

One year since the election of Donald Trump

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One year ago today, on November 8, 2016, Republican candidate Donald Trump won the US presidential election. Despite losing the popular vote by nearly three million, Trump defeated Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton in the Electoral College by means of narrow victories in the industrial states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

The *World Socialist Web Site* published a Marxist analysis of Trump's victory within hours of the votes being counted. We wrote:

The victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential election is a political earthquake that has exposed before the entire world the terminal crisis of American democracy. Such is the degeneration of bourgeois rule that it has elevated an obscene charlatan and billionaire demagogue to the highest office in the land. Whatever conciliatory phrases he may issue in the coming days, a president Trump will lead a government of class war, national chauvinism, militarism and police state violence... Under Trump, America will not be made "great again." It will be driven into the dirt.

The tumultuous events of the ensuing 12 months have richly vindicated this assessment. Trump selected a cabinet of billionaires, generals and far-right ideologues. He set as his main goal in domestic policy the enrichment of his own class of wealthy parasites through deregulation and a massive tax cut for corporate America. He worked to create a basis for authoritarian rule, appealing to the police, the military, the Border Patrol and ICE, and torch-bearing fascists like those who rioted in Charlottesville, Virginia. He embarked on a foreign policy based on militarism and

the threat of nuclear war.

The corporate-controlled media and the Democratic politicians treat Trump as though he represents a deviation from the norm of capitalist politics. But far from representing an aberration, his presidency is the product of tendencies that have been developing for decades, above all the colossal growth of social and economic inequality and 25 years of virtually uninterrupted war. Both of these hallmarks of American capitalism and its two-party system are incompatible with the maintenance of democratic forms of rule.

The United States is an oligarchy in which real political power is wielded by an unelected cabal of billionaires, intelligence operatives and generals. Trump is the representative of these reactionary forces.

Both of these processes—mushrooming economic inequality and rampant militarism—are characteristic of world capitalism as a whole, and not limited to the United States, although they find perhaps their most pernicious and grotesque expression on Wall Street and in Washington.

Trump is himself part of an international process, in which demagogues of the far right have profited politically from the worst economic crisis of capitalism since the 1930s. The Alternative for Germany; Le Pen in France; the ultra-right parties in Austria, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Italy; and the leading role of UKIP in the Brexit vote in Britain are all phenomena of a similar character.

The seeming paradox that the capitalist crisis has strengthened the right and not the nominal left in the spectrum of bourgeois politics must be understood in class terms. The official "left" parties, whether they call themselves Social Democratic, Labor or the Democratic Party in the United States, long ago turned their backs on the concerns of working people and have adopted austerity policies that benefit the financial elite. An enormous political vacuum has been created

that has been filled initially by ultra-right and semi-fascist elements using right-wing populist demagoguery to appeal to grievances over declining living standards and the loss of decent full-time jobs.

The 2016 US election registered massive disaffection and anger with the entire political establishment, expressed in the rise of “insurgent” candidates in both the Democratic and Republican parties. Some 13 million people, mainly young people and workers, voted for Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries because Sanders called himself a socialist and claimed to be leading a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class.” His role was to channel mass social discontent back into the dead end of the Democratic Party, an assignment he completed by endorsing Hillary Clinton.

Trump was able to rally support among sections of workers devastated by decades of plant closures and mass layoffs by billing himself as an opponent of the establishment and playing on the disgust and disillusionment generated by eight years of an Obama administration that oversaw the biggest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in US history and escalated US military aggression overseas.

Clinton ran as the continuator of Obama, the candidate of the status quo, allowing Trump to exploit mass discontent. The desire for change could not find any progressive outlet within the straitjacket of the corporate-controlled two-party system.

This mass discontent has been further fueled by Trump’s record since the election. His inauguration was followed by the largest protests in American history, erupting in virtually every major city. Hundreds of thousands have opposed Trump’s attacks on immigrants, his gagging of environmental scientists, his threats against social programs, including health care, and his open encouragement of racists and fascists. Trump’s standing in opinion polls is the lowest of any first-year president in modern history.

Every step of the way, the Democrats have sought to divert opposition to Trump into right-wing and pro-war channels, using bogus charges of Russian interference in the 2016 election to push the administration towards a more belligerent policy towards Moscow and demand Internet censorship to clamp down on any expression of political dissent.

A year after the election, the two capitalist parties that

share and alternate political power in America are both in deep crisis. Republican senators denounce Trump as a threat to democracy, while fascistic Trump allies like Stephen Bannon target the party establishment and align themselves with street violence by white supremacists and neo-Nazis. The Democratic Party is riven by conflicts between the Clinton and Sanders wings. Both parties are widely despised by working people as tools of corporate interests.

The entire bourgeois political spectrum has shifted drastically to the right in every major capitalist country. But the sentiments of the mass of working people and youth have moved in the opposite direction—to the left. In May, a majority of people between the ages of 18 and 35 polled by the Union of European Broadcasters said they would participate in a “large-scale uprising” against the status quo. In October, a similar poll in the United States found that more American young people favored socialism or communism than capitalism.

The profit system is incapable of providing good-paying jobs for working people or decent public services. It is driven to attack democratic rights and carry out increasingly bloody wars on a regional and ultimately global scale. Hundreds of millions of people already sense the conflict between the global financial elite and their own class interests. As the crisis deepens, they must become politically conscious of that conflict and fight it out.

The day after Trump’s election, the *World Socialist Web Site* declared, “The coming period will be one of shock, outrage and increasingly bitter struggles.”

The experience of the past year confirms the correctness of this prediction. The central question in this unfolding political crisis is the building of a new revolutionary leadership of the working class, in the United States and in every country, committed to developing a mass struggle for a socialist and internationalist perspective.



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