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USA

Trump's first week

- IV Online magazine - 2017 - IV504 - January 2017 -

Publication date: Monday 30 January 2017

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A mere week into his presidential term Donald Trump has created an enormous protest movement. Across the US protestors invaded airports on Sunday in protest at his Executive Order banning travelers from seven premoninantly-Muslim countries. The protest have apread elsewhere and over a million people in Bortin have signed a petition calling for the invitation to Trump to pay an official state visit be withdraw. David Finkel, editor of *Against the Current* and Joanna Misnik leading member of Solidarity gave us their opinion on the current situation.

What are your initial reactions to Trump's first decisions ?

Trump's executive orders, 14 in the first week, seek to implement his campaign promises and demonstrate his worth as the unique leader who will "make America great again." His announcements, interviews and alarming immature behavior are sometimes bewildering even to his inner circle of top staff, who have difficulty explaining their meaning or covering for his outright lying. A new phrase has entered the American lexicon: alternative facts.

Some of his announcements make no sense: planning to precipitously move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, making absurd claims about the size of his inaugural crowd and insisting that three million votes cast in the election were illegal. Others are vicious but predictably part and parcel of an agenda to satisfy supporters in the disparate sectors of the extreme and religious right: cancelling immigration visas, massive attack on abortion rights, wiping away the EPA's climate change web page, threatening to cut federal funds for cities that don't cooperate in anti-immigrant sweeps, reauthorizing the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipeline, and, of course, the infamous wall on the border.

Opposition to Trump's anti-immigrant policies has been swift in coming. Mayors of large U.S. cities – New York, Chicago, Portland, Los Angeles and many others – proclaimed they will continue to be Sanctuary Cities for immigrants no matter what the reprisals from the federal government. Demonstrations have erupted throughout the country, particularly in cities in the Southwest, and now at major airports where refugees and green card holders from seven banned predominantly Muslim countries are being held.

In his second week, Trump will announce his nominee to fill the vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court. The Republicans are determined to utilize a majority on that Court to roll back the Roe v. Wade legalization of abortion and to hand down decisions that seek to severely weaken the rights of workers to representation by a union. In this first phase, the majority of the U.S. trade union leadership has followed the self-defeating course of a wait and see attitude rather than joining the movement for solidarity and resistance. Still to come are the Republican budget proposals, which by initial reports will test the outer limits of economic lunacy. This is a very dangerous moment.

How did the big demos of last Saturday emerge?

We knew that Trump was the most despised incoming occupant of the White House in modern history. The women's demonstration was initiated by an individual Face book post and was rapidly incorporated by an organizing committee which, although clearly tied to the Democratic Party, was admirable in its centering of Black, Muslim, LGBTQ and general feminist concerns. The event itself was one of those occasions that surpasses all expectations, not only in Washington DC but in big and medium-size cities all over the country, and internationally. This was a spontaneous outpouring of women of all ages showing outrage and making a clear statement of determination not to go backward. The majority of very creative placards in the marches were hand-made by the women carrying them.

Participation throughout the U.S. was at least 3.5 million. To a considerable extent the planned marches didn't even happen because the streets were completely filled. The speakers at the Washington rally were excellent, but most of the people were nowhere close enough to hear them!

The demos seemed to be a broad convergence of all US protest movements, against Trump not also for equal rights, the environment, against police violence. How can this convergence continue and build itself.

We can say that these demonstrations picked up where the height of the Occupy movement left off. Where they may lead is an open question. It's important to recognize that the anti-capitalist left can importantly contribute to this development, but can in no way "lead" it. A stable, broad convergence of all the movements and organizations that oppose this new regime remains to be constructed. At this stage, a wide variety of activities are in motion, many of which are aimed at pressuring the Democratic Party and its elected officials to take a serious oppositional stance. Historically this has been a fairly fruitless exercise. Today's neoliberal Democratic Party may fight back on certain issues, if only to avoid extinction. But for the most part the Democrats are still saying they will seek to work with Trump where they can "to bring America together."

In local areas, nonpartisan coalitions to fight Trumpism have developed. Their focus is not on the Democrats, but on a new independent locus of resistance. We hope to build on these models as Trump times get tougher and the Democrats increasingly disappoint those who are now lobbying them to lead.

The movement must be prepared to defend its most vulnerable sectors: For example, there are threats to "investigate" Black Lives Matter in McCarthyite fashion. Undocumented immigrants face terrifying prospects. At the same time, the white working class sector of Trump's voting base is going to be savagely hit by the pending destruction of health insurance, Social Security and Medicare. The anti-Trump movement must have a message to reach them so that they don't fall deeper into racist illusions. Here again the timidity and disorganization of the trade union movement is a major obstacle. Construction unions for example support Trump's ecocidal oil pipeline policies, and some workers buy into the myth that protectionism will "bring back America's industries and jobs."

What are the perspectives for the anti-Trump movement?

There are a wide variety of activities, more than coherent "perspectives." Every Tuesday there are supposed to be activities that amount mostly to formal or informal congressional lobbying. Nationally, there is a major environmental mobilization planned for April 29 (in Washington DC and perhaps the West Coast). Enraged by attacks on their right to inform the public, scientists working for the federal government are planning a March for Science, date to be determined. Plans are underway for April 15, the day income taxes are due, especially around Trump's refusal to disclose his tax returns as all other presidents have. And the annual Pride March in June will clearly be much larger. It would be logical – although we don't know yet – for the massive Latino-led immigrant rights mobilizations of ten years ago to revive around May 1. Because much of what Trump is doing is unpredictable, we should expect the unexpected both in terms of attacks and resistance.

A point that deserves mention is that much of the bourgeois media are more opposed to Trump than to any previous president. Any number of scandals will be dug up. The implications cannot be known in advance. Speculation already abounds about when the ruling elite will collide with Trump and decide he is an impediment to the greatness they seek for their country.

Where is the left movement created by Sanders campaign today ?

Predictably, much of the Sanders base was incorporated into the Clinton campaign. Regrettably, the Jill Stein/Ajamu

Baraka Green Party campaign did not make a big breakthrough, winning only around 1% of the vote. In the wake of the election, Bernie Sanders launched his Our Revolution organization which attempts to remold the Democratic Party as a progressive populist force. There is some unhappiness among his supporters with this straitjacketed perspective and some former Bernie staffers and stalwarts have defected and are offering very public critiques of remaining in the Democratic Party. But most of Sanders supporters, like the majority of those who poured into the streets on January 21, are attempting to make the Democrats stand up and fight against Trump.

In terms of the left, the fact that Bernie Sanders popularized the idea of socialism, followed by the shock of the election, has galvanized a layer of people toward socialist politics. In the first place, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)– the closest thing to a traditional social-democratic formation in the USA since the fragmentation of the Socialist Party in the early 1970s – has seen an influx of thousands of new members. They have grown from 7,000 to 14,000 in a matter of several months. After years of stagnation DSA is suddenly a locus of left politics that cannot be overlooked. On a considerably smaller scale, organizations on the revolutionary left including Solidarity have also grown. The test for all of us on the anti-capitalist and revolutionary left will be how to respond to (with no pretensions of vanguard “leadership”) the hundreds of thousands of people horrified by the Trump and white-supremacist rightwing ascendancy, and those among them gravitating toward left and socialist ideas.