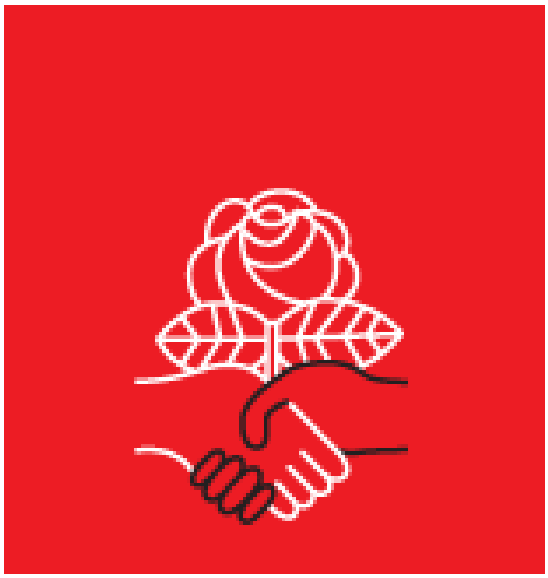
We Fight for Socialism over Barbarism

November 15, 2016



How Trump Won: Seizing the Anti-Establishment Ground through Racial and Economic Nationalism

On November 8, voters in the United States narrowly elected an openly racist, misogynist and nativist candidate for president. Donald Trump succeeded in defining himself as an anti-establishment candidate who will end dynastic rule in Washington, D.C., by elites who care little for "forgotten Americans."

The grain of truth in this rhetoric masked an ideological appeal to a "white identity" that Republicans have long cultivated — in this instance, focusing on fear of immigrants, Muslims and people of color. The facts go against the liberal media's narrative that "poor white people" were the primary force behind Trump's rise. We must understand "Trumpism" as a cross-class white nativist alliance; the median family income of the 62 percent of white voters who supported Trump was higher than that of Hillary Clinton voters and wealthier than Bernie Sanders' primary base.

Governing elites have long used racism to divide working people. The Left must understand the centrality of racism to capitalism and speak directly to how racism has hurt the interests of the white working class. The far Right in Europe and the United States has succeeded in speaking to the anger of people long abandoned by the bipartisan conservative and center-left consensus in favor of unbridled corporate globalization. Trump's victory should show once and for all the dire consequences of leaving the Left's response to economic insecurity in the hands of corporate-aligned centrists like the Clintons.

If Sanders had been the Democratic nominee, he certainly could have mobilized stronger working-class support against Trump, and his coattails could have put both houses of Congress in play. Clinton failed to gain the support of many working- and middle-class whites by running a campaign overly focused on Trump's character flaws rather than hammering home the Sanders-inspired platform proposals that would improve the lives of working people of all races. She failed to highlight raising the minimum wage, opposing "free trade" agreements and creating good jobs through public investment in infrastructure and alternative energy. The Democratic Party chose the wrong candidate and the wrong strategy, and now the United States is left with the most dangerous

government in recent history.

The Pressing Urgency of Now: Defend the Targets of Nativist Racism

Given Trump's and Pence's vilification of communities of color, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, women and LGBTQ people, Democratic Socialists of America's and the broader Left's first priority must be to defend the civil and political rights — and very physical security — of those groups targeted by Trumpism. The appointment of the open bigot and anti-Semite Stephen Bannon of Breitbart News as senior White House counselor demonstrates that Trump's hateful rhetoric is not just talk. DSA and YDS chapters should be militant supporters of these groups in their immediate struggles to establish sanctuary cities for the undocumented, to defend Muslims and their mosques and to protect women seeking reproductive services. We must also proactively train ourselves to intervene effectively when we witness harassment of and violence against those targeted by the white nativist politics legitimated by the Trump victory. Finally, we should reach out to these communities immediately to express our solidarity and ask what work they would wish us to do.

Much of this work will involve DSA deepening our engagement with the Movement for Black Lives, the immigrant rights movement, Fight for 15, the reproductive justice movement and other movements on the frontlines against Trumpism. Under Reagan, similar acts of resistance eventually created a powerful rainbow coalition that advanced a multiracial politics of economic and racial justice. If we fully commit ourselves to these struggles over the next four years there is no reason why a new, even more powerful multiracial coalition for social and economic justice cannot emerge.

The Left will be faced with tremendous struggles on a variety of fronts starting on January 20.

Upon assuming office, Trump may use executive orders to reverse Obama's environmental regulations (particularly those concerning coal-fueled power plants). The Left should connect Trump's hostility to climate justice policies with mass action in support of the struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline and for indigenous sovereignty. The climate justice movement, particularly if it puts environmental racism issues front and center, could be a major focus of resistance to Republican rule.

Trump is also likely to immediately end DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which currently protects from deportation over 4 million undocumented individuals who came to the US as minors. This could be the first step in the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants from the United States. The Left should build strong relationships with movements on the forefront of opposing these policies, and fight to build a majoritarian coalition in support of citizenship for the millions of Americans who contribute to our economy and society through their work and taxes, but do not even enjoy the most basic civil and political rights.

Republicans may press to repeal all of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), but they can be stopped. By organizing mass demonstrations, the Left could well save the eight million working-class family members who have gained Medicaid coverage and could also force the remaining 19 states that have refused to expand coverage to accept the federally funded program. We must organize the other 12 million people who currently receive health insurance through the ACA to demand that their coverage be continued, but at more affordable rates. Whether all or part of the ACA is abolished, the Left must campaign for state single-payer systems as the best alternative for expanding equitable and affordable health care coverage.

The Trans Pacific Partnership may well be a dead letter under Trump's presidency, but we must not see Trump's alleged opposition to it as a sign that he is in any way committed to a global trade policy that serves the interests of workers at home or abroad — far from it! In response to Trump's

savagely anti-worker policy prescriptions the Left must advance an alternative vision of global economic policy that raises global living, labor and environmental standards as an alternative to a nativist protectionism that blames foreign workers and immigrants for declining working-class living standards at home.

Further, Trump will move quickly to destroy organized labor in the United States, particularly in the public sector. We must resist, though our efforts will be complicated by the AFL-CIO's self-defeating conciliatory stance toward the President-elect. Unions are the most powerful tool we have for building inter-racial solidarity among working class people around a shared economic interest. The questionable strategic and tactical choices made by much of their leadership both to support Clinton in the Democratic primaries and to commit themselves to working with Trump show the absolute necessity of a bottom-up left insurgency within the house of labor.

The Left must also press Democrats in the Senate to use the power of the filibuster to prevent the passage of disastrous legislation and extreme conservative appointments to the Supreme Court, and urge Democratic state and local governments to resist disastrous changes in Federal policy in whatever ways they can.

A Longer-Run Strategy for Progressive Power: Building a Multiracial Post-Sanders Movement

These are our immediate tasks. But we must also assess the Trump victory and what it means for future left and DSA strategy and seek opportunities to move from defense to offense. Though Clinton won the popular vote, she underperformed among white voters in the rust-belt states in part because many older voters suffered from the Clinton dynasty's support of neoliberal policies that failed to address the economic suffering caused by deindustrialization, mechanization and corporate outsourcing. Clinton even narrowly lost the vote of white women, in part because Trump set himself up as the anti-establishment candidate who would "drain the swamp" of Washington "special interests" (despite the Koch brothers funding much of the Republican ground campaign). Combined with racist and sexist diatribes blaming the end of America's supposedly golden era on women, immigrants and people of color, this rhetoric resonated deeply with over-45 white voters (both men and women) facing stagnant living standards, downward mobility and a soon-to-be majority-minority status in the United States.

While Trump offers no viable plan to actually address these voters' economic anxieties either by increasing employment, transforming U.S. trade policy or any other means, his call to "make America great again" by rebuilding infrastructure and creating "jobs, jobs, jobs" was powerful among many white voters who associate the memory of better economic conditions with a past of white privilege and a politics of "law and order."

The Republicans will not address the needs of working-class people in the United States. Instead we can expect them to propose massive tax cuts for the rich and corporations, running up huge budget deficits and exacerbating our already staggering level of income and wealth inequality. They will only maintain or expand those parts of the federal budget that really should be shrunk — for example, the military and prison systems. Many Trump voters will resent tax giveaways to the rich, and most Americans today are wary of military interventions overseas, so the Left has a real opportunity to mobilize against such national priorities and advance an alternative vision.

As the 2016 election has shown, however, changing demographics alone will not automatically threaten the success of white nativist politics. In this election (as in 2000), the undemocratic nature of the Electoral College prevented the winner of the popular vote from taking office. Further, voter suppression drove down the turnout of working-class citizens of all races as well as the elderly and

students, a problem particularly severe in North Carolina, Wisconsin and Ohio. Beyond this, the progressive, black and Latino electorates are heavily concentrated in strongly Democratic states (and mostly in urban and inner suburban areas), which means that millions of their votes are effectively not counted in the outcome of the presidential election. (For instance, 100,000 additional votes beyond those needed to reach 50 percent in California do nothing to change the number of votes California receives in the electoral college).

To address this problem, the Left must build a stronger base among white working-class voters in small towns throughout the rural United States and in states in the former industrial heartland, the South and the plains states. There can be no progressive majoritarian politics in the United States without a politics that appeals to working-class voters of all races. Reapportionment in 2020 will heavily affect prospects for progressive electoral victories for the next decade. Thus, the Left has to sink deep roots in a wide range of communities across the nation, and DSA's rapid growth in the South should be nurtured and sustained.

Strong political headwinds blow against us over the coming years. If we hope to move U.S. politics in a progressive direction, we must continue down the trail blazed by Bernie Sanders. The many successful insurgent "Sanderistas" elected at the local and state level, as well as the emerging anti-corporate wing of the Democratic Party's congressional delegation and above all Sanders' own presidential primary run, demonstrated that multiracial working-class constituencies will support a social democratic program of progressive tax reform, universal access to high-quality health and childcare and public investment in infrastructure and alternative energy.

We must continue to press this agenda even more assertively, both by electing more insurgents at all levels of government and by also building working-class and socialist power in our trade union, social-movement and electoral work.

None of these programs can be won without a radical shift in power relations. In the absence of mass pressure from democratic social movements — movements willing to disrupt the everyday workings of undemocratic institutions — and the development of independent electoral capacity of activists of color, feminists, LGBTQ activists and trade unionists, corporate interests will continue to dominate the policy agenda.The campaigns of DSA-endorsed candidates at the local and state level, such as victorious State Representative Mike Sylvester (D-Maine) and the impressive second-place finish of Baltimore City Council Green candidate Ian Schlakman, demonstrate that building a multiracial base for explicitly socialist candidates (who, depending on local circumstances, may run as Democrats, independents, Greens or in nonpartisan races) is both possible and necessary.

The more than 9,000 members of DSA (nearly 2,000 of whom joined this week) believe that the surest way to resist and defeat Trumpism is if we build a strong, organized democratic socialist movement in U.S. politics, a movement that must become as diverse as the working class itself. The Sanders revolution moved us one step closer toward a stronger and more assertive Left that can push for the many long-overdue reforms working people in this country desperately need, such as raising the minimum wage to $15 an hour and making publicly-funded university education a basic human right. Clinton's neoliberal centrism proved incapable of warding off the nativist far Right. The way forward lies in the movement for democratic socialism.

Thus, we invite veterans of the Sanders campaign and others to join the organization that works to bring his democratic socialist politics into the mainstream of U.S. political life.

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