

Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall...

January 3, 2017



Trump is President. To avoid repeating the causes of Trump winning requires knowing what the causes were.

Liberals point at the FBI, Russian interference, the electoral college, racists and sexists, Trump voters, and also Trump haters who were too busy excoriating Clinton to urge voting against Trump. Radicals point at mainstream media, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the electoral system, corporate power, and neo-Nazis. Advocates for lesser-evil-voting point at arguers against lesser-evil-voting. Advocates of abstaining or voting Green everywhere point at lesser-evil-voters. Critics of single issue politics point at people who emphasize one or another single issue. Advocates of a single issue point at those who didn't highlight their preferred issue enough. Those who predicted Trump could win point at those who guaranteed Trump would lose. Those who guaranteed Trump would lose point at those who excoriated Trump. Those who pleaded Trump would be a disaster point at those who claimed Trump would be just another president. Those who celebrated that Trump-hating would rejuvenate radicalism point at Trump-defilers' "debilitating negativity." Nearly all who regret Trump winning urge that we let bygones be bygones and go forward.

Consider all those who would love to write an obituary for the FBI, who know Russia's reasons of state only pursue elite benefit, who abhor the Democratic Party, who call Clinton a war criminal, who call Trump a barbarian, who warned Trump could win, who urged lesser evil voting, who offered positive aims, who fight for the entwined importance of race, gender, and class and against prioritizing any one above the rest, who seek multi-issue, multi-tactic, cross constituency and cross-border solidarity and activism, and who oppose mainstream media and support alternative media. Considering only familiar reasons, such folks were not even a partial proximate cause of Trump winning. But are there other reasons for Trump's victory to consider?

Radical leftists are not even a smidgen at fault for the rich exploiters who voted for Trump. Or for the powerful trend makers who did so. Or for the pathologically depraved on account of their being grotesquely deprived who did so. But what about that any black people voted for Trump, or that any Latinos did, or that so incredibly many white women and men voted for Trump? What caused those realities? To answer, we have to look at more than the last year.

Consider only people who for whatever reasons know quite a lot about fascism and even more about current society. Only people who are intent on winning fundamental social change around race, gender, and economy. Only people who favor anti-authoritarian approaches, who favor full classlessness, and who know the difference between Trump and Clinton. Only people who devote themselves to communicating with others about the need to win change. Only people who know a lot about popular mindsets, feelings, and motivations. Does even that group need to reassess?

Am I circling the wagons and pointing at allies and self rather than only at more obvious causes of Trump winning? To correct our failings we must acknowledge them. But do any individuals, organizations, or outlets urge correcting their own prior failings as part of mounting an effective

opposition? If everyone avoids identifying their own choices as contributions to Trump's victory, won't our own choices remain as they were?

Is finding fault with ourselves more painful than spinning nightmare scenarios of Trumpian apocalypse? More painful than piling on essay after essay documenting coming disasters to audiences who already know how horrible Trump will be? More painful than finger pointing at everyone other than ourselves? More painful than calling for unity while shrouding our own past mistakes?

1. As an anti-sexist feminist I look at Trump's female vote and I ask myself, what did we do wrong over months, years, and literally a half century during which we have been trying to develop feminist awareness and commitment? Why have five decades of feminist efforts left society with so many women and men who did not cry out at Trump's obviously misogynistic intentions? Have we polarized away potential allies too often? Have we attracted potential allies, but conveyed insufficient clarity and commitment for them to stay? Were our feminist values, aims, or methods flawed? Does anyone believe that in five decades we could not have done better? Doesn't it follow that rather than bemoaning the choice of women and men who voted for Trump, we should ask what we ought to change about how we make demands and organize about gender so we attract rather than repel those who don't agree? Being morally and socially right for decades about the scope of society's gender injustices hasn't created an unstoppable tide against sexism. Perhaps we need to say more about medium and long run goals. Perhaps we need to seek feminist outcomes in ways that put off fewer potential allies and pull more constituencies more sustainably into feminist commitment. Can we find a way to talk about gender that doesn't polarize away men and neglect other social phenomena like class and race?

2. As an anti-racist internationalist I look at the admittedly small numbers of low or modest income blacks and Latinos confused about Trump and I wonder how any could exist. I look at the relatively modest support from Blacks for Sanders against Clinton - which was part of the whole election turning out as it did - and I wonder how that too could exist. And while I certainly understand considerable racism still existing in various white constituencies, I see the relative lack of fury at Trump's racism, Islamophobia, and immigrant bashing, and I have to wonder, again, how can that exist? Has decades of anti-racist organizing not tried often enough to reach whites who resisted the appeals due to our preaching overwhelmingly only where we already have a receptive audience? Have our messages too often failed due to their tone or substance alienating those we meant to reach? Have anti-racist communities been pursuing too narrow an understanding, thus concluding Clinton was preferable to Sanders? Have anti-racist values, aims, or methods been flawed? Does anyone believe that in over a half century we could not have done better? Rather than bemoaning the choices of whites who voted for Trump, shouldn't we ask what we ought to change about how we make demands and organize about race so we attract rather than repel those who don't agree? Being morally and socially right for decades about the scope of racism's ills hasn't created an unstoppable tide against racism. Perhaps we need to say more about medium and long run goals. Can we find a way to talk and make demands about race that doesn't polarize away white people and that better accounts for other social phenomena like class and gender?

3. As an anti-capitalist I look at a narcissistic billionaire bully attracting tens of millions of working class votes and I wonder how that could exist. How could five decades of anti-capitalist organizing leave so many workers susceptible to Trump's rhetoric and posturing? Was it something about our substance, such as not sufficiently addressing what working people feel and experience in ways they relate to? Was it something about our approach, such as giving off hostility toward working people quite like what they daily encounter from authority figures in hospitals, courts, and workplaces? Why when working people are furious at their plight do anti-capitalists have little connection to and often even little empathy for workers' rising fury? When Clinton called working class Trump supporters

deplorable was she manifesting sentiments widely held on the left? What must we change about how we talk about, make demands about, and organize about class and economy so we reach those who don't yet agree? Does anyone believe that in a half century we could not have done better? Rather than bemoaning the choice of working class people who voted for Trump, shouldn't we ask what we ought to change about how we make demands and organize about class and economy so we attract rather than repel those who don't agree? Being morally and socially right for five decades about capitalism's horrors hasn't created an unstoppable tide against class oppression. Perhaps we need to say more about medium and long run goals. Perhaps we need ways to seek anti-capitalist outcomes that put off fewer potential allies and pull more constituencies more sustainably into anti classist commitment. Can we talk and make demands about economy in ways that don't polarize away workers, and that don't ignore other social phenomena like gender and race? Could the issue be part style and part substance, with both parts owing to inadequately understanding the situation of workers and being too dismissive of them, and perhaps even aspiring to be above them both in the movement and in a new economy?

4. Finally, I look at progressive and left writing over the past year and I see a lot of people saying that Trump has a silver lining. Trump will galvanize us. Trump is just another ruling class lackey same as the rest. And, not voting in contested states or voting for Stein in contested states was a wise choice. I wonder how the callousness such views display toward those who will most suffer Trump's fascistic inclinations and ecological madness could exist. I wonder how such confusion about the prospects of movements trying to seek radical progress against a right wing thug rather than against a liberal woman could exist. How such views can exist for radicals immersed in left literature and activism? I wonder what those of us who knew better have done that has caused us to fail to reach the commentators who have offered such suicidal views. I wonder how months, years, or decades of involvement in radicalism could leave so many thinking such confused thoughts? I wonder what has been wrong with the accumulated sum total literature and practice of all the left's many parts, some of which I feel responsible for both as a left writer and speaker and as a left publisher, such that a good many left commentators and incredibly many young radicals could be highly versed in all that radical output and yet nonetheless hold the views many have been propounding.

Here is the bottom line. If what we each acknowledge and seek to change includes only things like FBI machinations, Russian hacking, electoral college imposition, and everything other than traits of our own, then we won't alter much of the decades long movement practices that allowed for 1-4 above to occur. But 1-4 are issues we must solve to attain lasting success in the future.

That we need to look in the mirror seems evident. 