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Panic in America: People in Revolt

By Luciana Bohne

November 14, 2016

A “grab them by the pussy,” racist, sexist white man has grabbed the White House, and the polite class is twirling in outrage like dervishes approaching oblivion.

This insult to the “dignity of the office” and the “nation” is more shocking than the action of the black man who took the Nobel Peace Prize and then proceeded to bomb seven countries.

Hillary Clinton’s victory was projected as the sole possible outcome of a reasonable, civilized, and progressive society, as the elite see it, which only eight years earlier had voted for the first African American president in its history. Instead—vanity, vanity, all is vanity—the troglodytes won.

Not so simple. Liberal brains pickled in the formaldehyde of identity politics are unwilling to recognize in the politically incorrect catastrophe of Donald Trump’s victory the blowback to the ferocious economic plunder by the neoliberal order, backed by decades of wanton and unchecked military aggressions.

The neoliberals’ vaunted “internationalism” (more realistically, American neocolonialism) has created a weak domestic economy which to a degree justifies the nationalist call to look homeward and entrench behind the borders of sovereignty—one of Trump’s rallying cries.

A Chinese observer, Qiao Liang, author of *Unrestricted Warfare* (1999), abused in English translation with the inaccurate subtitle, “China’s Master Plan to Destroy America,” recently identified the germ of the country’s general economic disease in the neoliberal shift from productive to financial investment:

“This financial economy (using money to make money) is much easier than the real (industry-based) economy. Why will it bother with manufacturing industries that have only low value-adding capabilities? Since August 15, 1971, the U.S. has gradually stopped its real economy and moved into a virtual economy. It has become an ‘empty’ economy state. Today’s U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has reached US\$18 trillion, but only \$5 trillion is from the real economy.”

People in revolt against the neoliberal order

For forty-five years, the neoliberal elite ruled the US by the “free hand of the market.” In plain terms, among other abuses of the social contract, they have launched a class war to maximize profits by depressing wages.” The mystical “hand” has been slapping around American workers by moving industry to places where labor is cheaper and unions weak. In turn, the exploited foreign workers have sought relief from desperate wage conditions in their countries by immigrating to the US, embittering the native workforce.

Nearly 50 million Americans, nearly twenty percent out of 325 million, are poor. The unemployment rate, officially around five percent, is closer to ten percent.

Twenty years ago Patrick Buchanan’s “pitchfork populism” appealed to only twenty percent of Republicans. After the crash of 2008 and the recession, which rescued the “banksters” and immiserated masses of Americans, public attitudes against the neoliberal global order (“internationalism” in the Establishment’s lingo) solidified and hardened, crossing party lines.

Buchanan’s political heir, Trump gathered the motley disaffected masses into a surge of revolt against the neoliberal status quo, winning the White House. As a tiny minority of sober voters had predicted in 2008, Obama’s presidency disappointed and enraged the masses of people whose material conditions his administration worsened by continuing and even accelerating the policies that his voters had expected him to reverse. In this sense, Obama’s blithe indifference to domestic poverty is responsible for Trump’s victory. The liberals have no one to blame but themselves.

Brexit, Trump, Le Pen, Corbyn, Sanders, and even Syriza and Podemos, in a discordant, confused, and unfocused cacophony of warning bells, are ringing the changes of public revolt. With any luck, the deafness of the international elite may in good time force a global social revolution. This is why the left should keep an open mind both about the limitations of these disgruntled popular forces and their potential for radicalization as a result of repeated frustration to effect change.

The elite are shaken

As the one percent of ruling elite well understands, Trump's victory signals the rejection of their policies. This week's issue of *The Economist* is devoted to Trump's "stunning victory" and to what it means for the world economy and corporate America, "*now that the old certainties are gone*" (emphasis mine).

Trump's election reveals, in the first place, the extent of the public's animosity toward globalization. Though they may not yet understand it as the re-colonization of the world, the people certainly feel its material effects and resent being its losers. The trade pacts, which Trump so cleverly and justifiably denounced, have benefitted no one but the corporations and the [indebted] consumers.

In the second place, Trump's election has tapped into the public weariness of the endless wars, though not in the spirit of international solidarity or appeals to pacifism. He is definitely not a socialist. His appeal is nationalist, in the "isolationist" tradition—not an innovative perspective.

Instead of denouncing militarism (he expressed support for the galactic size of the defense budget), Trump has fueled resentment of allies in military alliances (NATO, specifically) as "free-loaders," ignoring the fact that these military alliances do not serve any other interests than the interests of the US.

Nevertheless, to the elite this change of course from intervention to retrenchment presents an unwelcome shake-up, especially since it bodes a foreign policy of detachment, including relinquishing the aggressive face-off with Russia and China.

In the third place, Trump's invidious stance on immigration—not different de facto from Obama's—drives Trump to emphasize "sovereignty" ("got to have a country, people"), a most unwelcome word to the architects of invasions and regime change. It is understood by them that there is only one sovereignty, the sovereignty of international capital in a borderless world. That Trump advocates pulling back from wars and regime change and making the US an isolated national fortress goes against everything they have sought to achieve.

In sum, Trump's presidency bodes a return to tariffs and protectionism, a more restrained military posture, and a curb on the movement of labor. Less a political "revolution" than a change of course back to the 1840s' populism of the unpleasant Andrew Jackson, who was hardly a man of peace or of social justice. Not much in it for left hopefuls except for the significant factor that popular rage has driven the change. Undeniably, Trump's election is the working class' payback for the elite's betrayal and damage during over four decades of undeclared but effective class war.

It is doubtful that Trump will achieve much of his isolationist agenda, though he will have to make some concessions to the popular expectations of attenuating and even reversing neoliberal choices, as the conservative government of Theresa May is having to do in Britain.

In the US, as in Europe, the social structure has come under pressure, and the neoliberal regime feels threatened and insecure.

Regime change and its terrors

In the first hours and days after Trump's election, the Western media—just as it did with Brexit—was disguising the elites' terror at the looming regime change and their horror at the prospect of seeing the “free hand” in handcuffs as a moral revulsion at the arrival in the White House of a tribe of primitive white-trash rude-necks, straight out of the racist “populism” of the 1920s' Ku Klux Klan, fueling public hysteria with hyperbole and sensationalism.

The headlines in *The Guardian* on Thursday morning after the US election read like tabloids from the gutter press.

“Mourning in America: Will Trump Destroy the Country?”

“I think he's a damaged person”

“A night of shattered dreams”

“Transgender Americans fear for safety after Trump win: ‘We are traumatized.’”

“The first black American president will now be succeeded by a man endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan. This, according to Trump and his supporters, male and female, is what the American dream actually looks like.”

“Misogyny won the US election – let's stop indulging angry white men.”

“Forget angry white men – white women pushed Trump to victory”

Gloria Steinem's article in the same *Guardian* blames it all on “white-lash and man-lash,” even though fifty-three percent of white women voted for Trump, but some of these women have no college degree, so they probably don't count.

For Steinem, it was the exceptional quality of Clinton's character that lost her her chance. She was too good, too full of integrity, too devoted to women's rights, too un-conning to break through the highest of the glass ceilings.

She hoped but never expected her to win:

“If a first female president were someone like, say, Margaret Thatcher, Sarah Palin, or another woman who knew how to play the game and win, I wouldn't have been surprised. But Hillary Clinton didn't just play the game; she changed the rules. She insisted that women's rights are human rights, that women can decide the fate of our own bodies, that workers of all races should get paid the same as white men for the same work.”

Steinem's plaintive hagiographic obituary of Clinton's defeat omits mentioning that Clinton opposed raising the minimum wage of Haitian workers to 62 cents per hour because it would have lowered the profits of American corporations, exploiting the poorest of the poor there.

It must be difficult for a feminist Democrat to mention Haiti and Clinton Foundation in the same breath, for the racist and sexist profiteering of Bill and Hillary is most nakedly documented there. Its account can be read here.

As to evaluating character, it's been a long time apparently since Steinem read Virginia Woolf's idea of a feminist: "One's life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation and compassion." (*A Room of One's Own*).

These are not the virtues usually associated with the bellicose, corrupt, and ruthlessly ambitious Clinton, even if one refrains from calling her the Butcher of Libya and the Wrath of Honduras, her legacy as Secretary of State.

Clinton incarnates the most ferocious interests of international financial capital and of the high-tech industries that feed the military-industrial complex and the global surveillance system.

So, Gloria, yours is stupid stuff. If feminism is not about the pursuit of peace, it is simply the female version of patriarchal exploitation and opportunism. Weep not that she lost; weep that feminism has sunk so low as to celebrate in her person anti-feminist qualities such as ambition, careerism, competition, imperialism, and warmongering.

Such feminism has lost the moral ground to accuse anyone of sexism, let alone the people who voted for Trump.

It is now evident that identity politics, the mantra of race and gender, has been cultivated by the neoliberal order to obscure the category of class, while actually waging class war, and to relegate the working poor to the realm of the unmentionable.

Under worsening economic conditions, masses of the alienated have perceived their alienation. This is happening all over the neoliberally ravaged world. To side with the elite against the rage of the people is madness. Worse, it is to alienate the people further to the right in a classic social dynamic that, under severe conditions, delivers full-blown fascism