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USA

# The Chaos Known and Unknown

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**The advent of “Trump 2.0” poses dangers and challenges in U.S. society as well as globally — including the non-trivial problem of surviving environmental catastrophe — and most certainly to the social movement and socialist left. We will attempt here to sort through those elements of the swirling chaos that are pretty well known, and suggest where the uncertainties may lie. We know for sure that all our movements will be under attack — and it’s absolutely essential to stand together and refuse to be intimidated or divided. How extreme the assaults may become isn’t certain, and the strength of immediate resistance can make a big difference.**

The factors behind the Democrats’ debacle in the presidential election are explored in depth by Kim Moody in this issue of *Against the Current*. We won’t dwell on those here except to remark that if the swing-states margins had been as razor thin as expected, the Biden’s unequivocal enabling of Israel’s Gaza genocide, and the Kamala Harris campaign’s refusal to distance her from that policy, all by itself could have tipped Michigan and likely the presidency into Trump’s column.

The election ultimately turned on core economic issues, especially the impact of inflation, and on alleged “insecurity” — skillfully exploited by Trump’s anti-immigrant scare rhetoric, and rightwing appeals to (mainly male) fears of job and status loss. When he pardons the convicted January 6 rioters, we’ll find out whether they fade into obscurity or re-form their goon squads for future use.

In any case, goodbye and good riddance to Genocide Joe with his lasting legacy of the destruction of Gaza. What next then for 2025 and beyond?

## Greed on Steroids

We won’t dwell on the sexual predators, crackpots and creatures from the white-nationalist lagoon who make up many of Trump’s Cabinet nominees. There might be just enough Republican Senators to save Trump from the consequences of his most ghastly choices — Pete Hegseth, Kash Patel, Tulsi Gabbard — and God forbid the outbreak of a new pandemic with RFK Jr. in charge of public health. But first things first.

It’s clear that Trump’s core agenda aligns with “traditional” Republican policy, but this time on steroids: corporate enrichment and deregulation, tax cuts for the affluent, cuts in essential services and social safety protections, reversal of the modest recent gains in unions’ right to organize. Things like removing federal oversight that might restrain murderous racist police brutality also come with the territory.

This is all predictable, but the full extent of the right wing’s sadistic savagery remains to be tested and fought over — things like drastic cuts and unachievable “work” requirements for SNAP (supplemental nutrition) benefits. Already under Biden, the end of expanded Child Tax Benefit that had famously cut child poverty in half during the COVID emergency, resulted in those rates rebounding right back to the deplorable rate of 13.7% as of 2023.

For another example, we also can’t yet predict whether the privatization of Medicare envisioned by Dr. Mehmet Oz, to force all recipients into ruinous “Medicare Advantage” schemes, will actually be attempted against the public and institutional firestorm it would provoke. (Certain recent events have thrown a gruesome spotlight on popular attitudes

toward the U.S. health care and insurance industry.)

While the toxic combination of greed and hard-right ideology propels the tax-and-program-cutting drive, more extreme measures threaten to destabilize the whole project. Right away, the biggest economic and financial “unknowns” include the extent and consequences of Trump’s promised tariffs on “all imports.”

One assumes that economically-literate professionals with access to Trump might explain how 25% tariffs would threaten to crush the Canadian and Mexican economies which are inextricably bound to the United States, to say nothing of those of European and Asian countries, and highly inflationary in the U.S. economy itself.

Among those hard hit immediately would be many of those same U.S. middle and working class people who voted for Trump from inflation resentment — a self-destructive consequence. But as a display of the kind of “strength” that Trump loves, tariff threats might be leveraged to extract concessions he’s demanding from U.S. partners.

There’s panic in the Canadian political establishment evidenced in the clamor, not just by the governing Liberal but also Conservative and leftwing New Democratic parties, for a billion-dollar cost for increased border control personnel, surveillance and drone technology. Ostensibly Trump is demanding that Canada crack down on “drugs and illegal migrants” crossing to U.S. territory, but these issues in fact are marginal to nonexistent. His real more likely goals are trade and other concessions from Ottawa, and perhaps separate deals with Canadian provinces.

Tariffs also have their use in the growing economic (and potentially military) conflict with China, a bipartisan cause, which is why Biden maintained Trump’s initial anti-China measures.

## Immigrants Under Reign of Terror

We do know what’s coming is a literal reign of terror facing immigrant and refugee communities. Right off the bat, this is a crisis demanding preparation for resistance on multiple levels. Immigrant and civil rights organizations are preparing various legal, political and sanctuary measures.

In Michigan, for example, activists are putting pressure on the lame-duck Democratic legislative majority to pass access to drivers’ license, which would give undocumented folks at least a measure of protection from being swept up in racial-profiling traffic stops.

“Mass Deportations Now” was a prominent sign on display during the Republican convention. The incoming administration promises to do so by the “millions.” While the capacity, staffing, logistics and financing to pull off such an operation rapidly are in question, there’s little doubt that intimidation and high-profile sweeps are coming for televised effect at least — and the terror they produce will push many people into the shadows, and others to “self-deport” (as the firmly establishment Republican Mitt Romney used to happily advocate).

The promised “largest deportation in our history” might turn out to be mainly a higher-publicity version of what the Biden and “deporter-in-chief” Obama administrations preferred to do under the radar. Keep in mind that under Biden, 1.1 million people were “repatriated” in 2023 and 411,000 in the first half of 2024.

That would be vicious enough of course, but the potential also exists for police-state methods on a much expanded scale. By some accounts there are some tens of thousands of undocumented people in prisons and local jails —

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often on minor charges like driving without a license — vulnerable to being swept up and summarily deported if ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) can get its hands on them.

That's why one point of conflict will be whether municipal and state officials, willingly or by coercion, will implement extended detainment of prisoners for ICE to seize them. The fate of those awaiting immigration or asylum hearings, who might be swept into Stephen Miller's planned privatized mass detention centers, is also frightening — and a profit carnival for the contractors who will build and run them.

Will there be mass workplace raids? Sweeps of immigrant communities? Instantaneous revocation of Temporary Protected Status for people from 16 countries (e.g. Haiti, Venezuela, Ukraine) living and working legally in the United States — such as the large Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio brutally scapegoated by the Trump-Vance campaign? Peremptory deportations of those now held in detention centers? A new round of the family separations that became so infamous in the first Trump round?

Notoriously, Texas is furnishing land for a detention-deportation concentration camp to expedite removals with minimal or no due process. How to finance and fill such a facility for Trump's intended crimes against humanity isn't clear. And although not adequately covered, severe economic disruptions could result from truly mass deportations — particularly in agriculture, construction and meatpacking for example. In Michigan, farmers are already petitioning for workarounds.

Plans seem afoot to “investigate” the possibility of stripping naturalized citizens of their status. At the far extreme, ending birthright citizenship has been advocated by Trump and most aggressively his house fascist Stephen Miller. As that would entail cancellation of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, such a measure can't be accomplished by “normal” means — it would require some kind of executive and judicial coup that could shake the entire institutional structure of law and government.

U.S. capitalism objectively does not need any such destabilizing crisis, nor for that matter deportations “by the millions.” One expects in normal circumstances that capital in its own interests would impose some restraints. But in today's political climate what's “normal” cannot be assumed. We certainly can't count on the Democratic Party to effectively resist a far-right assault that its own policies have enabled.

If one target more centrally than any other, is in the crosshairs of repression, it's the Palestine solidarity movement — both for the cause it represents, and as a wedge for systemic assaults on progressive social activism across the board. Further, this attack on pro-Palestinian advocacy is bipartisan, both from the racist right wing and “progressive except Palestine” liberals. We have seen that all-out support for Israel is so deeply embedded in U.S. politics that the Democratic leadership would rather lose an election than break with it.

This is occurring at the very moment when the Israeli state's U.S.-enabled and armed genocide in Gaza, and military and settler violence in the West Bank, not only isn't ending but is escalating. What has happened in the past horrible year is both a quantitative and qualitative leap in the long history of ethnic cleansing, entailing not just mass murder by the tens of thousands but also targeted killing of journalists (192 and counting), medical and aid workers, and the drive to depopulate northern Gaza.

Every single day produces new world-class Israeli war crimes in Gaza, with the clear intent of destroying that society. And now whole cities in Lebanon and districts of the capital Beirut lie in ruins, shattered far beyond the destruction in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. And while both Hamas and Hezbollah remain as political forces in Palestine and Lebanon, their destruction as strategic military factors in the “axis of resistance” gives U.S. imperialism enhanced power in the Middle East and raises the enhanced possibility of an assault on Iran.

# Stand Together!

The menace to our movements ranges from victimizing immigrant communities, to attacking transgender rights (which the Supreme Court looks ready to wipe out), abortion access and racial justice, and from policing the right to read to crippling labor's right to organize, all the way to "Project Esther" — the Heritage Foundation's plan to target and defund Palestine solidarity and all progressive advocacy, brought to us by the same authors of Project 2025.

The tip of the Project Esther spear has been launched in Congress (HR 9495 and companion bills in the Senate). Incredibly, this would authorize the Secretary of the Treasury, without process or appeal, to designate any organization as a "material supporter of terrorism" and remove its tax-exempt status.

"Material support of terrorism" in this context can mean anything, including expressing the principle of oppressed people's right to resist. It is unlikely to be applied, for example, to the Jewish National Fund whose "tree planting" directly finances Israeli apartheid and ethnic cleansing, or the fundraising organizations for the violent West Bank settlers.

Although not likely to pass even with some craven Democratic support in the lame-duck legislative session of the fading Biden administration, this blatantly unconstitutional effort will be tested when the Republicans take over the government trifecta on January 20.

All this — and more to come — touches on some of the chaos, known and unknown, facing our communities and movements in a new political moment. In the face of a vicious and empowered right wing, unity from the outset will be critical. Division will be deadly.

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