is a quarterly journal which aims to challenge the ideas dominating Australian mainstream debate. Each edition includes major articles by activists and progressive thinkers on contemporary political, social and cultural issues.

History
Australian Options was launched in May 1995 by a large number of people who expressed a wish for an open discussion journal of the left.

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We receive no external funding and rely entirely on subscriptions and donations. Subscribers play an important role in the journal’s promotion. Your help and suggestions on increasing circulation would be greatly appreciated. Leaflets and complimentary copies for this purpose can be obtained by contacting Don Jarrett.

Membership
Australian Options is published by a registered non profit subscriber owned Association – Australian Options Publishing Inc. All subscribers are members of the Association and their involvement in the Journal is welcomed. The Annual General Meeting of members is held each October in Adelaide to review policy and progress and to elect members of the Management Committee.

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Blackwood, SA, 5051

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Deadlines
Issue No. 86: 10 April 2017

Australian Options Website
www.australian-options.org.au
Subscribers can search and download material from Australian Options. The on-line digest ‘What’s hot and what’s not’ is available on the site or by registering for email or social media.

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Publisher: Australian Options Publishing Inc.
ABN 129 568 793 66

Printed by Print Lord
08 8258 0156; www.printlord.com.au
Layout by Blue Eight Design www.blueeight.com.au
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2017: The year of the rooster

Trump’s ascent to the US presidency gives a new meaning to the ‘year of the rooster’. Trump represents heightened conflict, climate chaos, racism and corporate rule. Republicans now control both houses of the US Congress as well as the governorship of 33 states. Conservative judges will soon dominate the US Supreme Court.

The Trump administration is drawn from the corporates. It is strong on oil and gas exploration, denying climate change, cutting corporate taxes and blaming foreigners. As a populist administration it will spend on infrastructure but will be bigoted against migrants and Muslims (and probably other non-Christians) and will promote a frightening nationalism and patriotism.

The collapse of public trust and confidence in politics and politicians is part of the reason for Trump, Brexit, Le Pen and even Hanson. Much of the cause lies with the politicians. Geoffrey Wheatcroft, writing in the New York Review about the Chilcot Iraq Inquiry, says the distortions by Bush and Blair about the need for the invasion of Iraq has left a ‘damaging legacy’. This has fed ‘the revulsion across the Western world against elites and establishments so discredited by Iraq’. It bears recall that Australia, under John Howard, joined the invasion plotted by Bush and Blair.

The Australian Coalition Government does not seem to have changed. Indeed, Foreign Minister Bishop took the Trump line and gave uncritical support to Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu’s illegal settlements in Occupied Palestine by refusing to support a recent UN Security Council resolution condemning settlement expansion. The United States, at the very end of the Obama regime, did not oppose the resolution which was sponsored by, among others, New Zealand. Australia aligned itself with Trump’s approach and put itself at the very tail-end of justice for the Palestinians.

Trump’s war-mongering talk of conflict with China could well lead the world towards a real possibility of nuclear war. As former senior public servant and diplomat, John Menadue, said ‘dangerous allies, outdated treaties and the takeover of Australia’s policy’ highlights the need for Australia to adopt an independent foreign and defence policy.

Australian Politics

Malcolm Turnbull was a fortunate winner of the 2016 Federal election and seemingly used some of his fortune in winning. He progressively jettisons liberal beliefs and policies to keep neo-conservative support inside the party. Minister for Environment and Energy Josh Frydenberg mentioned a carbon tax only to submerge it within minutes with a spray against renewable energy. Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, Matt Canavan says coal is good and the Prime Minister says, straight-faced, that coal should get clean energy funding. They all support cuts in corporate taxes and reject action on negative gearing and superannuation perks; they support ‘robo-debt recovery’ by Centrelink and watch with almost equanimity as the car industry and manufacturing jobs depart.

Climate Change

The world’s major meteorological agencies have declared 2016 to be the hottest year on record - making it three new highs in as many years. Greenhouse gases drive global warming yet there are record coal exports from Australia and governments of both major parties champion the Adani Carmichael coal mine in the Galilee Basin. Emissions from the coal will be greater than the total annual emissions from Vietnam or the Philippines and more than the combined emissions from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Yet both the Queensland Land Court and the Federal Court have ruled that environmental assessments in Australia only need to take account of emissions that occur in Australia!

There are some signs of hope; China’s decision to cancel 104 proposed coal plants – many already under construction – is a response to the January 2013 ‘airpocalypse’ and massive overcapacity in the power sector. Prime Minister Modi has announced plans to install, by 2022, 30 times more solar generating capacity than India has now. The International Solar Alliance, an initiative from the Paris Climate Summit has been established in India and the Energy Minister has said that a new coal plant would be costlier than a solar plant.

A number of countries are legislating to be ‘carbon neutral’. Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Costa Rica were in the lead in 2008; they have been joined by the Maldives, Sweden, and Finland. Canada will phase out coal by 2030. Yet, and despite the Paris Agreement, not enough is being done to get the world down to a 2 degree increase let alone 1.5 degrees. Which is another imperative to alter the Australian attitude to exporting climate change.
Five things that explain Donald Trump’s stunning presidential election victory

by Anthony J. Gaughan

A populist wave that began with Brexit in June reached the United States in stunning fashion on Tuesday 9th of November 2016. In one of the biggest upsets in American political history, Donald Trump won a truly historic victory in the U.S. presidential election.

Trump’s remarkably decisive win stunned most political pundits, myself included. Throughout the campaign, Trump seemed to have a polling ceiling of about 44 percent and he consistently had the highest unfavorability rating of any major party nominee in history. Accordingly, months before the election I predicted that Clinton would easily beat Trump.

Then, at the beginning of October, the uproar over Trump’s lewd and offensive remarks on the “Access Hollywood” videotape, combined with the escalating number of women who accused Trump of sexual assault, seemed to finish off his campaign. Right up until the election afternoon, therefore, a comfortable victory for Clinton seemed like a foregone conclusion.

But I was dead wrong. Trump won a sweeping victory in the presidential race. His night began with critical victories in Florida, North Carolina and Ohio, three states essential to his path to 270 electoral votes. As the night wore on, Clinton’s “blue wall” collapsed amid a red tide that swept across the country from the Atlantic coast to the Rocky Mountains. The blue states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa fell to Trump like dominoes. The election returns made clear that Trump would carry over 300 electoral votes, more than enough to win the presidency.

It’s extremely early to draw conclusions about the 2016 election results, but here are five factors that at least partially explain what happened.

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Taking our lives back

Capitalism operates globally. Trump’s nationalism, protection and migration restrictions limits that global scope and advantages the domestic at the expense of the transnational. Trump’s populism will do best in conditions of backdoor deals and cronyism. While the global corporations are not beyond owning the odd government and regime, they prefer to be able to stand up at Davos and sing pure songs of markets and freedoms. Nationalism gets in their way.

Trump, Breixt and right-wing nationalism treat the rest of the world as ‘others’ who are a threat. Making one country (be it the US or Australia) ‘great’ is to make other countries weak. Global capitalism does not care about countries and is about making the rich, wherever they are, richer at the expense of the poor. Little wonder at the increasing inequality in wealth and income.

Progressives need to oppose nationalism and global capitalism. Local actions against nationalism need to make the global story clear. Actions about global issues need to have clear local roots. For example, opposition to the Adani Carmichael mine should be linked to how to provide cheap and secure energy for people in India, China and SE Asia. Opposition in Australia to the exploitation of 457 visa holders, international students and backpackers needs to be linked to policies that provide decent levels of living for workers in the Global South. We need to create ‘local’ movements that span national boundaries. Perhaps we could start with real solidarity actions around climate change, ecological destruction and cultural exploitation in our close neighbours like Timor L’Este and Papua New Guinea.

This ‘special edition’ of Australian Options draws together pertinent writing about Trump, Brexit and the rise of the right. Thanks are due to Elisabeth Gondwe for getting the necessary permissions and bring the pieces together. Geoff Evans of the SEARCH Foundation is acknowledged noting that part of this editorial draws on his work. Most especially, thanks go to the writers who agreed for their work to be republished in Australian Options.
1. Silent Trump vote
There really was a silent Trump vote that the polls failed
to pick up on. The nationwide polling average gave
Clinton about a 3-point lead overall, and the state-by-
state polls indicated that she would win at least 300
electoral votes.
But the polls were as wrong as the pundits. Problems
with the polls’ methodologies will undoubtedly be
identified in the days and weeks ahead.
It seems equally reasonable to conclude that many
Trump voters kept their intentions to themselves and
refused to cooperate with the pollsters.
The extraordinary role of FBI Director James Comey in
the presidential campaign cannot be underestimated
either. In late October Clinton seemed on the verge of
winning a double-digit victory. But Comey’s October
28 letter to Congress, which announced that the FBI
was reopening its investigation into Clinton’s State
Department emails, changed the momentum of the race.
Clinton retook the polling lead at the end of last week,
but the final polls masked the lasting damage that the
Comey letter had done to her campaign.
Whatever the ultimate explanation for the polls’ failure
to predict the election’s outcome, the future of the
polling industry is in question. Trump’s astounding
victory demonstrated that the polls simply cannot be
trusted.

2. Celebrity beat organisation
A longstanding assumption of political campaigns
is that a first-rate “Get out the Vote” organisation is
indispensable. The conventional wisdom in 2016 thus
held that Trump’s lack of a grassroots organisation was a
huge liability for his campaign.
But as it turned out, he didn’t need an organisation.
Trump has been in the public eye for over 30 years,
which meant that he entered the race with nearly 100
per cent name recognition. Trump’s longstanding status
as a celebrity enabled him to garner relentless media
attention from the moment he entered the race. One
study found that by May 2016 Trump had received
the equivalent of US$3 billion in free advertising from
the media coverage his campaign commanded. Trump
seemed to intuitively understand that the controversial
things he said on the campaign trail captured the voters’
attention in a way that serious policy speeches never
could.
Most important of all, he had highly motivated voters.
Trump’s populist rhetoric and open contempt for civility
and basic standards of decency enabled him to connect
with the Republican base like no candidate since Ronald
Reagan. Trump didn’t play by the normal rules of politics,
and his voters loved him for it.
Trump’s victory would seem to herald a new era of
celebrity politicians. He showed that a charismatic
media-savvy outsider has significant advantages
over traditional politicians and conventional political
organisations in the internet age. In the future, we may
see many more unconventional politicians in the Trump
mould.

3. Populist revolt against immigration and
trade
It will take days to sort through the data to figure out
what issues resonated mostly deeply with Trump’s base.
But immigration and trade seem virtually certain to be at
the top of the list. Trump bet his whole campaign on the
idea that popular hostility to liberal immigration and free
trade policies would propel him to the White House.
From the beginning to the end of his campaign, he
returned time and again to those two cornerstone
issues. In his announcement speech, he promised to
build a wall on the Mexican border and deport 11 million
unauthorised immigrants. He also pledged to tear up free
trade agreements and bring back manufacturing jobs.
From day one, he made xenophobic and nationalistic
policies the centerpiece of his campaign.
Critics rightfully condemned his vicious attacks on
Mexicans and Muslims, but Trump clearly understood
that hostility toward immigration and globalisation ran
depth among a critical mass of American voters.
His decision to focus on immigration and trade paid off
in spades on Election Day. It’s no coincidence that Trump
did exceptionally well in the traditionally blue states
of Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, all of which
have large populations of white working-class voters.
Previous Republican nominees such as John McCain,
who embraced generous immigration policies, and Mitt
Romney, who advocated free trade, never managed to
connect with blue-collar voters in the Great Lakes region.
But Trump’s anti-immigration and protectionist trade
policies gave him a unique opening with white working-
class voters, and he made the most of it.

4. Outsiders against insiders
Trump will be the first president without elective
office experience since Dwight Eisenhower in the
1950s. Eisenhower, however, served as supreme allied
commander in Europe during World War II and had
unrivalled expertise in foreign affairs.
So how did Trump make his lack of government experience an asset in the campaign?

The answer lay in the intense and widespread public hostility to the political, media and business establishments that lead the country. Trust in institutions is at an all-time low and a majority of Americans believe the country is headed in the wrong direction. The angry and volatile public mood made 2016 the ultimate change election.

Amid such a potent anti-establishment spirit, Trump's vulgar, intemperate and unorthodox style struck voters as far more genuine than the highly cautious and controlled Hillary Clinton. As the brash and unpredictable Trump positioned himself as an agent of change, Clinton seemed like the establishment’s candidate, an impression that proved fatal to her campaign. Indeed, Trump used Clinton’s deep experience in the White House, Senate and State Department against her by citing it as evidence that she represented the status quo. Ironically, Bill Clinton won the White House 24 years ago using a similar anti-establishment strategy. In the 1992 election, he successfully depicted incumbent President George H. W. Bush as an out-of-touch elitist. Eight years later Bush’s son, George W. Bush, employed the same tactic to defeat Vice President Al Gore. And in 2008 Barack Obama successfully ran as an outsider against John McCain.

Trump is thus the fourth consecutive president to win the White House by running as an “outsider” candidate. That is a lesson that future presidential candidates forget at their peril.

5. America, the divided

Above all, the 2016 election made clear that America is a nation deeply divided along racial, cultural, gender and class lines.

Under normal circumstances, one would expect the new president to attempt to rally the nation behind a message of unity.

But Trump will not be a normal president. He won the White House by waging one of the most divisive and polarising campaigns in American political history. It is entirely possible that he may choose to govern using the same strategy of divide and conquer.

In any case, Trump will soon be the most powerful person in the world. He will enter office with Republican majorities in the House and Senate, which means Republicans will dictate the nation’s policy agenda and control Supreme Court appointments for the next four years. It seems highly likely therefore that 8 November 2016 will go down in the history books as a major turning point in American history.

The 2016 election defied the conventional wisdom from start to finish. It is probably a safe bet that the Trump presidency will be just as unpredictable.

Anthony J. Gaughan is a Professor of Law, Drake University Law School, Des Moines.

This article was published by The Conversation in November 2016 <http://theconversation.com/five-things-that-explain-donald-trumps-stunning-presidential-election-victory-66891> and is republished with the permission of the author.
Why Donald Trump Won: What The Numbers Tell Us (And It’s Probably Not What You Think)

by Michael Brull

The Republican candidate managed to drag across blue collar voters, and Clinton won less votes from women than Obama did in 2012. Michael Brull crunches the numbers on an election that has already changed the world.

The victory of Donald Trump is catastrophic. Four years of a President who thinks climate change is a hoax. That he also wants to cut taxes and regulations on the super-rich may well mean that the planet will be cooked. Perhaps climate catastrophe will be averted by nuclear war; a risk which is impossible to gauge under Trump.

Everyone on the planet should feel anxious about Trump’s victory: this may be the end of all of us. There is very little dispute on the Left about the awfulness of Trump’s victory. The area of dispute mostly comes from the centre-left, who have reacted with bewilderment. How on earth could they elect Trump?

It is that question which I think it is important that we face honestly and squarely. In my previous analysis, I argued that crucial factors of Trump’s win included anti-establishment sentiment, declining support for the Democrats, and the class grievances of working class white workers in the Rust Belt. Since then, more information on Trump’s victory has come out. I think it makes clear that these trends were crucial to Trump’s win.

Sick of the establishment

Exit polls of voters in a way present their own bias. They reflect the views of Americans who thought that voting was actually worthwhile, as opposed to those who were too disillusioned or disinterested to think it worth voting for either candidate.

With that bias in mind, consider the exit poll of 10,000 voters by Reuters/Ipsos. Of those who voted, 72 per cent agree “the American economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful”. 68 per cent agreed that “traditional parties and politicians don’t care about people like me”. 76 per cent agreed that “the mainstream media is more interested in making money than telling the truth”. And 75 per cent thought that “America needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful”.

Now consider New York Times polling on voters. When asked about the most important candidate quality, 83 per cent of Trump voters thought Trump could “bring needed change”. Only 14 per cent said Clinton was that candidate. When it came to who “Has the right experience”, 90 per cent said Clinton.

In a sense, this was straightforward enough. Trump constantly trashed the establishment and elites; Clinton bragged about her experience and qualifications. Yet when so much of the public was so sick of the status quo, Clinton’s “experience” really meant that she was regarded as an insider.

It is also important to note how they described their votes. Of those who “strongly” supported their candidate, this only accounted for 42 per cent of Trump voters. 49 per cent of them had reservations, and 51 per cent disliked the other candidates. Most Trump fans weren’t that enthusiastic about him – and only a little more than half of Clinton’s supporters thought she was that great either. Only 35 per cent of Trump voters agreed that he “cares about people like me”.

Now consider the financial situation of voters. Those whose situation had improved as compared to 2015 mostly backed Clinton, with 72 per cent backing her over...
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24 per cent for Trump. As for those worse off, 78 per cent backed Trump.

Yet the way this played out is also significant. About half of voters said the most important issue was the economy, and 42 per cent of them backed Trump, versus 52 per cent for Clinton. Yet for the 13 per cent who worried about immigration, 64 per cent backed Trump, and for 18 per cent who worried about terrorism, 57 per cent backed Trump. That is, people who worried about their declining financial situation didn’t necessarily look to Trump to fix the economy. Though voters were likely to want change, they thought Trump should focus on terrorism, or immigration.

To that extent, Trump’s racist demagogy was effective for elements of the coalition of supporters he assembled. Yet the fact is that his voters didn’t overwhelmingly fixate on any particular issue. They simply trusted the strong man to solve their problems. And trust may be a strong word, because less than half gave particularly strong support to Trump.

Decline of the Democrats

Many liberals have no idea why so many people didn’t like Clinton. They responded to criticisms from Bernie Sanders and his supporters with arrogant high-handedness. Those critiques were waved away as nothing more than thinly veiled sexism. Clinton became the personification of all that is wonderful. Her closeness to Wall Street, her warmongering, her sale of weapons to repressive dictators were all dismissed.

Clinton felt no obligation to make any concessions to her critics. Supporters of Sanders were “Bernie Bros”. Supporters of Trump were deplorables. Those criticisms were not enough to win the election, nor were they enough to persuade people to vote for her. In the end, Clinton lost because she didn’t have enough support.


In 2008, about 69.5 million people voted for Obama. In 2012, about 66 million people voted for Obama. This gave Obama 365 of 538 electoral votes in 2008, and 332 electoral votes in 2012. Though Romney and McCain got more votes than Trump from a smaller electorate, Obama beat them by getting more votes.

Though polls before the election suggested Clinton was more popular than Trump, the preference for Clinton didn’t translate into people going and voting for her. If she had inspired them, if they thought she was terrific and would do great things for them, they would have voted for her.

As we have seen, many of those who did vote – including those who voted for her – think the system is rigged for the rich and powerful. Many of those who stayed home didn’t think Clinton would challenge the system, and did not think she was on their side.

Race and gender alone had limited effect on the election

It is easy to look at this particular demographic or that one and decide it tells the story of the election. For example, 53 per cent of men voted for Trump, and 54 per cent of women voted for Clinton. Thus, one could conclude that the story of the election was decided by gender.

Similarly, one could conclude that 58 per cent of white people voted for Trump, whilst everyone else favoured Clinton. Thus, the election wasn’t decided by gender, it was decided by race. Yet the fact that Trump had narrow margins among these groups doesn’t necessarily tell us much about the election, because it doesn’t tell us what changed. After all, Romney got 52 per cent of the male vote, just one per cent less than Trump. Romney even did better among white voters than Trump, by one per cent. Does that mean he ran a more racist campaign than Trump?

I will try to explain the fallacy in another way. 55 per cent of voters from 18-29 backed Clinton. 53 per cent of voters 45 and older got the support of Trump. Does this mean the election was solely decided by age? That old people are awful and reactionary, and young people are good and wonderful? Was that the basis on which the election was fought? Or is that simply one prism through which the campaign manifested itself? In my view, we should accept the latter.

Any particular demographic that voted for the Republican candidate in this election is a snapshot. To understand how Trump won, we have to understand what changed between him and previous candidates.

No one denies that Trump engaged in crudely racist rhetoric, and attracted many racist supporters. Yet what was the impact of this on his election? When it comes to Hispanic voters, the gap between Democrats and Republicans narrowed. As noted at Pew Research, Clinton’s share of the Latino vote was lower than Obama’s in 2012. 71 per cent of Latinos backed Obama, whilst 27 per cent backed Romney – a margin of 44 per cent. 65 per cent of Latinos backed Clinton, whilst
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29 per cent backed Trump. That is, Latino support for the Democrat declined, and Latino support for the Republican increased. Likewise for black voters. And Asians. Their level of support for Clinton declined from their support for Obama in 2012.

What was different about Trump’s support?

Some 48 per cent of those earning over $100,000 a year voted for Trump. He narrowly beat Clinton in this demographic by 1 per cent. Traditionally, the rich vote for Republicans. His support among the rich declined by 6 per cent since Romney ran in 2012. For those earning between $100k and $200k, Trump won by 1 per cent. Clinton improved on Obama’s vote among this demographic by 9 per cent. That is, Clinton significantly improved the standing of the Democrats among the affluent. Trump only narrowly won the vote of those earning between $200k and $250k by 1 per cent.

Yet Trump took white workers without a college degree by 67 per cent, to Clinton’s 28 per cent. Trump also held on to a narrow majority of white college graduates. Yet there were major changes in both categories – Clinton got 10 per cent more of white college graduates, whilst Trump improved over Romney’s standing with non-college graduates by 14 per cent.

Let me underline this: Clinton significantly improved the Democrat’s support among the affluent, whilst Trump significantly improved the Republican’s support among the working class.

Trump’s appeal to non-college graduate white voters played a particularly strong role in winning him the election. Taking the Upper Midwest – the Rust Belt – was what he needed, and what he did. The counties that backed Obama twice and then backed Trump were 81 per cent white. Those that backed Obama once were 71 per cent white. On average, 36 per cent of voters in counties Trump won had no college education. They gave him at least 83 electoral votes in Wisconsin, Iowa, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Perhaps more in Michigan and New Hampshire.

Trump got less support among the top three income groups than Romney did. But among those earning less than $50k a year – especially those earning less than $30k – Trump drastically improved his standing. He still only got 41 per cent of those earning under $30k, and 42 per cent of those between $30k and $49k. Yet these represented drastic improvements of 16 and 6 per cent.

That is the unusual thing about the election. Republicans usually win the super rich, the white, and the male. Trump did better among the poor and working class, registered better improvements among voters of colour than white voters in general, and only lost two per cent of women voters along the way – even though more women voted for Obama than they did for Clinton.

It wasn’t just white men who didn’t graduate college who supported Trump. Trump won white women by a margin of 10 per cent, with 53 per cent of their vote. He also garnered 62 per cent of non-college graduate women voters, as opposed to Clinton’s 34 per cent. Trump did even better with white men non-college graduates, winning 72 per cent of their vote, to Clinton’s 23 per cent.

Why would white working class, blue collar voters without college degrees be mad? Put aside the free trade agreements. The Economic Policy Institute has an array of graphs showing how wages have stagnated for American workers for decades. For the bottom 90 per cent, wages have increased 15 per cent since 1980.

Low wage workers have seen their income decline by 5 per cent. The real minimum wage has declined since 1970.

Torsten Bell from the Resolution Foundation notes another trend. That is, ‘many more people are neither working nor looking for work than was the case in the past. This partly reflects a failure in the US to bring women into the labour force in the way that has been done in much of Europe, but it is driven by more and more men dropping out of the world of work entirely.’

And in the rust belt states? Clinton got 13 per cent less votes than Obama, whilst Trump improved on Romney’s vote by 7 per cent. Clinton declined by about 20 per cent of the vote each in Iowa, Ohio, and by over 10 per cent of the vote in Wisconsin and Michigan. Trump did 9 per cent better than Romney in Pennsylvania and Iowa, and 7 per cent better in Michigan. Trump’s victories consisted not only of improved votes for himself, but also of declining support for the Democrats.

Conclusion

Republicans usually win over rich white men. Democrats usually do better among minorities, women, and in theory, those less well-off economically. Yet Trump successfully reinvented the Republicans as the party of the working class, blue collar whites, male and female.

There is no reason the Democrats can’t reach these voters. The fact that Clinton lost whites who didn’t graduate college by almost 40 per cent shows the extent to which the Democrats have failed to develop a class politics that can appeal to those angry about stagnating wages and unemployment.
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Instead of reaching out to blue collar and working class whites, Clinton drastically improved her standing among affluent whites. In the process, she alienated the voters of colour who stayed home, and the Rust Belt states that had twice voted for Obama, and now backed Trump.

Trump didn’t win a particularly large number of votes. He won fewer than Clinton, fewer than Romney, and fewer than McCain. He was simply shrewd enough to win enough votes in the Rust Belt states, among white blue collar workers, among communities that had plenty of reason to be sick of the establishment. And in an environment where most Americans thought the system was rigged for the rich and powerful, Clinton bragging about her experience marked her as an insider.

The losers of American capitalism were desperate for change. They haven’t enthusiastically backed Trump. They have, sceptically, given him a narrow victory. Trump is not invincible, and the American people have not fundamentally changed.

It is hard to separate Trump’s appeal to white workers from his crude racism and sexism. After all, his support was particularly strong among white people, and particularly strong among white men. But it was above all strong among blue collar white men, and it was his

ability to successfully target them that won him the election.

In this sense, the role of race and gender in the election is complex. Undoubtedly, they were there. Trump ran an overtly racist campaign as a crude sexist. But his appeal through race and gender are inseparable from his appeal on a class basis. If the Democratic nominee had kept Obama’s voters of colour, or had appealed to poorer whites rather than wealthy ones, then the result may have been quite different. Clinton failed to do so, but that doesn’t mean that Trump is invincible.

Stressing the role of class in the election is important. Because just as Trump was able to peel away blue collar workers from the Democrats, so the Democrats could take them back. The challenge in the meanwhile for Americans is to develop a social democratic alternative to Trump. As for the rest of us, we can only watch anxiously, and hope Trump doesn’t destroy the planet.

Michael Brull writes twice a week for New Matilda. He has written for Overland, Crikey, ABC’s Drum, the Guardian and elsewhere.

This article was published on November 12 2016 in New Matilda. https://newmatilda.com/2016/11/12/why-donald-trump-won-the-numbers-explained-and-theyre-not-what-you-think/
Trump Won
Because Democrats
'Abandoned Working
Class'

Noam Chomsky Post US election Interview
with C.J. Polychroniou

CJP: Who is to blame for Trump?
NC: The Democratic Party in the U.S. is to blame for Donald Trump’s presidential victory after failing for decades to appeal to the white working class in the country and instead feeding into the neoliberal tendencies of the corporate elite.

The exit polls and post-election data show that the majority of Trump voters are “the angry and disaffected” white working people who are victims of the neoliberal policies of the past generation. The Democratic Party abandoned any real concern for working people by the 1970s and therefore let them be victims of the manipulation of the likes of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

How would you sum Trump up?

We don’t really know what he thinks. And I’m not sure he knows what he thinks. He’s perfectly capable of saying contradictory things at the same time. But there are some pretty stable elements of his ideology, if you can even grant him that concept. One of them is: “Climate change is not taking place.” As he puts it: “Forget it.” And that’s almost a death knell for the species – not tomorrow, but the decisions we take now are going to affect things in a couple of decades, and in a couple of generations it could be catastrophic.

How does Trump fit with right-wing victories elsewhere?

There are many similarities with British people who voted to leave the European Union after a xenophobic, anti-refugee campaign by the far right.

Trump voters also share the anger throughout the West at the centrist establishment; this is revealed as well in the unanticipated Brexit vote and the collapse of centrist parties in continental Europe.

Was white supremacy important?

White supremacy played an important role in the rise of Trump as white nationalists fear the decline of their power due to figures that suggest that whites will soon be the minority in the U.S. and will lose their dominance as the country’s majority population.

Is it correct treat Trump as an ‘outsider’

Some people followed Trump because for them he represented “change”, while his opponent, Hillary Clinton, represented the status quo and the policies that were feared and hated.

But the real estate billionaire’s ‘change’ was never clearly stated or presented to the voting public. This was because the media complied with his campaign’s successful attempt to steer clear of elaborating on proposals for change or any other political action.

What do you think the future will be like with Trump as President of the USA?

I think that the Republican Party is the most dangerous organization in world history. It now has control of all of Washington’s branches of government. It is an advocate of the fossil fuel industry, cynical and sceptical of action on climate change and so the world is headed towards destruction of organized human life. The biggest worry is the future of the plant from the threat of climate change.

On foreign policy, it may well be that the mutual admiration between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin will mean the reduction of the very dangerous and mounting tensions at the Russian border.

Even if that does not happen, European leaders might distance themselves from Trump’s White House and thus also seek to work with Moscow on an integrated security system away from NATO.

Trump is too unpredictable. This is very dangerous in regard to U.S military interventions around the world. There are too many open questions. What we can say is that popular mobilization and activism, properly organized and conducted, can make a large difference.

Noam Chomsky is an emeritus professor of linguistics at MIT and a prolific critic of American politics and foreign policy.

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Extracted from an interview published in teleSUR, 14 November 2016
FOCUS: THE ELECTION OUTCOME

Why Trump
(Or, America In Fragments)

by Siobhan McGuirk

People want answers. On social media timelines, in newspapers and blogs, in private conversations, those who cannot understand how Donald Trump has been elected President of the United States are desperate to make sense of it all. Too many people are accepting easy answers. It was neoliberalism. It was misogyny. It was white supremacy. It was fear. It was Hillary. It was the media. It was the FBI. It was Facebook.

In truth, there is no single person, group, ideology, or media moment to “blame”. Ignore the thousand Think Pieces telling you otherwise. No one “let” this happen; there is not one “cause”. Desire for straightforward answers reveals only the depth of denial we face in the United States today. The voting public chose this. Across income levels, across numerous states. We chose this. That is how democratic society works. We are all complicit.

People are asking the wrong questions. ‘How did Donald Trump win marginally more support in three particular U.S. states?’ ‘Why were pollsters wrong?’ ‘Did Democrats choose the wrong candidate?’

The question we are too afraid to ask is simple: ‘What is our society, such that Donald Trump could be President?’

But this is the question we must ask as we plan the necessary fight back. The answers, like the United States of America, can only be understood in fragments.

I. The ravages of neoliberalism

Rural USA has been decimated by neoliberal policies and trade agreements: laws and deals that have supported private interests, diminished labour protections, rolled back welfare, and consolidated wealth in the hands of the few at the expense of the many. Neoliberalism is an ideology with social as well as economic dimensions, as proclaimed by Margaret Thatcher: ‘There is no such thing as society.’ Neoliberalism celebrates individualism, a tenet of the U.S. state of mind. It’s meant to be an even playing field. But the closer you are to the top of the pile, the more tax breaks and laws on your side, the easier it is to take care of “you and yours.” For those starting out at the bottom, without social safety nets, access to resources, and labour protections, that effort becomes near impossible.

Across America, factories have closed; wages have fallen; health costs and needs have spiralled. Forget mobility, dreams of social stability have been shattered. While politicians placated, “the economy is recovering” and “unemployment is falling,” the rural poor saw walls crumbling around them. Economic disaster strikes at wallets, bodies and minds.

As Anne Amnesia wrote with devastating eloquence in May, the desperation of people living in the rust belt is not only palatable, it is writ large in hard data:

The number of overdoses in 2014? 47,055 of which at least 29,467 are attributable to opiates. [...] Suicide is up as well. [...] both suicide and addiction speak to a larger question of despair. Despair, loneliness, and a search, either temporarily or permanently, for a way out. And yet this isn’t seen as a crisis, except by statisticians and public health workers. [...] There’s no sympathy at all.

The “unnecessariat”, she argued, would embrace Trump because he dropped the pretence that everything was fine. He said what they already knew: things are bad. He promised change. Clinton promised more of the same. The choice was easy.
This is an important part of the story. But only part. Robert Reich says that Democrats’ lean into corporate power pushed “the working class” into Donald’s open arms, but takes for granted that “the working class” is white. It is not, and millions of non-white working class people did not vote for Trump. Neoliberalism has ravaged them, too, but they refused to back Trump. They could not overlook the other aspects of Trump’s multifaceted “appeal.” Neither can we.

II. White supremacist nationalism is real, and it is everywhere

The massacre of Indigenous people; the slave trade; Imperialist expansion; immigration and naturalization policies based on racial “purity”—these are the bedrocks of U.S. society. On these foundations, the ground is not only ripe, but primed for white supremacist nationalism to flourish. And flourish it does.

The United States of America is a profoundly racist society. Racism is not the exclusive purview of the poor. Far from it, in fact. People at all levels within the Criminal Justice system (a professional sector) disproportionately target, beat, shoot and sentence black and brown men and women with impunity. Historically Black churches are being burned to the ground. At our Great Institutes of Higher Learning, black PhDs cannot get jobs. Dating app users proclaim: “no chocolate, no rice, no spice”, echoing signs in shop windows that we’re told are relics of the past. But this is the present, and Trump is the President-elect.

While some spit epithets, others simply treat their non-white friends and employees with disdain. Last week, a white, educated, liberal, professional man told me to avoid a theme park near Baltimore because “it’s pretty sketchy.” When I moved to DC, I was encouraged by similarly situated people to avoid the NE and SE quadrants, because they “aren’t safe.” Let me translate: ‘Black people are dangerous.’

Trump said that too, just plainly. Black people are “thugs”. Muslims are terrorists. Immigrants are a threat. His words echo the daily messaging of pop culture. Turn on the TV. Newscasters will tell you the same thing. So will your favourite TV dramas. Yet scriptwriters do not toil in the bible belt. Trump says Mexicans are drug runners and rapists—though he ‘assumes some are good people’.

President Obama divided undocumented immigrants into two similar camps: “families” and “felons”. That doesn’t sound so bad. So we applauded his humanity, as Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers took the law into their own hands and his agencies deported 2.5 million people.

This election has emboldened the far right, and non-white people are justifiably terrified. But Trump has not simply “played upon frustration”. He told people that their already existing white supremacist, xenophobic leanings were justified. Whether earning under $30k, or over $250k, whether college educated or high school drop out, whether “holding their nose” or laughing in the voting booth, white people across the board backed Trump, at least in part because they share his fear of, and refusal to lose their perceived power—be it financial, social, cultural, or ideological—to those blacks, Jews, Mexicans, Muslims and ill-defined “immigrants” that threaten their place at the top of the pile.

III. Contempt for the poor is a national pastime

It bears repeating: Among white people who earn over $250,000 per year, Trump won the popular vote. Among white people with college degrees, Trump won the popular vote. Yet we’re told that “invisible voters” won the election for Trump. Not “unexpected” or “underestimated,” but “invisible.” To borrow from Arundhati Roy, there is no such thing as the unseen, only the ignored.

George Orwell said that the British middle and upper classes are taught to hate the poor. His words apply here. Between the Coasts lie the “fly over states.” The Washington Post names a Nevada town as “the armpit of America.” The Police also batter the poor and homeless, regardless of race—abuses that have not prompted national outcry. Trailer trash, white trash, rednecks and hicks populate our nightmares. They are toothless Halloween costumes; Simpsons’ punchlines; uneducated and unwashed; ignorant rage personified.

It’s a comforting idea that bigots live only in the
“backwaters” of America. It’s also useful, justifying the popular idea that poor people have only themselves to blame for their lot. Fragment I exists in conjunction with Fragment III. The belief that everyone can, and should pick themselves up by their own bootstraps transcends party lines. It applies to poor white and non-white people alike, who are dehumanised in different ways, by different groups of people.

Across America, there is little popular support for universal healthcare; free higher education; higher minimum wages; labour protections, or a robust welfare state. Prosperity is the American Dream. Even Trump knows this. “Part of the beauty of me is that I am very rich,” he accurately declared. It appealed to the very poor—and to the similarly rich.

As I watched results from Florida flash up on screen in a DC bar on election night, someone screamed over the boos: “Garbage State!” Another voice asked: “How is this happening?” Her question had just been answered. It has been answered time and again, by every person seriously considering emigrating to Canada or New Zealand post-election. I wonder if those eager emigres believe in open borders for all? And do they still laugh at secessionists, as they clamour to leave the country?

As for those living in rural America? They know they are neglected, ignored, and ridiculed by the urban elite. But that “hard work” ideology feeds their political choices too, as Kathy Cramer explains:

...when people think about their support for policies, a lot of the time they’re... thinking about whether the recipients of these policies are deserving. Those calculations are often intertwined with notions of hard work, because in the American political culture, we tend to equate hard work with deservingness. And a lot of racial stereotypes carry this notion of laziness, so when people are making these judgments about who’s working hard, oftentimes people of color don’t fare well... But it’s not just people of color. People [in rural Wisconsin] are like: “Are you sitting behind a desk all day? Well, that’s not hard work. Hard work is someone like me — I’m a logger, I get up at 4:30am and break my back... I’m wearing my body out in the process of earning a living.” Through resentment and these notions of deservingness, that’s where you can see how economic anxiety and racial anxiety are intertwined.

IV. Misogyny (in its many forms) is the desirable norm

Donald Trump endorses this message: “Don’t hold back boys, grab her by the pussy!” Electing him to the White House legitimises sexual assault in a society that is already defined by rape culture. Trump treats women with disdain, and surrounds himself with advisors who face charges for battery, spousal abuse, sexual harassment and assault.

This is not coincidental. It is not incidental. Trump’s misogyny was not simply “tolerated” or “overlooked” by voters. It was embraced.

Hetero-patriarchal power has been the explicit policy-platform and a badge of honor for the Trump campaign. Members of his inner-circle, his likely Cabinet, promised voters that they would overturn Roe vs. Wade, restricting access to abortions, and defund women’s health services in the interim. They want to overturn Oberfell, banning same-sex marriage. They oppose equal pay for women. They support religious freedom acts, which sanction multiple forms of discrimination against LGBTQ people.

Transgender women and girls are likely to be hit hardest by “traditional values” policies and health services restrictions. Calls to LGBTQ suicide hotlines have spiked since the election, and transwomen are already calling on their cis-gender allies to stockpile birth control drugs, knowing that access to hormones will soon be impossible for some. The recent decision of major LGBTQ Rights organisations to privilege “more pressing issues” over trans rights appears doubly short-sighted, doubly painful, post-election.

Again, these were explicit policy proposals that appealed to a large number of voters. Many Americans—including women—believe that abortion should be banned, that transgender women are an abomination, that “Family Values” must be enforced at all costs. Other women backed Trump because they were “more concerned” about “other issues”. They did not see his actions or statements as a red line, unthinkable to cross. Misogyny, like racism, courses through America’s veins. Some people were never meant to survive

As for Hillary? There is simply no denying that her gender played a role in the election result. Her parameters of acceptable behaviour were circumscribed by her being a woman. A former first lady who doesn’t know her place, she could not be “angry,” or overly “emotional.” She was untrustworthy; “unpresidential,” a Lady Macbeth. Trump had no parameters. An accused rapist and avowedly sexist man termed his opponent “a nasty woman” and 60 million people agreed. If Hillary had been a man, for better or worse, we would very likely be discussing president-elect Clinton right now. (And Fragmented America would still persist, out of sight).
FOCUS: THE ELECTION OUTCOME

V. Bernie was not the messiah (but his popularity should not be overlooked)

Bernie Sanders polled well against Trump. More importantly, voters in key states preferred Sanders over Clinton. During the Primaries, he rode a groundswell of popular support to shock the Democratic National Committee—which promptly conspired to shut down his campaign. Many Bernie supporters, feeling betrayed, refused to back Hillary as a result. It might have cost the Democrats the election. The same populist backlash that propelled Trump to the White House might have elected President Sanders. Might.

Putting aside the fact that pollsters were just proven wrong in their predictions, we can only say that people who voted for Trump might have supported the anti-racist, pro-choice, pro-LGBTQ, climate change-affirming social democrat Bernie Sanders. Or maybe they would have hated him for those stances. Or seen him as a long-standing member of the political elite, whose "revolutionary" efforts had little to no impact on the status quo over forty years. Or maybe Trump would have rolled out his anti-Semitic ads earlier. Who knows? No one. So let it go. Pick a new hero. Better yet, pick a thousand. We’re going to need a lot of them.

VI. Neither was Hillary

Much of the Clinton smear campaign was risible. Email scandals, Benghazi conspiracies, FBI “interventions”, rumours of terminal illness, and, of course, the misogyny. Yet there remained numerous reasons for voters not to throw their weight behind Clinton. As Secretary of State, she ushered in a military dictatorship in Honduras. She regards war as the best option in a multitude of contexts. She has supported corporations and cosied up to Wall St. She has repeatedly made the kinds of remarks that situate her fully in this fragmented, racist, pro-traditional values America—even if she regrets them now.

Her party is also deeply problematic, and has been for a long time. President Obama backs the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a hyper-neoliberal deal widely opposed by the global left. He is delaying judgement on the Dakota Access Pipeline, currently slicing through Indigenous people’s land. His administration drops bombs daily, sells copious amounts of arms, including to Saudi Arabia (currently bombing Yemen), and militarily supports Israel (currently bombing Gaza). During Clinton’s time in office, her Party has supported free trade agreements, mandatory minimum sentencing, and welfare cutbacks—policies that ravaged the poor, people of color, and all but the elite in NAFTA signatory states. Disliking Hillary is not necessarily “anti-feminist,” as Gloria Steinem claimed. It is just as likely to be anti-Imperialist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist. The heroes we rally behind must deserve our support.

VII. Trumpism is not new, or surprising

Trump is not a revelation. He is merely an escalation of political ideologies that been promoted and embraced in this country very explicitly, and very recently. Trump-lite candidates are regularly elected to office across America: Mike Huckabee, Mike Pence, Rick Santorum, Michele Bachmann, Scott Walker, Ted Cruz, Sheriff Arpaio, Sheriff Clarke, Jan Brewer, Sarah Palin. These are not unknown names. Some of them will continue their political careers in Trump’s administration. Their racist, transphobic, homophobic, pro-life, climate change-denying, xenophobic, and misogynistic views are a matter of record. Their Acts and laws have already impacted marginalized people in their respective states.

These are people roundly ridiculed on The Daily Show—one of the ‘most trusted news source in America’. But liberal laughter and mock-horror has not prevented them from passing startlingly oppressive laws over the years, or mobilizing mass support. On November 8, voters worked their way down the ballot to propel a cohort of new explosively right-wing candidates into power at local levels. They did not merely prefer Trump to Clinton. They embraced the Right. Even The Onion saw this coming. Its headline the day after the 2012 election ran: ‘After Obama Victory, Shrieking White-Hot Sphere Of Pure Rage Early GOP Front-Runner For 2016’.

Elected officials aside, it has been impossible to miss news coverage over the past year of efforts to cut funding to reproductive health services; of rampant Police shootings, most notably of unarmed black men; of Trans women being violently and legally prevented from using the bathroom; of calls for sympathy for white boys who rape. A hate-fuelled act has featured in the newspaper every single day that I have lived in the USA. Over the past two years, the clarion bell has sounded, again and again. America responded, straight-faced: “All Lives Matter.”

If you did not see this coming, you were simply looking away.

VIII. This Is America

People are grieving; mourning. Eager activists say there is no time for that. I disagree. We have witnessed a death. On November 8, 2016, the illusion of the United States of America as a post-racial, gender-blind, pro-LGBTQ, immigrant-friendly, egalitarian society finally died. It had been ailing for a long time; it’s mask of “safety” and “progress” slowly crumbling away. In the wake of the election, we need an open casket funeral. So we can to
see the illusion for what it was.

The urgent fight-back must be built on a broad recognition that America was never “great”—not for everyone. It was not great for non-white immigrants, barred from naturalizing as citizens. Or for women who died following backroom abortions. Or for Native American victims of genocide and ongoing abuse. Or for 3,437 black people lynched 1882-1951. Or for 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry imprisoned in camps 1942-46. Or for workers nakedly exploited by their bosses. Or for the non-whites, non-Christians, non-property owners, and women denied a panoply of rights at some point in U.S. history. Or countless others.

Despite Michelle Obama’s insistence, it is not great now. It may be hard to accept, but we live in a society in which the expected norm is racism, sexism, anti-LGBTQ violence, anti-immigrant sentiment, disdain for the poor, ignorance of the disabled, fear of Muslims and hatred of Jews. We lived here last week. We lived here last year. We have always lived here. America’s “greatness” has always been based on willful exploitation, exclusion, oppression, and dehumanization of “others,” both internal and external to its already militarized borders.

All over the world, people live in the shadow of the United States. Some see it as a promise, even if just a broken one. More know it as a threat. Millions of people woke up on November 9 scared for their futures for the first time. Billions more felt a boot heel that was always already on their neck simply press down harder.

**IX. But it doesn’t have to be this way**

We will also live here tomorrow. To make sense of President Trump, we have to see the fragments of this shattered America, and try to understand them. This list is not the whole picture, but they are important pieces. So what happens now?

Democrats are calling for calm, even collaboration, while privately seething and internally battling for the “soul” of the Party. It may be too far gone for repair. Third sector vultures are already circling and are declaring “monetise, don’t organise!” telling supporters to donate to “the cause.” Neither are offering answers. If it this election has taught us anything, it is that money does not speak louder than action. And that backing the establishment for revolution is a losing game. It’s time we play a new one.

There is only one question left to ask: When will you join the fightback?

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This article has appeared in the UK magazine Red Pepper in November 2016. It is reproduced here with the permission of the author. [https://siobhanmcguirk.com/2016/11/13/why-trump-or-america-in-fragments/](https://siobhanmcguirk.com/2016/11/13/why-trump-or-america-in-fragments/)
The real reason Trump won: White fright

by Christopher Sebastian Parker

What drew white voters to Donald Trump?

If Trump is so divisive, why did he win? Many presidents have assumed the reins of a divided nation, but we’ve never seen anything like the reaction to Donald J. Trump’s 2016 presidential election.

It didn’t happen to Richard Nixon while the country was bitterly split over race and war. Half of the country believed Al Gore was cheated out of his shot at the White House in 2000, but the run-up to George W. Bush’s presence in the Oval Office offered nothing like what we are seeing now.

President Barack Obama, by turns believed a socialist and African national, among other things, was feared by some on the right, but didn’t face what the current president-elect now faces: a country whose division is exceeded only by Civil War-era America.

The conventional account

If we are to believe the emerging consensus, Trump won with the support of working-class white voters, people anxious about their economic prospects in a globalising economy. The theory goes that the automation that has replaced workers, and the pull of capitalism that pushed manufacturing jobs overseas, squeezed the white working class. As a result, the white working class supported Trump and his promises to blunt globalisation and curb free trade, moves that will preserve working-class jobs. Hogwash.

Reasonable people may disagree on the definition of “working class,” but let’s agree that it resides in the US$30,000 to $50,000 range. Even if we add in those classified as poor – that is, households earning less than $30,000 – this group constitutes only about 36 per cent of the electorate. Substantial, but not enough to hand Trump the election.

Especially not since Hillary Clinton actually beat Trump among poor and working-class voters: 52 per cent to 41 per cent. So, where did Trump beat Clinton if income is the criterion by which we’re judging the election? Even if not by much, exit polling indicates he bested her among those earning at least $50,000 – that is, the middle and upper class.

But for the fact that much has been made of the white working class riding to Trump’s rescue, it’s not entirely shocking that the GOP standard bearer won the middle- and upper-class white vote: It’s been this way for some time, for several decades, in fact.

Instead, what’s most arresting is that middle- and upper-class whites voted for this particular candidate. College-educated whites tend to be more tolerant than those without a college diploma. In a nutshell, a college education is generally tied to a commitment to democratic values. But Trump’s brazen misogyny, racism and nativism run afoul of these values.

By the way, I’m not the only one to conclude that Trump’s victory had at least as much to do with support from voters who remain unencumbered by economic anxiety as those riven by it.

The real reason he won

If social economic status – especially education – is a gateway to a more tolerant, democratic society, why did middle- and upper-class voters back someone who represents the antithesis of such values?

It’s actually pretty simple, in my opinion. My reading of history suggests that the boundaries of American identity intersect with whiteness, patriarchy, xenophobia and homophobia. This means that anyone, any group that falls outside of such a definition of American identity, is considered beyond the political community; they’re aliens.

Rapid social change, which poses a threat to this truncated version of American identity, activates anxiety and anger on the part of those who lay claim to this identity. The America with which they’ve become familiar is changing too fast. Hence, the slogan for the Trump campaign: “Make America great again.” This suggests that America, in its present state, is defective in some way and needs to return some previous version of itself.

Let’s consider what could be “wrong” with America circa 2016.

Rapidly changing demographics means that America will transition to a “majority-minority” country no later than 2044. Women are now more visible in public life than ever. Three serve on the Supreme Court. One even ran for president – twice. Same-sex marriage is now the law of the land. Last, but not least, we’ve had a black president for almost eight years.

With this in mind, many Trump supporters believe themselves to be losing “their” country, something that leads them to prefer a social milieu more consistent with days gone by – one in which primarily white, middle-
FOCUS: SCOURGE OF RACISM

and upper-class, heterosexual, native-born men reigned supreme.

It isn’t the first time America has witnessed something like this. Rapid social change spurred the growth of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and the John Birch Society in the 1960s.

Like Trump’s supporters, economic anxiety had next to nothing to do with why people supported the KKK or the John Birch Society. These people were relatively well off. Instead, it was the perception of existential threat that pushed people to join each. The KKK felt threatened by the “New Negro” and religious minorities; for the JBS, it was about the civil rights movement joining forces with the Soviet Union.

But we needn’t look back as far as the 20th century to identify the most recent example the reactionary sentiment that fueled Trump’s stunning victory. As I have written elsewhere, the Tea Party movement formed in reaction to the election of the first black president. He represented social change in which 20 per cent of white voters couldn’t believe.

When one considers the extent to which these groups overlap, these similarities come as no great surprise. My analysis of existing polling data suggests 83 per cent of those who identify with the Tea Party also supported Trump’s candidacy during the campaign. In other words, Tea Party supporters are now Trump supporters.

More importantly, if the policy preferences of Trump supporters are even remotely similar to those who supported the Tea Party, progressives have reason to be concerned. Tea Party types are far less inclined to support progressive policies than establishment conservatives.

Still, a silver lining may exist. Trump’s victory, in light of all of his antics during the campaign, makes it all but impossible to deny the continuing currency of racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia in the United States. It’s on display for all to see. This could be a good thing: It forces us to reckon with who we really are. Is America really about the democratic, progressive values professed in the founding documents? Or, are we really the small-minded, bigoted place Trump’s election represents?

If we hope to maintain a claim to exceptionalism, we must find our way back to the values on which this country was founded, ones that include equality and freedom. If Trump and his supporters really wish to “Make America great again,” perhaps they should go all the way back to these founding principles. Only this time, they should leave behind the racism, sexism and nativism.

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This article was published in The Conversation <http://theconversation.com/the-real-reason-trump-won-white-fright-67899>

A Crisis of White Identity...

by Marcus Woolombi Waters

With the US election now decided and Donald Trump as President Elect it’s interesting watching the shock and amazement that this could have ever happened. I read an article recently that provided some insight. ‘Behind 2016’s Turmoil, a Crisis of White Identity’ was written by Amanda Taub and published in the New York Times. It highlighted the rise of White supremacists across the globe under the veil of conservative nationalism.

Taub claims White anxiety has fueled 2016’s political turmoil in the West referencing Britain’s exit from the European Union, Donald Trump’s Republican presidential nomination and the rise of right-wing nationalism in Norway, Hungary, Austria, Germany and Greece.

Michael Ignatieff, a former Liberal Party leader in Canada, said that in the West, ‘what defined the political community’ for many years ‘was the unstated premise that it was White.’

The rejection of racial discrimination has, by extension, created a new, broader international community. The United States has had their first Black president, London a Muslim mayor and Melbourne a Chinese Lord Mayor. But rather than advancement many whites feel a painful loss and it is here we are seeing the rise of Donald Trump.

Across the West we see hate against Muslims, Refugees
and ethnic minorities with the racist catch cries, “I want my country back,” “we are full,” “Australia for Australians,” and of course “lets make America great again.” Lecturer and author Robin DiAngelo, calls this movement “White fragility”; the stress white people feel in trying to understand they are not special and are just another race like any other.

White fragility leads to feelings of insecurity, defensiveness, even threat. It creates a backlash against those perceived as the “other.” One example is terrorism seen as an act of people of colour never perpetrated by White people.

Remember the mass murder in the US city of Charleston, where a white man killed nine Black people in a church, seen to be motivated by depression, alienation and mental illness – not terrorism.

In Brisbane Australia, again depression was cited as the cause when an Indian Bus driver, Manmeet Alisher, 29, was burned alive by a white man and Queensland Police and media were quick to suggest, one, the attack was not terrorism and two, not racially motivated. Could you imagine if it was a man of colour killing a white man on public transport?

India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi even called Malcolm Turnbull to express concern felt in India over Mr Alisher’s death, in light of the racially-motivated attacks on Indian students recently in Australia. But again these attacks were also denied as being racially motivated.

Consider the Task Force established in Kalgoorlie following the tragic death of Aboriginal teenager Elijah Doughty run down by a 55yr old white man. The Task Force is focusing on thirty “at risk families” rather than a culture of racism and hate including websites that Debbie Carmody from the Tjuma Pulka Media Aboriginal Corporation says, ‘incite violence, and murder towards Wongatha youth, and literally tell people to go out and kill’.

WA Premier Barnett adding ‘a new safe house would likely offer young children somewhere to go to late at night. If their parents aren’t around or they’re not capable at the time.’

The undercurrent of racism within the comment takes away from the original crime an Aboriginal teenager killed by a white man and suggests problems associated towards Aboriginal families instead.

Kalgoorlie’s Mayor John Bowler went as far to say “social problems” in his town ‘begin with Aboriginal parents’, while claiming that each generation of Aboriginal people is ‘worse than the one before’. Kalgoorlie is home of the biggest open pit mine in Australia where its website proudly claims it donates $460 million to the local community each year. So why are our people not benefiting from such support. I will tell you who is benefiting the local Golf Club that just had a $10 million renovation approved by the local council where the Mayor is a member.

As stated by Co-head of the Royal Commission into the Detention of Children in the NT, Mick Gooda, such mining towns do nothing to lift the quality of life of our people only instead establishing Aboriginal fringe communities out of town ‘like we’ve got in places like Kalgoorlie, Darwin and Alice Springs?’ Mr Gooda said.

It’s the same in Port Hedland, Australia’s largest distribution centre for iron ore where in March 2016 a record of 39.6m tons was exported. Port Hedland boasts $1 million bungalows and apartment blocks, but in South Hedland, where Ms Dhu infamously died in custody, our people continue to live in squalor and poverty.

As a young Kamilaroi I witnessed the same apartheid (lets start calling it for what it is) practiced when I visited the Aboriginal community of Toomelah just down the road from Goondiwindi. Rather than identify the problem, columnists like Andrew Bolt’s maintain their White privilege over Black oppression.
FOCUS: SCOURGE OF RACISM

Only recently in his Blog for the *Herald Sun*, Andrew Bolt published, ‘How activists use Aborigines to censor debate’ where the blog stated the Human Rights Commission was ‘disgraceful’ and the Racial Discrimination Act as ‘sinister’, when writing about the Bill Leak racist cartoon. The Blog went on to add, ‘that so many journalists are on the side of the censors, attacking the free speech they should be defending to the death’.

The anger against “censorship” by the White privileged is explained by Amanda Taub who writes in her article ‘...for many Western Whites, opportunities for reaching the top of the hill seem unattainable. So their identity, their Whiteness feels under threat and more important than ever’.

In other words if you were supported for the majority of your life in a world that re-enforced Whiteness, settlement and colonisation of great White pioneers over invasion and genocide, Whites as superior and Blacks inferior in need of civilisation – rather than embrace a deconstruction of the truth you become fearful.

And because the foundations of your identity were based on denial and non-truths rather than acceptance you fear this “truth” will destroy or diminish an identity you cherish, and because you have no understanding of a world beyond Whiteness you have no culturally acceptable way to articulate what you perceive as a crisis.

In watching the destruction of Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and other Third World nations of colour around the world at the hands of White Developed countries the days of thinking of domestic terrorism as the work of a few Klansmen or belligerent skinheads are over.

In finishing I want to end with a reference from Morris Dee and J. Richard Cohen also published in the *New York Times* taken from their article ‘White Supremacists Without Borders’ published in 2015; ‘We know Islamic terrorists are thinking globally, and we confront that threat. We’ve been too slow to realize that white supremacists are doing the same.’

They are just better organised, resourced and firmly embedded into our institutions and structures.

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First published in the Koori Mail, 16, November, 2016, and republished with the permission of the author.
Hate speech by another name: Why the term 'alt-right' should not be legitimised

by Celeste Liddle

The first time I heard the phrase "alt-right" used with regard to political discourse, I honestly thought I was imagining it. Perhaps it's my lefty bias, but the idea that the right could have an "alternative" when they are the generally staunch defenders of the status quo (as they tend to benefit from it) seemed somewhat out of place. Yet since then, I have seen the term used over and over again, to describe a specific group of people within the right and why they feel they're distinguishable from the traditional right.

Alt-right has been mainly used in regard to the US election and those who've supported Trump. There's already been much written about this but if people are not aware, the man who penned it; Richard Spencer of the National Policy Institute; might be able to explain while he talks about how the US is meant to be a "white country". As might the gleeful group of white people throwing celebratory Nazi salutes in honour of Trump's victory. This occurred in mid-November when alt-right leader Richard Spence described white people as "children of the sun", and told the National Policy Institute in Washington DC that with President-elect Donald Trump, 'their time has come'. Breitbart Technology journalist Milo Yiannopoulos could explain as well while also telling us how he feels feminist bullies are destroying the video gaming industry.

There has been a lot of great coverage on the need to stop using the fluffy titles the alt-right created for themselves in order to obfuscate what they actually are: white nationalists, misogynists, homophobes and the like. It's notable that the editors from online publication ThinkProgress have released a statement outlining that they will 'no longer describe racists as "alt-right". I cannot echo their views strongly enough. To frame hate speech as a mere alternative stream of political philosophy is not only dangerous, but it is not remotely conducive to a cohesive and accepting society where safety and tolerance is prioritised over persecution and fear. I admit to being amused that the recent rally in support of Trump by these groups mobilised a tiny fraction of what the counter-rally of anti-racists managed to gather together. A minute rally showing, though, should not be taken to mean that these extremist reactionary elements are not of concern here.

However, when it comes to the term "alt-right", my concerns about the use of it don't end at the fact that the messages of racists are being sanitised. I'm also concerned that via the nifty clean packaging of people who are outwardly hateful to build their notoriety, we reinforce idea that their message is in some way an "other". I draw from the example in this country knowing that while Australia and the USA are different in so many ways, we also share many similarities as a western settler colonial society. Australia additionally benefits from a lot of US cultural input.

Let's be honest: racism is hardly "alternative" in society. Indeed, it is so mainstream that it permeates all our social structures and has been actively promoted via legislation. Look no further than the current discussions on lifelong bans on Australia visas for "boat people" along with expensive and discriminatory measures such as the "Community Development Program". As the First Dog on the Moon shows in a cartoon, racism forms our very foundations. Former Prime Minister Paul Keating recently stated that Australia continually fails to rectify
these foundations. While the US may have treaties with its First Peoples, - like here the fights for rights on Indigenous lands (as the Dakota Access Pipeline battle shows), rage on. It’s only now that moves are being made to embrace the truth of Columbus Day from a Native American perspective.

Excusing racism is also hardly an alternative stance in this country. Right now in our Parliament they are again debating whether 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act should be amended or removed. This is because mainly white powerful men with broad media and political platforms are concerned about their access to "free speech" – ideas they have borrowed from American ideas of free speech, while they concurrently show no understanding of what the Australian Racial Discrimination Act actually states.

There is also the danger that racism will get framed as only an issue within the right, and indeed, only within a dedicated attention-seeking fraction of the right. Racism transcends the political spectrum and neither the conventional right nor the broad left is free from it. The Australian union movement, for example, is still working hard to redress its history of support for the White Australia Policy. Recently Indigenous writer Luke Pearson argued the left-wing media often neglects to recognise its own racism when it comes to addressing Indigenous issues. When I see catch phrases like "Real Australians Say Welcome" I can only think of how this forcibly assimilates those of us whose unacknowledged heritages predate any concept of "Australia" even though these statements are intended to be inclusive.

The alt-right in the US, and its parallels here, need to be named for exactly what they are. These are not merely "different opinions" that need to be tolerated for the sake of free-flowing social dialogue. They are "hate speech" designed to generate controversy to increase the discrimination inflicted upon some of the most vulnerable in society. While we are calling it out though, we need to be careful that we don’t paint them as too exceptional in our societies. Trump’s presidential rise did not come from nowhere and the alt-right’s support of him is not a freak accident. While racist structures continue to flourish and racist messages are tolerated, racist groups will continue to have a place in our societies.

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This article was published in the Brisbane Times in November 2016 and has been republished with permission from the author. - http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/lifestyle/news-and-views/opinion/altright-is-not-a-thing-and-lets-not-use-it-to-legitimise-hatred-20161125-gsxw4r.html>
The Economic Consequences of Donald Trump

by Pavlina R. Tcherneva

Economic consequences
A lot has been said already. For me, this was the culmination of a decades-long process where the Democrats sold out their progressive agenda and happily embraced the Republican’s neoliberal economic policies. Some of the best analysis includes Matt Stoller writing in the Atlantic who says that ‘The Democratic Party helped to create today’s shockingly disillusioned and sullen public’. Vincent Bevins of the Los Angeles Times says ‘Since the 1980s the elites in rich countries have overplayed their hand, taking all the gains for themselves and just covering their ears when anyone else talks, and now they are watching in horror as voters revolt’, My own view is that the Democrats have not had an economic policy of their own for nearly half a century, just an ‘inferior’ version of what Republicans usually champion—tax cuts on the wealthy, dismantling the public safety-net, ‘fighting’ inflation by creating unemployment, market liberalization and deregulation across the board, which among other things brought us a colossal financial sector that has cannibalised the productive economy.

Democrats need to grapple with the reality that Bill Clinton completed the Reagan revolution, and what we got from both parties is rabid financialisation, extreme inequality, corporate welfare, joblessness, and economic insecurity: precisely the conditions that fan the flames of social antagonism and deep-seated racism and bigotry.

There are many ways to tell this story but, just think, the real incomes of the vast majority of US households have barely moved in the last two decades. Most of us live in stagnation (at best) and many communities are mired in an ongoing recession (even depression), while the economy is ‘officially’ growing.

Neo-liberalism on steroids

As vile as Trump’s campaign was, many of his supporters have legitimate gripes about the state of the economy and about big money in politics. Of course, the notion that Trump is the ‘man of the people’ who will deliver the kind of change they (we) need is preposterous. In fact, his entire economic platform is basically the one I already described above. Nothing has changed. It is the same old plain vanilla “trickle-down economics” we know too well.

And all of us, but especially poor working folk, will hurt even more if Trump repeals Obamacare and the Dodd-Frank Act, gives more tax cuts to the ultra-rich, cuts the budgets of the Department of Education and the EPA, and continues to weaken labour bargaining, to name just a few of his to-do items. All of this is a continuation of neo-liberal policies but on steroids.

The long-term prospects for the economy are dismal. While I do not foresee the economic Armageddon many are predicting in the immediate future, what we will see is another sequel of the structural forces that have brought us the economic ills, which produced this election result–outsized corporate power, unbearable inequality, and increased financial instability. The one bright spot could be his plan for over $1 trillion in infrastructure investment. That is something we surely need.

But remember, if it does not translate into genuine deficit spending, and Congress tries to ‘pay’ for these expenditures by slashing other Federal programs, there will be no ‘stimulus’. What one hand gives, the other will take away. And Mitch McConnel
is already on record that infrastructure is not a priority. But if the deficit expenditure is there and Trump ends up “reviving our inner cities” and restoring infrastructure so “it’s second to none” (as per his acceptance speech), that will benefit the economy and create jobs (though it might come with a giant neon TRUMP sign on every new bridge).

But no one should have any illusions. America elected someone very much from the wealthy elite, a privileged member of the establishment, who happened to be a better salesman.

A social plague

Unfortunately, it is impossible to discuss the ‘economic consequences of Trump’ in an objective way because he has unleashed a plague on our society, from which we will suffer for many years. Trump has brought white supremacy out of the shadows and has normalized bigotry, misogyny, and hate in ways we hadn’t seen in decades. He has now given permission for the resurgence of overt racism. And while this may well have been already underway, racism and economic anxiety are deeply intertwined, and both seem to be reaching a new fever pitch.

This cancer will stay with us for years to come and must be fought every step of the way. Whatever our gripes and differences about the economy, we must together collectively stand against acts of hate. Nothing will erode the social fabric more and undermine our ability to make progress on economic matters than this poison. Fear sells.

As FDR warned us long ago:

>We have come to a clear realization that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.

Democracy didn’t fail. It did exactly what it was supposed to do.

But:

>The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerated the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than the democratic state itself. That in its essence is fascism: ownership of government by an individual, by a group, or any controlling private power.

Looking ahead

So while the mainstream pundits are burning their batteries trying to sort out what went wrong, we need to get to work—do something useful, say something inclusive, stand up to a bully, be safe and keep advocating and working for social justice.

The election has exposed further our desperate need to design genuinely inclusive social policies. What we have here is a crucial moment to mobilize, to start drafting a Democratic progressive agenda from scratch, to shed the destructive neoliberal policies so wonderfully championed by Democrats and Republicans alike.

An Economic Bill of Rights

What might that look like? Policies that create jobs for all, boost incomes, usher in a Green New Deal, transform our energy system, complete the safety-net with paid family leave, universal child allowance, strengthened social security, guarantee healthcare for all, invest in public education, provide debt relief for families, renew anti-trust policies and aggressive financial regulation, to name a few. And save the environment. Because if we don’t, none of the above will matter. Never let a good crisis go to waste.

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This article was originally appeared in New Economic Perspectives http://neweconomicperspectives.org/2016/11/economic-consequences-donald-trump.html. And is republished with permission from the author.
Trump Presidency Could Kill Labor Unions
His election is "an extinction-level event for American labor."

by Harold Meyerson

As Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin—states that once were the stronghold of the nation’s industrial union movement—dropped into Donald Trump’s column on election night, one longtime union staff member told me that Trump’s victory was “an extinction-level event for American labor.” He may be right.

A half-century ago, more than a third of those Rust Belt workers were unionized, and their unions had the clout to win them a decent wage, benefits, and pensions. Their unions also had the power to turn out the vote. They did—for Democrats. White workers who belonged to unions voted Democratic at a rate 20 per cent higher than their non-union counterparts, and there were enough such workers to make a difference on Election Day.

That’s not the case today. Nationally, about 7 per cent of private-sector workers are union members, which gives unions a lot less bargaining power than they once had, and a lot fewer members to turn out to vote. The unions’ political operations certainly did what they could: An AFL-CIO-sponsored Election Day poll of union members showed 56 per cent had voted for Hillary Clinton and 37 per cent for Trump, while the TV networks’ exit poll showed that voters with a union member in their household went 51 per cent to 43 per cent for Clinton, as well. In states where unions have more racially diverse memberships, Clinton’s union vote was higher (she won 66 per cent of the union household vote in California).

In states where union membership is predominantly white, Trump did better—actually winning the Ohio union household vote with 54 per cent of the vote to Clinton’s 42 per cent. The very economic and social wreckage the unions had warned against when they had opposed NAFTA and permanent trade relations with China ended up diminishing their own numbers and that of Democratic voters, and helped spur Trump to victory.

Now, Trump, the Republican Congress, and the soon-to-be Republican-dominated Supreme Court are poised to damage unions—and the interests of working people, both union and not—even more. Indeed, within the GOP, the war on unions engenders almost no dissent. Since Republicans were swept into office in a host of Midwestern states in the 2010 elections, Indiana,
Michigan, and Wisconsin have all effectively eliminated collective-bargaining rights for public employees and subjected private-sector unions to “right-to-work” laws that enable workers to benefit from union contracts and representation without having to pay their union any dues. Previously, such laws were largely confined to Southern states, whose respect for worker rights has improved only somewhat since they were compelled to abolish slavery. As the GOP has become steadily whiter and more right-wing, those Southern norms have become national.

The advances that workers and their unions have made under the Obama presidency came chiefly as a result of executive orders and departmental regulations, which Trump can reverse with the stroke of a pen. Obama’s Labor Department rules that extended eligibility for overtime pay to millions of salaried employees making more than $22,000 a year, and that compelled federal contractors to offer paid sick leave to their employees, may well be struck down. National Labor Relations Board rulings that employers cannot indefinitely delay union representation elections once their employees have petitioned for a vote, and that university graduate students who work as teaching and research assistants are employees who can elect to unionize, will probably be undone.

The most devastating blow to unions may come from the Supreme Court, once a Trump-appointed conservative wins confirmation to the seat that the late Justice Antonin Scalia occupied. It was only Scalia’s death that kept the court from ruling in the Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association case that public employee unions no longer have the right to collect partial dues payments from the nonmembers they represent in disputes with employers and for whom they bargain contracts. Unlike their private-sector counterparts, who’ve seen their organizing drives stymied by employers able to violate the laws safeguarding workers without incurring significant penalties, public employee unions have largely retained their strength, still representing more than 30 per cent of workers in the public sphere. The two national teachers unions, as well as the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and the Service Employees International Union, each have well over a million members; their combined membership comes to a little more than half the total membership of American unions. These are also the most potent unions come election time, mobilizing not merely their own members but also waging major get-out-the-vote campaigns in minority communities.

Within the next 18 months, a court ruling in Friedrichs or a similar case will almost surely decree that members of these and other public employee unions can receive full benefits from union representation without having to pay their union so much as a dime. Such a ruling will present a huge challenge to these unions, although they’d already embarked, while Friedrichs was still before the court, on efforts to build closer ties with their members.

Although the unions’ future looks anything but bright, they will continue—at least, for a time—to wield considerable power in Democratic Party circles and wherever liberals govern. However much their treasuries are reduced, they still will have more resources than any other progressive organization. They will remain the linchpin of the liberal coalitions that govern in nearly every large American city, the key groups behind the campaigns that have seen cities and some states raise the minimum wage and mandate paid sick days.

Even among centrist Democrats previously indifferent to labor’s plight, increased awareness of the nation’s stratospheric economic inequality has also brought about a new appreciation of the need for strong unions—one reason why a range of Democratic think tanks have turned out study after study in recent years calling for laws making it easier to form unions.

The election should also make those centrists realise the Democrats’ political need for unions, most of which remain the nation’s only multiracial mass organisations. A larger, more powerful movement, articulating labor’s core principle—Workers’ Lives Matter—might have kept the Democrats from backing such economically and politically disastrous policies as normalizing trade relations with China.

Polling shows that most Americans still think unions play a positive role in the nation’s economy. Support
Trump and Brexit: are these really revolutions on the right?

by Victoria Honeyman

When Donald Trump promised that his election would be “Brexit plus plus plus”, many of us took him at his word. Britain’s Brexit vote had been momentous, and unsettling for politicians of most stripes, not simply because of the strength of public feeling which the vote exposed, but because of what the referendum result meant.

The UK has spent the months since the referendum struggling with the constant questions which Brexit raises. It will take many years of wrangling to answer those questions and people on both sides of the debate will remain unsatisfied for the foreseeable future.

Like the Brexiteers, Trump was promising a period of upheaval and of change. But to what end? What did his supporters want, and were they different to those who voted for Brexit in the UK? As the dust begins to settle after the US election, an accepted wisdom is being created. The rise of the right across Europe and the US is due to globalisation, the dominance of a liberal elite, the marginalisation of the white working class, even political correctness gone too far. The balance is now apparently being reset.

Brexit is being held up as the first example of this backlash against traditional politics and the political elite, while Trump is being held up as the latest. Neither are one-sided events, something which is being increasingly overlooked. Of those who voted in the EU referendum, 48.1 per cent voted to remain in the EU, while 51.9 per cent voted to leave. Trump won the presidential election and the majority of the electoral college votes, but not the popular vote.

While the media and those on the winning side use words such as “revolutionary”, these victories need to be viewed in context. What they tell us is that both the UK and the US are divided nations, with different geographical areas having different priorities and needs.

Establishment shaken

In the referendum, a simple question was asked regarding Britain’s membership of the EU. While some people will have inevitably used this vote as an opportunity to express dissatisfaction, as happens during general elections, the majority of individuals inevitably voted on the issue at stake – Britain’s position within the EU.
While that vote has undoubtedly shaken the political establishment, it cannot and should not be dismissed simply as an expression of general irritation. Perhaps what it demonstrates most clearly is that national government and the media cannot continually blame the EU for unpopular policies for decades before changing their position and arguing it is in fact a positive part of political life.

The situation in the US appears to be different. In the presidential system, voters select an individual to represent and lead their nation. Trump, a 70-year-old white, male, property tycoon and billionaire, painted himself as the champion of the underclass, of the forgotten white working class in the American rust belt. As unlikely as it appears, Trump was able to claim he was not part of the establishment, just as Nigel Farage, a former banker and MEP, had done before him.

Trump, like Farage, is the epitome of the establishment, but with no political record to defend, they both found themselves in the position of being able to criticise their opponents with very little comeback. While their opponents may have argued their plans were untested, extreme and unachievable, this sounded like political fudging to the public.

Hillary Clinton was painted by her political opponents as the nasty face of the political establishment, just as Jean-Claude Junker, Donald Tusk, David Cameron and Nick Clegg were in the UK. Trump and Farage – and many of the Brexit supporters – were able to link dissatisfaction with the status quo to the records of their opponents. They then claimed their solutions would deal with underlying problems.

Whether they will or not remains to be seen, but it’s already clear that there are very many underlying problems within both the US and the UK – as well as in France, Germany and Italy. All these countries are expecting to see a rise in right-wing parties over the next year.

By dismissing the votes in June and November as simple “dissatisfaction” the political elites face a long walk in the wilderness. Similarly, if Trump and the Brexiteers ignore the specific wants and needs of their supporters, instead favouring their own political agenda, they will find that their support will ebb away as quickly as it did for their political opponents. Democracy cannot be dismissed by anyone because you don’t like the result, and that applies to Trump just as much as anyone else.

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This article was published in The Conversation November 16, 2016. https://theconversation.com/trump-and-brexit-are-these-really-revolutions-on-the-right-68866
FOCUS: ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

It’s not only our industrial heartlands that have hollowed out, it’s our progressive politics too

by Dan Firth

A community organiser reports that progressive politics is shockingly out of touch with the communities whose interests they purport to represent.

I’ve organised with communities from London to Yorkshire to win on issues that matter to ordinary people: from good jobs to living wages to better housing. I’ve also trained Labour party politicians and activists in community organising. In the course of my work I’ve met hundreds of ordinary people hungry to make a change. Whether the mum at the local primary school afraid about the health of her child as air pollution rockets, or the cabbie worried about losing his job to the march of automation. They are potential leaders, and they have been locked out of progressive politics.

The problem is progressive parties haven’t got a clue how to find, nurture or develop talent. Most Labour Party meetings up and down the country are so dreary they would kill the passion of even the most ardent Corbynista. Equally door knocking, and leafleting will only deliver fatigue, not win elections. Of course, being out of power is a problem - as Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, reminded us 38 times in his speech to the Labour Party conference.

But being in power is not enough.

Progressives have failed to grasp that more than anything, ordinary people share a sense of powerlessness. That’s why ‘take back control’ resonated with so many people. In fact, too often, progressives have been guilty of taking people’s power away. From the bureaucratic Labour council ignoring thousands of complaints about damp housing; to a Prime Minister rushing the country to war, to policy wonks being parachuted into safe seats, progressives in power have too often treated people as a barrier to progress or simply as election fodder. And people feel it. That’s why community organising matters to the future of the progressive movement.

Over the last 20 years the progressive movement has hollowed out. Support built on a network of workplace, trade unions and non-conformist churches has largely gone. Labour, and no doubt the Greens and Liberal Democrats, have increasingly recruited their stars from a cabal of think tanks and elite universities, further increasing the sense amongst ordinary people that politics is out of their reach. And with that there has been a loss of authentic leaders whose demands for social justice and equality were forged in these communities.

Despite all the talk of a gulf between cosmopolitan London and ‘monocultural’ former Industrial towns, from Dalston to Donny, ordinary
people’s grievances are largely shared; a need for good jobs, affordable housing; rip off energy companies and a sense of hope for our children are what matters. These are issues that progressives should be winning.

The problem is progressives tend not to listen. Armed with a manifesto - drafted in party HQ - activists pound the streets, phonebank, leaflet and ask people to support this or that prospective councillor, attend a meeting on academies, join a demo on trident or decide which leader is best for the party. Despite most of us viewing ourselves as open minded democrats - fighting for and with the people - progressives are in fact more comfortable being both transactional and ideological.

How often do we have a proper conversation with the people we push to turn out to vote. How often do we try and build a relationship that goes beyond an immediate political transaction? How often do we bring people together around issues that matter to them, not us. Activism and clicktivism might build your data but they won’t build relationships and they certainly won’t build trust.

Organising is about developing, nurturing and training leaders rooted in communities across the country to build people power. Power that can turn winning local issues into winning elections. But crucially it is also about sparking political imagination. The Living Wage was not a gift of policy wonks, but was born out of the anger of low paid workers. The real solutions for progressives will not be thought up by a policy adviser in the Westminster bubble but should be forged in communities through real struggles.

That’s why progressives must now roll up their sleeves. Despite a rather smug view on the left that UKIP is now a spent force, if the regressive alliance of the Tories and UKIP can deliver on Brexit - the logic may follow - why not on jobs and better housing? If you throw in Trumps’ election and Arron Banks’ money - a resurgent right could be energised in former industrial towns like Doncaster. In this context progressives must reconnect and rebuild trust amongst communities. If we can’t then others will.

If we want to build a progressive force, ordinary must be at its heart. We must be bold, partisan and willing to back ordinary people all the way to the ballot box. That’s why we are building a movement in forgotten heartlands like Doncaster and Medway as well as the City of London. We can win, but until progressive parties get this - they will be bereft of leaders, trust, imagination and ultimately power.

Dan Firth is the Founder of We Can Win; and was formerly a Lead Organiser and Director of Good Jobs at Citizens UK.

This article was originally published in the online magazine www.opendemocracy.net on the 28 November 2016.
Castro's audacity resounded for decades

by Guy Rundle

The global reach of Fidel Castro's influence now has everyone rushing in for a post-mortem (and ahistorical) stoning. Well, 2016 really is determined to be a clearing-house of modernity, ain't it? The death of Fidel Castro at the age of 90 is being taken as an opportunity for all sorts of positionings, most of them absurdly self-serving. The US right-wing efforts are particularly remarkable, since they're all from fundamentalist Christians who believe that he is now literally in hell, being prodded with pitchforks. Their glee is all a little post-hoc. Castro retired from power a decade ago, an event that right-wing Cuba-watchers assured us would occasion a rising in the streets. It didn't happen then, and what was hoped for, the great repudiation, has still not occurred.

But Castro's longevity has been as inconvenient to those from his side of politics as for his enemies. He survived 60 years past the revolution he led, 25 years past the collapse of the USSR, still lucid, still commenting furiously. It is as if Lenin had lived into the 1970s, to give his views on Woodstock and the Sex Pistols.

That survival, and his intractability on political strategy and state socialism, might not only have kept Cuba stuck in a minimal transition to a mixed economy, it made a historical reckoning with his rule and life something a lot of people were unwilling to do. Thirty, even 20 years ago, a lot of people, even his enemies, were more willing to concede some points to the Cuban revolution; now, many, including its friends, are rushing to judge it without any context.

Let's consider that context. From the late 1940s, Latin America had been caught up in a ferment, as various nations tried to throw off dominance by US imperialism and local dictatorship, enforcing the power of landed families and American corporations to deny the most basic rights and reforms — lethal arrangements that had kept people poor, illiterate and powerless, enforced by repeated US invasions and occupations from 1898 onwards.

In 1951, in Guatemala, a reformist government headed by Jacobo Arbenz enacted a large land reform program, distributing locked-up lands to peasants, allowing them
to become small farmers. For this, at the behest of the US United Fruit Corporation, the US government and CIA fomented and backed a coup d’etat, which plunged the country into a half-century of repression, civil war and Indigenous genocide that would eventually claim 250,000 lives.

Significantly, at the time, it told supporters of Arbenz, such as Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara, that the US would not permit even mild reformism — the same lesson the Bolsheviks had taken from the brutal repression of the 1871 Paris Commune. Any chance of escaping a global system of imperialism and underdevelopment would require a full defence. As night descended on Latin America, and US backed death squads spread out to wipe out whole classes of people — teachers, union leaders — who might form some resistance, it became clear that the US plan was to keep the region in a permanent state of subjection.

The Latin American left tilted towards Marxist analysis and strategy. The Cuban revolution was part of that, and part of the global uprising against the extension of US imperialism. The revolutionaries saw the imposition of global capitalism as involving the imposition of permanent underdevelopment — as agrarian producers of cheap raw materials, making just enough to serve as a market for US industrial goods, without competing against them — and had become intransigent on this point in 1953-54, with the Arbenz overthrow, the coup in Iran, and the installation of the Shah, and the creation of the puppet state of South Vietnam, after the French had been defeated.

The Cuban regime was, thus, as brutal towards its enemies as it felt it needed to be to survive — and far less brutal than many of the US-backed regimes that surrounded it. The resistance it led was against a real enemy, and it extended that resistance with the creation of the Cuban brigades, sent into Africa in the mid-1970s, when South Africa sought to extend its power over the whole of southern Africa. The pressure Cuba put on the apartheid regime was essential to frustrating its plans to dominate the region, and to the ending of apartheid itself.

When the Cold War was over, the foreign brigades were replaced with medical brigades, who brought healthcare to countries whose healthcare systems had been devastated by the imposed austerity of the International Monetary Fund. These alone have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Cuba sends doctors to Pacific island nations, while we turn them into client-state prisons. They were going into West Africa during the recent Ebola crisis, while everyone else was rushing out. The commitment of their participants comes from a genuine socialist-humanist ethic that the regime’s existence has fostered.

But that’s really the context in which Cuba has to be understood. The Cold War in the Third World wasn’t a fight between democracy and communism; it was between imperialism and self-determination. The imperialism offered was murderous beyond all imagining; 200,000 dead in Guatemala, more in El Salvador and elsewhere, 3 million to 5 million in Indochina, three-quarters of a million in Indonesia, half a million in Iraq (the last, or latest, act of the ‘50s Iran coup). Add to that the lives blighted by lack of schooling, unionisation, medical care, and then by the imposition of the “Washington consensus” debt bomb in the ‘80s and ‘90s, which drained local budgets of hundreds of billions, and the human toll is vast. It would have been unimaginable without resistance, and victory against it.

Imperialism had no inherent use-by date, by which it would simply wither away. What imperialism had in mind for the 20th century was an imperial apartheid planet, ticking over indefinitely. If you find that unimaginable, thank a Third World revolutionary. (And it’s the moment for my annual reminder that the funds for the CIA wing of such operations came from the same place as did the funds for the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which funded magazines such as Quadrant, whose then-editor Peter Coleman, now claims the virtue of having been on the “right side”. Tell it to the dead, Peter. The money came from the same place that paid your salary).

What Cuba provided was not merely actual resistance, but a demonstration that it was possible for small nations to defeat the beast. More than 1949 in China — a country no imperialist power has ever been able to fully swallow — Cuba showed the power of audacity. With US state connivance, the Mafia were busy turning it into a gangster client state. Recent stuff about its economic growth in the 1950s are the usual use of aggregate statistics to obscure winners and losers — the latter being almost everyone.

So, the judgement against the Cuban revolution itself, its bloody aftermath, and its subsequent lock-down is absurd if it does not occur in the context of this history. Or the effect of a decades-long blockade whose effect, once overstated, now appears forgotten. Or the Missile Crisis, in which the US had missiles based in Turkey, on the USSR border, but objected to any on its own front step.

That Cuban Leninism continued decades beyond any justification, even on its own terms, is without question. That this resulted from the political structure it imposed, which facilitated Castro’s arrogance and insensitivity is
not contested. Nor are the particular crimes of a certain 
left puritan machismo: the persecution of homosexuals 
and prostitutes, in the early years. But equally absurd are 
the comparisons, in which Cuba is slated for not being 
Massachusetts or Denmark. Try comparing Cuba and 
Haiti. Or the Dominican Republic. Or anywhere where 
capricious death and misery without cease stalks life.

So Fidel lived long enough for the judgement passed 
on his life to be one that excluded all that had served 
as the context of his acts. To argue against the current 
celebration of global capitalism and wealth creation is 
hard enough, but it is nearly impossible to remind people 
that there was a period, from 1949 into the 1970s, when 
millions worked to create a way in which humanity could 
rise itself up, without turning the world into a giant 
knock-off handbag factory/call centre.

Memory of that time will come again, and soon, because 
the liberal capitalism that announced its triumph less 
than 20 years ago is now in crisis. The initial beneficiaries 
in the West have been the right — and note how willing 
the champions of small government, sound budgeting, 
etc, are to sign up with the incoming Donald Trump 
administration whose Breitbart faction proposes a 
$1 trillion state infrastructure spending program, 
funded by borrowing. Much of it will be a rort, but its 
announcement marks the death of the legitimacy of 
liberal capitalism.

But those are desperate measures against a global 
process that is setting the system against the people. 
It’s a measure of the times that much of the criticism of 
Castro’s regime at the moment centres on its persecution 
of homosexuals in the ’60s and beyond — a ghastly 
episode, and for which Castro later apologised. This was 
ignored for too long by a left focused on the economic 
and geopolitical question.

Now the latter have been relatively forgotten. They 
will return, I think, as the deep problems of global 
capitalism spread — permanent low growth, falling 
Wage power, decaying social mobility, increasing public 
squalor. Sooner rather than later, the excluded will 
be so numerous, so under the thumb, so lacking in 
prospect, that interest in organised and militant political 
movement — one unified by notions of universality 
rather than divided by the media class brand-builders of 
the new identity politics — will reoccur. Will it look like 
Castro-ism? Of course not. State socialism has been dead 
as a strategy for 40 years.

The right is celebrating the victory of one track-suited 
old dude in Havana, whose revolution was won a half-
century ago. Some victory. Capitalism triumphant? Let’s 
wait and si.

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