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USA

# Some aspects of US politics today

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**Black Lives Matter, the Bernie Sanders movement, the presidential campaign with the unlikely presence of Donald Trump and of the first woman candidate of a major party. The political situation in the USA has sparked a lot of interest. The NPA newspaper *Anticapitaliste* spoke to Joanna Misnik, leading US activist present at the NPA summer university.**

### **Can you explain to us the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement?**

In just a few years, the Black Lives Matter movement has become a political force in the U.S. The movement that began with a call to action by three women has focused public attention on the brutality of police assassination of Black people. A new generation of young African-Americans has been propelled into action and organization. Now, anywhere in the U.S. where Black people are murdered, the BLM movement can mount militant protests, often including civil disobedience. Some victories have been achieved, such as the resignation of several big city police chiefs, new regulations for police conduct, mandatory body cameras for cops, swift and more impartial investigation of police conduct. The crucial issue of the role of systemic racism has been brought to the foreground on the left and within the general working class population. BLM stands aside from elections and the presidential race and refuses to endorse any so-called "lesser evil" candidate such as Hillary Clinton.

A recent study estimates that a Black person is murdered by police every 28 hours. The BLM movement arises at a time when the social position of the African-American community has drastically altered under the neoliberal assault. The civil rights movement of the 1950-60s operated in a climate of general prosperity and the expansion of the social welfare state. The Black population was considered a reserve army of labor and the civil rights movement sought full equality and integration into the American dream. Neoliberalism has reduced the role of the inner city Black community, particularly youth, to an excess, disposal workforce that has been set aside from economic activity nearly completely. Estimates are that it would take the average Black family 228 year to accumulate the wealth that the average white family has today.

The response of the ruling class is the militarization of the police as an occupation force in Black neighborhoods, the school to prison pipeline that sees one in three Black males in jail at some time in their lives. When Obama took office, expenditures for local police were around \$30 million. In a few years, the federal government was spending \$787 million subsidizing local police forces to provide heavy military equipment like armored trucks, grenade launchers, riot gear, drones, etc.

This is the formidable system that Black Lives Matter is fighting. Inside BLM there is a debate: do we demand abolition of the police or do we demand community control of the police, civilian review boards, etc. After one year of work, some 40 organizations under the umbrellas of the Movement for Black Lives has issued a political platform that goes beyond spontaneous outcry against each individual police murder. Titled "A Vision for Black Lives," the program raises demands on all aspects of Black oppression and Black economic degradation. It is a giant step in the creation of a new Black liberation movement in the US. (The program can be found [here](#).)

### **How do you assess the impact of the Trump candidacy on the Republican party?**

Donald Trump's victory in the Republican primary is the product of years of change in the core constituencies of the Republican Party. Beginning with the George Bush junior presidency, waves of fundamentalist Evangelical protestant sects invaded the Republicans to secure a base of operations against the godlessness of modern government. After the 2008 depression hit, they were joined by the Tea Party, a mass movement with over 1,000 chapters of white

workers and middle class reactionaries clinging to religion as well as opposition to liberal ideas of the Democrats such as abortion rights, immigration rights, government social welfare programs. By 2010, 87 new members of Congress were elected by the Tea Party Republicans, causing paralysis in federal government. Republicans of this fundamentalist type have won governorships and majorities in the legislative bodies of 24 states. This has resulted in major restrictions on abortion rights, illegalization of the right to form a union, lack of protection of voting rights in those states. Trump's vice presidential running mate, Governor Pence of Indiana, is typical of the victorious right wing Republicans in state governments. Among other things, Pence believes that condoms are "too modern" and should be illegal.

In reality, the vast majority of the 17 contenders for the Republican nomination were extremists in their beliefs. Trump stood out as a renegade, different from the professional politicians. Most importantly, he denounced NAFTA and promised to put a stop to the trade agreements like the pending TPP and bring "our jobs" back to the U.S. Many white people were drawn to his cry to "make America great again," in part by stopping immigration from Mexico and Muslims from everywhere.

Trump's victory in the primaries broke the Republican Party to bits. Traditional Republicans, typified by the Bush family, refused to attend the Republican convention or campaign for Trump. Money and endorsements began flowing to Hillary Clinton and the Democrats. Hillary, after all, in her support for the war machine, big business and the big banks, is as good a Republican as any. In the age of neoliberalism, to pretend there are distinctions between liberal and conservative becomes increasingly meaningless.

It's one thing to win a Republican primary and quite another to triumph in a general election. As he stumbles from one misstatement-apology to another, without the full support of his party, Trump is losing this election. It remains to be seen whether the Republican Party can be put back together again or whether the U.S. will finally have a third political party. Unfortunately, this party would be a product of a relationship of forces that favors the extreme right wing and not working class for itself independent politics.

### **What does Hillary Clinton's campaign represent?**

Poll after poll shows that US voters are faced with two candidates for president in whom they have no real trust. Hillary has a broadly based reputation for not telling the truth and seeking to use her positions to enrich herself and her family. Even after she has secured the nomination, federal agencies and investigative journalists continue to try and unearth more information about the Clinton Foundation. What did donors to this supposed non-profit receive for their generosity to the foundation from Secretary of State Clinton or her former President husband. This story, along with the private email server debacle, remains to be written in full - and won't be until well after Hillary is no longer president. Hillary Clinton is under protective cover by the ruling class to ensure her election. After all, this is her reward for faithful service to that class.

Neoliberalism dates from the serious collapse of U.S. profit margins in the early 1970s. President Ronald Reagan is considered the leader who, along with Margaret Thatcher, crafted state policy that set up unfettered reign of the free market at the expense of working class standards of living and institutions. However, Democratic Bill Clinton, with Hillary Clinton at his side as a close adviser and more than a traditional first lady, did as much or more to set the direction of state government into a neoliberal framework. The Clinton Dynasty rests on the legacy of the "Third Way," a blurring of the liberal lines of the Democratic Party in favor of a consensus on behalf of corporate America between the two parties. Bill Clinton styles himself as an Eisenhower Democrat, perhaps unmindful of Eisenhower's opposition to the military-industrial complex.

The Clinton presidency saw the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, banking regulations that, when lifted, contributed to the crash of 2008. The Clintons opposed gay marriage and helped pass the "Defense of Marriage Act." Bill Clinton

abolished "welfare as we know it," throwing hundreds of thousands of children into abject poverty. They defended capital punishment and supported legislation on crime that began the flooding of the prison system with thousands of Black and Brown men serving impossibly long sentences for relatively minor crimes. They were, as Hillary admonished, "bringing the predators to heel." The Clintons failed to bring relief to 40 million Americans with no health insurance, erecting a plan that was profitable for the private insurance corporations and useless to those enrolled. Yet, the dot com boom brought some prosperity for a time during their administration, Bill played the saxophone and was a cool guy and his wife was super smart and talented.

Somehow, the Clinton team masked the pernicious nature of how they ruled and in whose interests. It will be much harder to do this time around in the age of austerity, with a new radicalization out there and poised to strike. Hillary Clinton is a war monger and a lover of the US "right" to regime change in order to protect "our" interests. Her overthrow of the elected government of Honduras has been highlighted through the murder of human rights activist Bertha Carceras. She has collected up the great proponents of US might from both parties into her big tent for this election, headlined by Henry Kissinger. All of the movement to the left she exhibited during the primary in order to accommodate to Bernie Sander's success is already eroded. The Democratic Party platform is only a piece of paper, not a promise. No one who saw it can forget Hillary's reply to a question during a television interview about the incursion into Libya and Gaddafi. Well, she told the interviewer, breaking into an ominous cackle, we came, we saw, he died.

**There are some leading feminists who advocate support for Hillary Clinton because she is a woman. What do you think about that?**

Hillary Clinton is not the lesser evil, just one of the evils who happens to be female.

**For observers from the left everywhere the movement for Bernie Sanders was an astonishing development. What about in the US?**

No one on the revolutionary left foresaw the Bernie Sanders movement. Bernie himself never saw it coming. Much like the Occupy movement before it, this mass upsurge simply appeared and then swept the country. In the end, the Sanders campaign did the impossible, raising over 225 million in small contributions from 2.5 million people, received 43 % of the votes " over 14 million " winning the primary contests in 23 states, and attracted well over 2 million people to giant rallies all across the nation. Bernie's campaign proved it was possible to run for president without the financial backing of the big corporations and their super-PACs, that a mass insurgency could reject the influence of corporate funding. [1] This exposed how politicians like Hillary Clinton were dependent on big money from Wall Street and how the corporations and banks owned and controlled our government.

The indelible lesson of the Occupy movement " that there's the 99% versus the 1% " took the form of legions of young people determined to wrest control of the society from the wealthy by electing Bernie Sanders. They were led in their struggle by Bernie the socialist. Even prior to the Sanders campaign, poll after poll had revealed that U.S. youth favored socialism over capitalism by a slim margin. Bernie socialism was classically post-war social democratic, the redistributive welfare state. He pointed to Northern Europe and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal as he campaigned for healthcare for all, free college tuition, \$15 an hour minimum wage, paid leave for parents, jobs programs through rebuilding the infrastructure and addressing climate change, making the corporations pay their fair share in taxes and ending corporate control of the government. Sanders stressed that no president could achieve these ends alone; people had to remain politically mobilized in mass movements to win our demands. He pointed to the example of the social movements like the civil rights and women's liberation struggles.

Sanders has been the lone independent in the Congress for decades. When he announced his campaign as a Democrat, he pledged to support whoever won the primary. As his campaign gained momentum, his supporters,

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many active in politics for the very first time, began to disbelieve that Sanders would give up "the revolution" and endorse Hillary. It was a shattering disappointment to the 1,900 Sanders delegates at the Democratic Party convention when Sanders stood up to nominate Hillary by acclamation and honored his "deal" with the Party. Most youthful Sanders supporters had no interest in reforming the Democrats from within or becoming a left caucus inside that Party. After the primaries in particular, they had seen the dirty tricks and how the Party had rigged the election against Sanders. Hundreds of delegates walked out of the convention in disgust. Many will give their vote and energy to Jill Stein, the Green Party presidential candidate. There is a substantial movement saying Jill Not Hill.

Where will the Bernie rebellion go from here? Will it continue in some form or disappear as an organized force, leaving individual activists to find projects and organizations on their own. Bernie is offering up something called "Our Revolution," an organization and funding source for progressive Democratic Party candidates around the country that, if elected, would change the balance of forces in the Congress. Early indications are that Our Revolution is having trouble getting off the ground. My organization, Solidarity, and others on the revolutionary left are counterposing the idea of building coalitions to run candidates who are independent of the two parties on the local level. We are seeking to capture the Bernie momentum into beginning efforts to break with the Democrats and build working class political independence. This includes, but is not limited to, the Green Party.

The radicalization that surfaced around the Sanders campaign is a rebirth of rebellious ideas in the U.S. and the determination to fight for them. It is a welcome and hopeful sign. It should be noted that, unfortunately, the 20th century organized revolutionary left is far too small and socially weightless to have been able to provide a pole, an ideological gathering point for this new upsurge. This also retards the ability to keep the Sanders momentum above ground and growing. There's a great deal of work to be done.

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[1] Super PACs are a relatively new type of organisation which can raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions, associations and individuals, then use these to overtly advocate for or against political candidates, while being prohibited from donating money directly to political candidates. See [here](#) for more.