

United States - Build and Fight: Beyond Trump and the Limitations of the United Front

Tuesday 7 February 2017, by [AKUNO Kali](#), [NORBERG Doug](#) (Date first published: 6 February 2017).

On Inauguration Day, we note the considerable range of the opposition to Trump, from traditional activists to very mainstream folks. In many respects the opposition mounted was unprecedented, on a day where patriotic and jingoistic hyperbole is typically concentrated and loudly broadcast more than at any other time, and when, traditionally, new Presidents make appeals to the heart and to democratic unity while all who know how false the claims are bite their lips, party, and hope for the best.

The opposition struggling to find expression is broad and deep. But, nearly all expressions of opposition are resorting to traditional methods of reformist oriented protest while millions of people throughout the United States and the world are discussing and debating how they are going to survive and resist the emerging Presidential regime of Donald Trump and the rise of right-wing populism and a resurgent “America first” white nationalism.

Given the nature of Trump’s politics and how he came to power, comparisons abound between him and Hitler. Some of these comparisons are compelling; several are strategically and tactically instructive for our present predicament. But, while most activists focus on how and why Trump captured the Presidency, or the nature of an ascending neo-Confederacy, most do not address the crisis itself. Nor what the crisis practically implies and when, where, and how the Left and the people’s movements can and must intervene to produce desired outcomes.

The crisis in question is the crisis of the capitalist world-system, which has entered a profound state of economic and ecological imbalance, social instability, inter-imperialist infighting, mass displacement, increased suffering, and rampant carnage not experienced on this scale at a global level since the 1930’s. By every measure the world-system is set for another major global calamity, but with even higher stakes, given the depth of the climate and ecological crisis produced by the exploit-and -plunder, expand-or-die capitalist mode of production. The result? Given the present balance of forces throughout the world, we may be facing another great inter-imperialist war that will result in massive destruction and the likely creation of a new “pecking order” of the capitalist world system as occurred in the 1940’s—or will produce no imperialist winners, but only result in dystopian barbarism, the collapse of “civilization”, and the likely fulfillment of the 6th great extinction event that many are coming to see as virtually inevitable.

We have to ask ourselves, are there other options? Other possibilities? And if there are, what must we do to bring these into being?

We have to start with a clear understanding that the “liberal” center of the world-system is exhausted, bankrupt, and cannot hold. Resistance is growing and is just beginning to develop a revolutionary imagination, and address the imperative need for revolutionary organization and strategic focus. The relatively spontaneous, reactive, and largely reform-minded movements we see in North America and Europe, from the center-left (liberals and social democrats) and the right

against the predominant neo-liberal order, reveals that there is tremendous potential for change. However, the change will only be substantive and beneficial to humanity if what replaces our present unethical and inequitable world is truly emancipatory. Spontaneity will not get us there, nor will the liberals, centrists, or the resurgent forces of the right. A revolutionary force is needed, one that is not yet born.

The salvation of the human family is up to us—the revolutionary left and the people’s movements. We must find a way to align and unite our fragmented forces, and form a revolutionary, counter-hegemonic force. Some of the fundamental questions confronting emergent revolutionary forces are: how will the developing anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle be unified? How will the revolutionary political forces develop and struggle? And where should and will they aim their strategic focus?

As these forces develop and struggle for political and strategic clarity, they will have to confront and overcome the demons that have weakened revolutionary forces over the last several hundred years: lack of internal democracy, hierarchy, sexism, patriarchy, heterosexism, Eurocentrism and settler-colonialism, white supremacy, xenophobia, the mental/manual division of labor, electoral fixations, economism, revisionism, and reformism. While all of these issues are of equal weight, the last three issues are of particular short-term concern in the U.S. context. If the struggle against them is mishandled, it will result in the emerging resistance movement being subject to the agenda of the liberal faction of U.S. imperialism, the Democratic Party.

The paramount question is, how do we play a leading role in facilitating and directing the current motion of resistance and transform it into a revolutionary movement? The orthodox left answer in times and conditions similar to these is to organize “popular,” “united,” or “national” fronts to unite all who can be united in the struggle against fascism. But these calls rarely take into account the inequality or lack of political parity of the “uniting” forces, and have usually blurred or ignored the difference between the fundamental unity required in strategic alliances, and the temporary or limited unity of tactical alliances. United fronts (in which all parties agree to subordinate or postpone their “secondary issues”) are necessary to mount massive campaigns of resistance against right-wing dictatorships and/or fascist regimes; but they have proven woefully inadequate as vehicles of revolutionary social transformation. They are therefore necessary tactically for defense, but insufficient for the purposes of strategically advancing a revolutionary program.

At best, “united fronts” are instruments for restoring the status quo ante, which in our case is the neo-liberal capitalist-imperialist order that has dominated U.S. political economy since the 1980’s. The failure of this order created the political vacuum that produced Trump and the resurgence of white nationalism and neo-fascism. Restoring the failed neo-liberal order is no solution. Nor is the attempt to campaign for the restoration of the welfare or social democratic state a solution, as it was (and is) a strategy to maximize profits and pacify and disempower the working class.

Many of the current liberal, progressive, and left-leaning discussions about how to resist Trump and the neo-Confederates reflect the limitations of this “united front” approach. Some, like Sanders and Nader, project a combination left-right unity for economic collaboration with the emerging neo-fascist regime. Other democratic pundits strike a laissez-faire “populist” tone, exemplified by Politico, saying “the most likely outcome of this Republican government is probably failure, which is a horrible thing for the country but actually a very convenient one for the Democratic Party. So follow that strategy, disassociate yourself from the outcomes, wait for the government to collapse and then you’re in power again.” It’s the old mad illusion of democratic pendulum swings, but with a caveat:

“this is bad for the country and the way things go badly might result in horrific tragedies, so that’s a

grim prospect, but if you're simply analyzing the political calculation, that's available to the Democrats.... at times they're going to have to balance their political interests against policy outcomes. So if you have a chance to bargain with the Trump regime, in a way that averts humanitarian catastrophe, you could trade away some of your political leverage to do so, to negotiate minor details on Obamacare so that you can avoid subjecting millions of people to hardship, then that's probably worth doing. Climate would be another area where that kind of bargain is worth doing—giving them bipartisan cover in order to mitigate the damage of the policy agenda. But otherwise, if you're just analyzing what's in the political best interest, it's almost never to cooperate."

Such arguments are promoted by liberal Democratic figures and echoed by reform-careerists, in order to hold more privileged "middle-class" folks to a loyalist agenda, and in order to silence more radical and demanding activists and critics. In other words, Democrats should ride the discontent and direct it toward non-involvement with Trump initiatives, so the pendulum will swing back mechanically to the Democratic Party retaking power. Many will, (unfortunately in this view) be thrown under the bus—"for the common good."



This argument appeals to the reform left who, long accustomed to playing the single-issue reformist game a la "NGOism," will fit right in and help throw radicals and all manner of anti-system activists—like those struggling against the police, prisons, poor education, inadequate health and childcare, substandard and unaffordable housing, gentrification, domestic violence, anti-surveillance, whistleblower, animal rights, transphobia, climate justice, Islamophobia, BDS, anti-fascism, etc.—under the bus for "the greater good", so as not to spoil the "strategic deal" of a projected pendulum reversal.

But the views of the millions "thrown under the bus" historically and today are not unknown, though routinely denied, dismissed, deemed divisive, and often outright criminalized. Many activists are easily swayed by such arguments, in part because of decades of single-issue reformism, and also the utility of commonplace appeals to "united fronts" historically, which have not been critically examined. In times of great capitalist crisis, severe systemic repressions combined with age-old oppressions throw many people on the defensive, and often move many to be dismissive of attempts at revolutionary challenges to the system. In such a time it's crucial to examine these illusory "pragmatic" maneuvers (surrenders) against the reality, from the perspective of those who have been, and will be, thrown under the bus: the unmentionables and untouchables throughout the US political arenas.

We have to counter the narrowness of the standard "united front" approach and build a political force and a social movement that aims for social and economic emancipation, and not just a restoration of the "good ole bad days" of the Obama era or the 1950's and 60's. This force must be built by the broad totality of the working class in all of its (ethnic, racial, national, spiritual, and gender) diversity, serve its broad interests, and be self-organized and self-directed.

By working class, we do not mean a narrow, monolithic subject of the old, idealized, white, heterosexual, male-bodied, industrial worker. The working class encompasses all those who are structurally dispossessed from owning and controlling the means of production, and who are

dependent upon selling their labor, labor power, or their bodies and reproductive capacity in order to survive. This includes everyone from computer programmers to sex workers, from teachers and waged-slaved doctors (both traditional and alternative) to farm workers, from prisoners to the structurally unemployed, and to the vast numbers of unrecognized “gray market” workers in household, caregiving, home and auto maintenance, food preparation, and others.

Given the increasing automation of production, this force must call for and organize a liberatory program based on the decolonization of land and knowledge systems, the democratization of the productive forces, the full automation of the productive forces, the decarbonization of the economy, the full democratization of markets and the processes of value exchange, and a regenerative social order based on zero-waste and the restoration of the biosphere.

This is not a vision and a program that can be led and advanced by a narrowly focused “united” or “popular” front and the convoluted class interests that such unequal alliances represent. Given the urgency of the situation, particularly from an ecological perspective, the universal interests of the working class cannot be entrusted to and constricted by liberal bourgeois forces of privilege, who historically tend to dominate popular and united fronts with their positionality and resources, and who often intentionally work to dilute and obscure the politics of struggle for social (class, national, racial, sexual, and gender) liberation in order to sustain their position and preserve the bourgeois order.

The key to understanding and acting in a revolutionary manner in a period of profound social instability and upheaval is to recognize and rally forces to the strategic emancipatory opportunity, even while uniting broadly for defense against the serious threats and attacks. The fragmentation of power, of social hegemony, means that there is space for revolutionary interjection, intervention, and innovation from subaltern class forces. What we lack is the organization, resources, and initiative to intervene in a sustained and determined manner.

But these are not normal times, and opportunities to to seize the initiative can be found and created. Capitalism is driving humanity and all complex life on earth to the brink of extinction. Trump, the Tea-Party neo-Confederates, and the rising neo-Fascist forces throughout the world are just a reflection of this dynamic of collapse. The situation demands that we, the Left and the People’s Movements, rise to the occasion. Although profoundly difficult, history says we can. Let us make this era the most luminous period in human history.

We can.

We must.

We will.

Kali Akuno and Doug Norberg, February 6, 2017

P.S.

* <http://solidarity-us.org/site/node/4894>