

A letter from North America - Trump and After

Tuesday 14 February 2017, by [TATE "Ernie" Ernest](#) (Date first published: 9 February 2017).

One of the most important areas of work for socialists in Europe in the period of Trump will be to establish ongoing working political relationships with comrades in the US and Canada. To that end Left Unity will increase our coverage of politics across the pond. We will begin with a new 'letter from North America' courtesy of Ernie Tate. Ernie is a lifelong revolutionary who emigrated to Canada from Northern Ireland as a young man. In the 1960s working in Britain he was one of the most important activists of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. He has recently produced a two volume memoir of that period, "Revolutionary Activism of the 1950s and 1960s", published by Resistance Books. Now at the age of 82 and living in Toronto he is still active and an acute observer of the political scene. Ernie will send us his thoughts twice monthly. This is his first instalment written to Phil Hearse his longtime friend and comrade.

Thanks, Phil. Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. A very good statement! I like it very much. You synthesize the general trends very well. It's important to highlight, as you do, the scale of the shift and its international dimensions and the dangers we face. It will be invaluable in laying the basis for a good discussion, and just as importantly, help us to get a handle on what's going on. At least the radical left should be alerted that it cannot be business as usual and we must find ways to confront the new danger. Consider this note - rather long — as a contribution to the discussion.

Humanity has certainly entered an alarmingly dangerous time and we should all be fearful for the future, but not only because of the Trump ascendancy and the rise of hard right around the globe but because of how the U.S. has been arming itself over the past period. In his last defense budget, for example, Obama, without much public notice being taken of it, assigned \$1.2 trillion to "improve" their nuclear weapons and missile system, an unimaginable amount by any standard. And now within a couple of weeks of the election more than half the country - and the world - is on a war footing!

The total madness of it all was brought home to us recently when we were in Miami and switched on the T.V. to hear the panelists on various news channels talking about "how better our missiles and nukes are compared to theirs" and how "our defense system can stop theirs", and such like. One high-level military figure even warned that the danger of war has never been higher. I think we've been so preoccupied with the environmental crises we've tended to forget this kind of threat and it's clearly the more immediate danger. Significantly *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* has adjusted the hands on its clock to two and a half minutes before midnight, the closest it has been in several decades. This should tell us something about the dangers we face.

It's been amazing what's been happening in the U.S. since the Trump insurgency, really a hard-

right-coup inside the Republican Party. The political crisis continues as the party hierarchy try to get him back on track and it is playing out on T.V. every day. The Trump gang are on a mission to remake the party to incorporate the new right-wing elements that the election campaign coalesced across the country. Steve Bannon, cynically and ironically enough, talks about this as being a new movement of “working people”. We can be sure it won’t be movement “for” working people. Whether they need such a movement or whether it will ever get off the ground is another question however. Does the ruling class really require it at this stage? They’ve been very successful with their existing two-party system. It has worked very well. In addition, they must be aware that once you induce that kind of crises, there are high risks to their rule. Recent weeks have shown that there’s massive, if relatively unorganized, opposition everywhere and the serious possibility of new radical forces entering the political arena, although the unions still, despite everything, appear very quiescent. But it’s certainly an opening for the left as political issues can be avoided in the broader society.

It’s hard to predict what’s going to happen. It’s a political crisis, the likes of which we haven’t seen in a very long time. And every time you switch on the T.V. you see it. The media in their majority, as far as I can see, are extremely nervous about their new president. He’s so unpredictable. But it’s quite unlike the time of the Joe McCarthy witch-hunt, the last time there was this kind of shift to the right when the liberals ran for cover almost immediately he made his appearance. And it’s not just the radicals in the streets who are protesting. Hollywood, which in its time was on board with McCarthy, now seems to be in total opposition to Trump. Every awards ceremony sees major actors taking the stage to denounce the regime.

The political mood in the United States has changed dramatically over the course of the past year. It has all come upon us very quickly. Traditionally, at least up until this year, election times and for a period after, have usually been difficult period for the left to attention. In normal times, we’ve found in the past, it usually takes a while for people to recover to get back to political activity. But this year it has been very, very, different. The mobilization of women in Washington and all over the country on January 21st was truly incredible - of historic proportions and quite spontaneous, with millions participating, in cities and small towns everywhere, even in remote areas. They were larger than the largest demonstrations at the time of the Vietnam War, and involving whole new layers who have clearly never been on the streets before.

The mobilizations have been virtually continuous since the inauguration and have found their expression all over the world, according to the press. And we’ve experienced it here in Toronto. We were taken completely by surprise, pleasantly so, as was most of the left, by a mobilization of over 40,000 by our estimate (the press claimed 60,000!), made up of mainly young women, in solidarity with the Washington action. We later found out it had been organized on very short notice - mainly through social media — by a handful of women who were as surprised as everyone else by its success: they had only applied for a permit for 2,000 participants! And this past Saturday we attended another one again, against the ban on refugees - about 10,000 turned out this time on relatively short notice and on a very cold day — which is huge for here -with most of the participants again being mainly young people.

There have never been demonstrations like these for many, many years. They are truly historic. I think the mood among many young people that underlay the initial appearance of the Occupy movement was never fully extinguished. For sure it found its expression in the Sanders campaign. We seem to be entering a new period when the left, despite the difficulties, can grow but only if it can get its act together. At the minimum, there are certainly tens of thousands of new people in North America who are now ready to listen to what it has to say. It’s certainly a better time than we’ve had in a long while to win new adherents to our ideas.

Ernie Tate

Comment

Chris Schenk

February 10, 2017 at 2:52 pm

I agree with Ernie's points. Yet I would add a further contribution regarding the ban on immigrants from 7 muslim majority countries. Demonstrations have been held all over the US against the ban, often at airports, and several challenges have been upheld by the courts. The quickness, size and geographical spread of these demos are significant and mesh with Ernie's comments on opportunities for the left.

P.S.

* <http://leftunity.org/a-letter-from-north-america-trump-and-after/>