

Trump Takes Office, Resistance Takes to the Streets

January 25, 2017



Donald Trump takes office on January 20, setting up the most right-wing, racist government in modern American history, but he will not go unchallenged. That challenge is already in motion.

Within days of the election, hundreds of thousands took to the streets nationwide, and governments in dozens of cities, including Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and Washington DC, pledged to continue offering sanctuary to immigrants—key targets for the right. Trump’s cabinet choices and the reaction to them suggest that we are in for four years of tumultuous political and social battles. We do not shrink from these battles.

We are also sobered by the prospects.

With Trump in the White House and in position to stack the Supreme Court with a renewed reactionary majority, and with the hard-right Republican Party dominating both houses of Congress, along with state affiliates holding the whip hand for 30 governorships and 27 state legislatures, the right will be more formidable than at any time since the Gilded Age.

Immigrants, Blacks, and Latinos know that they will be targets of the new administration, and a large part of the population has ample reason to fear this menace to American democratic rights. There is a widespread foreboding, even among many Republicans, that this new political configuration could jeopardize the international economy, wreak havoc on the global political situation, and escalate climate change and hence the destruction of the global environment.

A Staff and Cabinet from Hell

Trump’s victory brings a group of far-right politicians into the White House and puts actual fascists just a step away. His selection of Stephen K. Bannon, the maximum if camera-averse leader of the “alt-right” movement and, until he joined the Trump campaign, boss of the toxic media venue *Breitbart News*, to be his chief strategist/*consigliere* is a frightening augury that puts a white nationalist notorious for his Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-feminism a few steps from the Oval Office.

Trump’s first cabinet appointment was also a signal of malign things to come when he named the notorious racist Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions as attorney general. This is the same Sessions that Ronald Reagan nominated in 1986 to a federal judgeship. Sessions’ white-supremacist views were so evident that even Senate Republicans joined in voting down his nomination.

Today even conservative Republicans are worried by Trump's choices. John Weaver, an advisor to conservative leaders Senator John McCain of Arizona and Governor John Kasich of Ohio, told the media, "The racist, fascist extreme right is represented footsteps from the Oval Office. Be very vigilant, America."

A White Nationalist Program

Trump, who ran on a nationalist economic platform and a nativist, racist social program, has listed his grim goals for his first hundred days. Among his pre-election pledges:

- Immediately deporting two to three million undocumented immigrants and erecting a wall between the United States and Mexico, allegedly at Mexico's expense.
- Suspending immigration from regions where terrorist groups are based, which means slamming the door on Middle Eastern and Muslim people, including people fleeing war zones.
- Further militarizing the country's police and building more privately owned prisons, measures that will fall heaviest on African American and Latino communities, whose members are disproportionately arrested, convicted, and imprisoned.
- Nominating at least one new conservative justice for the U.S. Supreme Court, creating a right-wing majority that could end the federal right to abortion.
- Slashing already low taxes for corporations and wealthy individuals.
- Ending environmental restrictions on coal, gas, and oil companies and curtailing other anti-climate-change programs, as well as allowing the Keystone Pipeline XL to go ahead.
- Labeling China, the United States' second-largest trading partner and holder of more than a trillion dollars in U.S. debt, as a currency manipulator.
- Initiating a trillion-dollar 10-year program to build what will be privately operated infrastructure such as highways, bridges, and tunnels, while providing no targeted spending on mass transit.
- Abolishing the intrinsically inadequate Affordable Care Act, Obama's federally coordinated private health care plan, and replacing it with a new and undoubtedly inferior competitive private health care plan.

Then there are Trump's foreign policy plans:

- Placing the United States on a permanent war footing by making the fight not only against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but also supposed new and threatening targets worldwide as well as domestically.
- Legitimizing and abetting Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's territorial encroachments and foreign interventions under the guise of improving U.S.-Russian relations. (Only a new, democratic, and non-imperialist foreign policy—which is not on offer by either party—could politically challenge Russia's own imperialism.)
- Massively renovating and strengthening the United States' offensive military capabilities at the expense of domestic programs.

Obama Offers an Olive Branch but Protest Erupts in the Streets

President Barack Obama, to the disappointment of many and the surprise of just a few, has urged Americans to give Trump a chance. But hundreds of thousands in cities across the country are refusing to do so and have come out chanting, "Not My President!" Hillary Clinton's supporters, backers of Bernie Sanders, and political independents; high school and college students, immigrants, and Black Americans are joining this inchoate if promising protest movement. In many of the demonstrations marchers carried signs against racism, Islamophobia, and misogyny. Women and LGBT people have been in the forefront of many protests. We believe resistance will continue to grow.

Take for example Sanctuary Cities, where mayors nationwide promise to continue the practice of offering sanctuary to immigrants while declining to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

To his credit, Democratic New York Mayor Bill de Blasio pledged, "We are not going to sacrifice a half million people who live among us, who are part of our community. We are not going to tear families apart."

Even the former Obama chief of staff cum leg-breaker and current Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, notorious for waging war against public-sector unions and dubbed by the Chicago Teachers Union and others as "Mayor 1%," said, "To all those who are, after Tuesday's election, very nervous and filled with anxiety, you are safe in Chicago, you are secure in Chicago, and you are supported in Chicago. Chicago will always be a sanctuary city." During his campaign Trump warned that if he were president, "Cities that refuse to cooperate with federal authorities will not receive taxpayer dollars," promising a political battle in one more arena. Students and professors are also pressing colleges and universities to adopt sanctuary policies.

Several important Democratic Party leaders have sworn to resist Trump, among them Harry Reid, the party's outgoing Senate minority leader, liberal icon Senator Elizabeth Warren, and, of course, Bernie Sanders, who ran for the Democratic Party presidential nomination as a "democratic socialist" calling for a "political revolution."

Warren told the media, "You can either lie down, you can whimper, you can curl up in a ball, you can decide to move to Canada, or you can stand your ground and fight back, and that's what it's about."

Yes, the Democrats can be expected to oppose certain noxious Trump-inspired legislation and executive orders, but they are unlikely to lead a militant fight against Trump unless heavily forced. After all, they have mostly aided and abetted, rather than resisted, the Republicans, having gradually adopted conservative shibboleths for some 40 years as they came to share the same neoliberal ideology and commitment to austerity. President Bill Clinton was responsible for—and Hillary Clinton supported—some of the worst legislation on social welfare and on crime and justice, policies that fell hardest on Black and Latino communities, while doing precious little for displaced workers in Rust Belt areas and elsewhere.

No wonder, then, that Hillary Clinton lost an election to a clown princeling and notorious real estate grifter. In debates, she barely echoed her own party platform, which, as strong as it was in some parts—on paper at least—served mainly as a sop to supporters of Bernie Sanders, who many believed caved too soon and for too little. Once installed as the party nominee, Clinton gave no hope to voters that she could really do much except save them from the looming Trump. She was the plodding Brand X candidate and champion of the status quo, while he posed as the rallying campaigner for social and economic change. Not enough voters recognized that Trump's brand of change, combining nativism, sexism, a drunken warrior sensibility, and a pro-business bias, would come at their expense. It's small comfort to know that Clinton won the popular vote and

outperformed President Obama's 2012 results in four states, one of which was Texas; it was in the swing states that decided the election that Clinton did significantly worse than Obama.

Going Forward, Not Backward

Resistance is not only about defending minorities who are being targeted. That's absolutely essential and urgent. But peeling working-class whites away from Trump also requires offering a radical economic program that addresses their absolutely legitimate grievances and insecurities; for example, not a measly \$15 minimum wage, but a federal guarantee of a job at a "middle-class" wage. It means raising the issues of a mandatory guaranteed income, job training on demand, Social Security that is offered at an earlier age and is fully converted into a national pension plan, paid family leave, and high-quality day care for the children of working parents. It means guaranteeing that workers will not suffer job losses or economic insecurity because of trade agreements. Such a radical economic program is precisely what the corporate-dominated Democratic Party will never accept. And that's why a strategy of trying to win sections of the white working class away from Trumpism by relying on the Democrats will fail.

While the broad left tends to look toward reforming the Democratic Party, particularly through elections at local and state levels, we warn that neoliberal Democrats cannot be trusted, except to fail in leading sustained resistance to Trump and the right. The all-important question is how to build an independent political force, ideally an independent political party, out of the resistance movements that are now arising. But for now, we resist.

What forms that resistance will take to be effective can't be easily charted, even if we know that what's past is prologue. But ongoing struggles give us not just hope but also direction. Sectoral fights against degrading the environment, plant closings, evictions, police brutality, anti-LGBT violence, school privatization, and so on, will continue—just as the right's efforts to destroy those movements will escalate. And in these struggles, ordinary people can become fighters in their communities and come to recognize not only the humanity in others but the commonality of interests in seemingly disparate causes.

Politicians and media pundits are telling us that we should give Trump a chance. We say no, what is needed is mass struggle, which history has repeatedly shown can arise in unpredictable and surprising ways, even when it seems unlikely.

Sarah Jaffe, in her new book, *Necessary Trouble: Americans in Revolt* (Nation Books, 2016), charts dozens of modern battles that appear disparate but become "intersectional," in which alliances are more than tactical, they are integral to a common struggle against plutocracy, a challenge to the capitalist system itself. Barbarism, as Rosa Luxemburg knew, was as likely an outcome of any final conflict with capital as was socialism, but there are sound reasons to believe that socialism can come even to the imperial center itself. That is urgently needed, but not inevitable. If twenty-first-century Marxists have learned anything it is that socialism is neither inevitable nor foreclosed and that humans make their own history. But socialism must win out if humankind is to survive.

Footnotes