

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4775>



USA Elections

“Don't mourn, organize”

- IV Online magazine - 2016 - IV502 - November 2016 -

Publication date: Monday 21 November 2016

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

Just about everybody is using the slogan “Don't mourn, organize” – good solidarity with the Swedish martyr for the working class, Joe Hill. But it seems particularly apposite after the Trump election. We spoke to Joanna Misnik, leading activist in Solidarity, about the election, the reaction and prospects for long-term organizing.

What are your first thoughts on the election outcome?

The U.S. just elected a new “leader of the free world.” Both he and his opponent Clinton ran their entire campaigns with persistently high rates on disapproval from the public. Fully 12 million people who voted for Trump stated they had an unfavorable attitude toward him. But the South Carolina Klu Klux Klan held a gala celebration and Marine Le Pen, leader of the right-wing National Front in France, jumped for joy. The Republican Party that Trump overwhelmed when he got the nomination despite his egomania and racist, anti-immigrant, misogynistic utterances will now realign to become much more of an undiluted white nationalist, xenophobic, fundamentalist Christian bastion. The Democratic Party appears to have collapsed, at least temporarily. A new breed of carpetbaggers are consolidating their grip on the government – racists of all stripes, right to life zealots, climate deniers, Muslim haters, anti-LGBTQ crusaders, trade union busters, anti-immigrant wall builders, creationists, and defenders of the European white race. Unexpected though it was, from the morning of November 9 we live in a vastly different and dangerous political world.

How do you explain the result?

By now hundreds of analytical articles are available about why Hillary Clinton lost the election when all the pollsters and the mainstream U.S. media had already pronounced her the winner. The discussion turns in part around to what degree and why the U.S. white working class (called white no-college by the media) was the culprit in bringing her down. The discussion is correctly littered with comparisons to Brexit. A strange piece of the answer can be found in the battle between artificial intelligence and industrial workers thrown on the neoliberal scrap heap. The Clinton campaign relied heavily on an algorithm named Ada, after Ada, Countess of Lovelace, a pioneering 19th Century female mathematician. Ada spat out some 400,000 simulations per day that determined where the Clinton campaign would spend time and deploy resources. But Ada cannot calculate feelings and emotions, so she never calculated anything that would question the safety of the Blue Maginot Line, the assumption that the Rust Belt states of Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin were secure for Democrats. Besides, Democrats needed to go after new, middle class constituencies that traditionally voted Republican; who cared if a few white workers slipped away through the cracks. Clinton's loss in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin gave Trump the electoral vote, though not the popular vote. Many of these white workers had voted for Obama in 2008 and 2012, challenging the notion that racism was the sole or main impetus.

Yes, backward and nativist attitudes toward race, gender, sexuality, immigrants and Muslims played a role in capturing votes for Trump despite the negative attitudes toward him and his personal character. But in the main this white working class vote, particularly where Trump triumphed in the Rust Belt, was a clear rejection of the Democrats and the damage that neoliberal policies had brought to these industrial communities. It was a rejection of a party and a candidate that did not offer any relief, but supported NAFTA and trade agreements that steal “our” jobs and didn't care about them. Since the election, a number of reporters have gone back to hard-hit Ohio and Michigan cities. Time after time, the workers interviewed do not voice great respect for Trump. But they expect him to make America great again as he promised by bringing the lost jobs back to their communities. Most interviewed said they expected these changes in six months to a year at the most. Those expectations, combined with Trump's tax breaks for the rich, abolishing Obamacare potentially without a replacement, and the attacks on Social Security and Medicare that

many Republicans are itching for will likely cause real tensions between the new President and the working class victims of neoliberalism who gave him their grudging support.

Can you explain the Electoral College?

This is a peculiar institution. Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by more than 1.5 million, yet Trump is the winner via the Electoral College system, scoring 290 electoral votes to Clinton's 232. The U.S. president is not directly elected by whomever gets more individual votes, as Hillary Clinton has just done. Many explain it by saying the Founding Fathers were fearful that, in the period before the establishment of political parties, the unwashed and poorly educated voters would make unwise decisions. However, the Electoral College is an undemocratic vestige of slavery and the influence of the Southern slaveholders on national government in the foundational period of the U.S. Direct election of the President by white property-owning men eligible to vote in that era would have greatly advantaged the North with its larger population of eligible voters and reduced influence of the Southern ruling class. So the Electoral College was written into the Constitution. Each state is allocated a number of electors based on the number of representatives it has in Congress. Congressional representation is based on the total population of a given state. And in 1787 Southern planters had already won the right to count each slave as three-fifths of a person in order to attain greater representation in the Congress.

This is the archaic system, birthed by slavery and institutional racism, that remains in place today. African-Americans' right to be fully counted came as a result of the civil rights movement, which won the 1965 Voting Rights Act aimed at protecting their right to vote. In this recent election, with many of the protections of that Act removed by the Supreme Court, the right of Black people to vote came under threat through identification requirements', removal from the voting rolls, and the shutting down of 800 polling places in order to make voting inaccessible to poor voters with little to no transportation. Out on the streets in the anti-Trump protests, signs demanding an end to the Electoral College system in favor of direct election are cropping up.

It's new to see demonstrations throughout the country the day after a presidential election. How did they come about, who called them, are they mainly youth or also workers, can they help bring together different protest movements?

The spontaneous anti-Trump outpouring of tens of thousands just after the elections was inspiring, and protests are still being organized. Young people once again, through social media, were the main organizers of these actions. Thousands of high school and college students in city after city walked out of their classrooms to march against Trump's agenda. The very young people who were so numerous on the streets were in part a post-Bernie generation, coming into political action for the first time. Demonstrators included the whole gamut of social movement activists, particularly Black Lives Matter, Latin@s demanding immigration justice against Trump's plan for an initial 3 million deportations, and women taking the first steps to defend abortion rights against renewed Republican assault.

The demonstrations make the immediate statement that Trump and his right-wing cronies will face resistance, that the left is not hiding or cowed, let alone defeated. As has been the case since Occupy, these actions were not led by any particular organization or coalition. Despite efforts by some revolutionary groups to claim them, they are again the product of social media outreach by all kinds of individuals and groups. Already Facebook is being loaded with different actions for January 20, the day Trump is sworn in as President.

The Brooklyn, NY Chapter of the National Women's Liberation movement has monthly meetings usually attended by a couple dozen women. Just after Trump's victory, so many people said they were going on Facebook that they booked into a nearby stadium. Thousands of women flooded this meeting, overflowing even the stadium. The January 21st Million Women March in Washington also typifies how things move along. Facebook pages are being launched state by state by "organizers." The March will be a success, but no actual named and ongoing organization

or coalition is bringing it about.

What's the attitude of the trade-union movement?

Most of organized labor is missing in action from the early efforts to build resistance. For decades the labor movement has seen itself as a loyal junior partner of the Democratic Party, even as the Party's neoliberalism has landed severe blows on working people. With only 11% of workers organized into unions, the labor movement is increasingly vulnerable to the inevitable attacks from a right-wing Trump regime. And the movement is not at all prepared to meet this very serious challenge.

Republican administrations in 26 states have managed to pass anti-union-“right to work” legislation. With a Republican majority in both houses of Congress and a Trump presidency, it is likely that a Republican bill to rid the private sector of effective unions – the National Right to Work Act – will pass through. New appointments to government bodies dealing with labor rights will yield similar steps backward. When a right-wing voting majority is secured on the Supreme Court, an avalanche of cases challenging the right to unionize may well appear. Escalating privatization of public services on the state and federal levels could gut the public sector union movement.

A far-reaching political transformation is needed if the union movement is to survive the coming storm. Only 51% of union households voted for Clinton, the lowest percentage for a Democrat since 1980, the year of the Reagan Democrat. Tens of thousands of union workers who voted for Obama in the past went over to Trump in this election. The popularity of Bernie Sanders' anti-corporate, social democratic program among working people, including the unions that formed Labor for Bernie, point the way forward to the political renewal labor needs to mobilize for the fights ahead. Another attempt to influence or renew a neoliberal Democratic Party that has already shoved unions to the side of the road will only make a dead strategy more deadly. Hope lies in contestation with the 1% by the 99% and solidarity in action with the social movements under attack – an injury to one is an injury to all.

How have the turnabouts of Sanders been seen? What is the evolution of those that were in his campaign? Can we imagine a convergence of youth movements like BLM, a sector on the labour movement posing the question of a new party, a labour party as was discussed in the 1930s?

The response demonstrations have modeled solidarity and defiance. But the fight against Trump and the right wing in government is a longer-term process that requires something beyond Facebook networking. That would be the role of a third, left political party or pre-party formation in the US, or even a reinvigorated trade union movement. The power of the social movements, which are not presently bastions of strength, would be enhanced by a unified left front.

Bernie Sanders' army of supporters, many young, was basically dispersed when he honored his pledge to work for Clinton's election. But the Bernie revolt was and remains the real “revolution” in U.S. politics. The blocked social mobility of youth, especially from working class and immigrant backgrounds, is a volatile socio-political reality that won't go away. Many are out in the streets right now. Far fewer millennials voted for Clinton than voted for Obama. Millennial disaffection from the two capitalist parties helped boost the tally for Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein to over one million votes. In just a few days after the Trump victory, the Democratic Socialists of America, (that's what google brings up when asked to find democratic socialism in order to connect with Bernie Sanders' ideas) reportedly received nearly 2,000 applications for membership.

The prospects for a third national political party emerging in the US in the near or medium term are not great. Class for itself consciousness is really very low and millennial distrust of parties and other institutions is high. This idea has more traction after the dismal defeat of Clinton and the neoliberal Democratic Party, but the small and splintered

revolutionary left cannot bring this party into being by patiently explaining it. Real social forces must converge in action to create such a party. Moreover, so-called progressives and liberals are putting a new twist on the argument for remaining in the Democratic Party. They agree that a brand new political party is needed, that the Democrats as they are now are finished so let's turn the Democratic Party into that new party. This is the same old cynical game. U.S. progressives know full well that the Democratic Party is not a party in any real sense, but a wholly owned subsidiary of U.S. capital interests. Unlike the British Labour Party, for example, it has no real chapters, no rank and file membership decision-making structures in which to stage a revolt.

On the municipal level, however, local independent political campaigns and candidates can be initiated by the small revolutionary left in combination with social movements, unions, Green Party activists and local leaders. Pioneering models for this type of local independent politics include the [Richmond Progressive Alliance](#), which has wrested control of the city council of this California town from the domination of the Chevron Oil Company, 8th largest corporation in the world. A national network of scattered municipal efforts at new politics outside the two parties would help legitimate the building of a new political voice for working people. [LeftElect](#) is that network of the rebels against the duopoly. The second **LeftElect** national conference will be held in Chicago in March 2017. National collaboration to grow independent political efforts is more of a start than we've had in decades.