

The fall of Trump



Finally at about 4.40pm on Saturday 7 November Pennsylvania was called for Biden and it was over. Biden had crossed the 270 electoral votes threshold and Trump was defeated. Plus Biden had won the national popular vote by well over 4 million votes. It is also looking unlikely that Trump's bogus lawsuits will be able to overturn the result or that he will be able to use the US state apparatus to obstruct the transition.

The defeat of Trump is greatly to be welcomed as a Trump win would have encouraged every racist and fascist around the world but a Biden presidency cannot be celebrated by socialists. He is simply the continuity of candidate of US capital and will do nothing to end the economic and racial inequality that blights America. Trump's efforts to steal or frustrate the election must be resisted but the question that needs to be asked is how it is that the result was so close despite Trump's appalling record in terms of his personal behaviour and so many issues such as covid, racism, and climate change denial? I would start by rejecting any notion that the American people are simply stupid or innately reactionary, or the narrative currently being circulated by the Democratic Party establishment that it was because the advocacy of left and 'socialist' ideas by some Democrats was frightening people off. Rather I would cite four main factors:

☛ The predicted high turnout, which meant not only a record vote for Biden but also a big and unexpected surge for Trump. It is clear that there is a desperate, unfocused anger raging across much of America, especially poorer rural America and sections of the blue collar working class. Trump, despite being a billionaire, has been able to capture much of that anger by positioning himself as an outsider fighting the Washington establishment and defending their jobs and their way of life against the economic and psychological assaults of a changing world. In this, his boorish brutality has probably been an asset.

☛ The fact, as shown in exit polls, that in the minds of many millions of voters the economy played more strongly as an election issue than the Covid disaster, and that the economy, prior to Covid, was perceived to be doing well with Trump getting the credit for this.

☛ The fact that racism is clearly still an important factor in U.S. politics. According to the national exit polls, white voters went heavily for Trump by 56 percent to 42, whereas every other ethnic category broke clearly for Biden (Blacks: 87 percent to 12; Hispanics/Latinos: 65 percent to 32; Asians: 63 percent to 31; Other: 58 percent to 40). No other general demographic characteristic—not gender or age, but with the possible exception of rural versus urban—showed such a significant plus for

Trump (though significantly, Trump won by an almost identical margin among those with an income over \$100,000, while losing among all those below that figure, illustrating the strong crossover between race and class in the U.S.).

☛ Then there was the particular weakness of Biden as a candidate. Apologists for Biden will contest this on the grounds that that he got a record high vote, but that was clearly a purely negative anti-Trump vote, and was stated to be so by Biden voters. His weakness was not just his personal failings as a bumbling and uninspiring speaker but political in that, like Clinton in 2016, he appeared as the ultimate establishment insider, completely unable, either through his record or his centrist policies, to tap into the anger that motivated Trump supporters. By blocking a candidate, Bernie Sanders, who could have related to that rage and thus undercut Trump, the Democratic establishment hobbled their campaign from the start.

Mainstream politics

The next thing in assessing the current situation relates to one of the most distinctive features of the Trump presidency from the outset (indeed from his original campaign); namely his refusal to be bound by the normal rules of "civilised" mainstream politics. This went beyond his peculiarly vulgar personal

4 brutishness. Most importantly it extended to his overt promotion of racism. It is, of course, the case that the U.S. was born in genocide and built on slavery and has been institutionally racist since its inception. Racism is deeply embedded in its history, its national consciousness, and above all its police and so-called “justice” system. None of this is down to Trump. Nevertheless, no president since the Second World War has given such open expression to racist sentiments, has made such overt appeals to white nationalism in his campaigns and rallies (“Build that wall!”), enacted such racist immigration policies (the “Muslim ban”), and sided so blatantly with the police over their murder of Black people.

Far-right reactionary

Above all there has been his dalliance with and encouragement of the fascists and the far right. One stand out instance of this was Trump’s refusal to condemn the Nazis and White supremacists at Charlottesville, even after a counterdemonstrator was publically run down and murdered. Another was his simultaneous claim not to know anything about the fascist Proud Boys (while knowing all about Antifa) and his instruction to them to “stand back and stand by”; an instruction that was immediately seized on by them as an endorsement. If Trump himself has not yet definitively crossed the line from being a far-right reactionary within the limits of bourgeois democracy to being an outright fascist, this cultivation of a fascist base has raised the spectre that he might well do so in the not too distant future and clearly he has been able to grow that base over the last four years and during this election campaign. This raises serious questions about

whether, if he is engaged in trying to overturn the election result in which he has lost, he will resort to street mobilization of his armed and dangerous supporters? At the moment of writing there has been some such mobilization but it so far it seems to be limited. Or, if he is forced to vacate the White House, will he attempt to draw together his far-right base into an actual movement, in short, go full fascist? My guess is that Trump’s seemingly petulant lawsuits are a deliberate strategy to convince his base that they were robbed by the system, not defeated, with a view to cohering them in the future. We do not yet know the answer to these questions, but it is unprecedented in U.S. history that they can even be asked. Moreover there is an international dimension to this. As I said a Trump victory would have inspired the far right around the world, and even the relative success of coming close, as opposed to being thrashed, may give them some encouragement. We will all need to remain vigilant. Finally because Biden’s presidency will simply mean a return to business as usual for US capitalism and imperialism in a time when capitalist business as usual is driving the US into ever more polarised decay and the world towards catastrophe Biden and all he stands for will have to be fought and mobilized against from day one.

In this issue

In this issue we continue to address aspects of the triple crisis gripping a decaying capitalist system: covid, recession and ecological crisis. Brian O’Boyle contributes an analysis of the major global economic recession triggered by the pandemic; he documents both its scale and its underlying causes in the system’s long term crisis of profitability. Kieran Allen examines the inevitable consequences of this recession for the Irish working class- large scale redundancies and mass unemployment- and maps out a strategy for resistance. Alex Day discusses the particular impact of covid and recession on women in the light of their role in the process of social reproduction. John Molyneux makes the political argument for the adoption of the term ‘ecosocialism’ and Mark Walsh presents an accessible account of the ecology of Marx and Engels and their concept of the ‘metabolic rift’ with nature brought about by capitalism. Séan Mitchell contributes a major account of the key Marxist concepts of base, superstructure and dialectical totality and their role within historical materialism. In addition we have an extract from John Molyneux’s forthcoming book on *The Dialectics of Art* and Mark Walsh’s account of the extraordinary uprising in Portland, Oregon in the course of the Black Lives Matter rebellion. Finally, we have a range of interesting book reviews including Owen McCormack on John Bellamy Foster’s *The Return of Nature*.

John Molyneux