springfield, MA just hours after the election was not surprising, and we must use all means necessary to stop such movements.

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Retrieved on March 18, 2016 from web.archive.org
Adopted by U.S. NEFAC, November 2008. Published in *The Northeastern Anarchist* Issue #14,
2009.

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