

Trump's contradictions and the future of the Left

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The first 100 days of Trump's presidency did not resemble the honeymoon normally enjoyed by newly elected leaders of the United States. The severity and aggressiveness of the debate was unprecedented. Liberals threw at Trump all of their hatred, while the conservative public – all of its delight. Opinions in Russia are split roughly along the same lines as they are in America.

The situation on the Left is much more complex. While some repeat, like well-trained parrots, the talking points of liberal propaganda about Trump's agenda being racist and homophobic, passionately quoting the CNN and the *New York Times*, the others, exhibit at least some schadenfreude about the disintegration of Democratic Party, and the collapse of free trade agreements. However, even in the last case, the discussion, with a few exceptions, does not go beyond the question of whether we like or do not like the 45th president of the US and his decisions.

Assessments of Trump's personality, and even actions, are the last thing we need if we are to understand the perspectives of his term as a president of the US. We would be much better served by an analysis of the processes unfolding before us. Meanwhile, the decisions the new president has made so far are clear evidence of the contradictory character of his policies. Trump and his entourage, perhaps, have not realized the extent of the problem yet, but the future course of events will force them to do so.

The wavering of Senator Bernie Sanders, who expresses approval of the decisions of the White House one day, while unleashing a fierce criticism the very next, is revealing in its own way.

In fact, a number of actions and statements by Donald Trump put him on par with the anti-globalists who protested in Seattle in 1999. But his other decisions and statements unequivocally portray the president as not just a conservative, but as an ardent supporter of the free market and liberal economic doctrines.

On the one hand, Trump cancels Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement and insists on revising NAFTA, the embodiment of neoliberal principles. He berates NATO, talks about Canada-style public health insurance, calls for lower drug prices and even pushes through the congress six

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weeks parental leave for women, something never achieved by any Democratic administration with the reputation of being pro-feminist. The president meets with trade unionists at the White House and discusses joint efforts to create jobs. But on the same day, Trump cancels restrictions and regulations governing the activities of the major Wall Street banks, while negotiations on the price control of medicines turn into promises to lower taxes for manufacturers.

The nomination of Betsy DeVos as a head of the Department of Education was a complete scandal. And not only because of her conservative views, but also because the lady who was put in charge of the public schools, was in a sharp conflict with the professional community – how does this fit in with the promise to return power to the people?

It is most likely, though, that from Trump's point of view, there is no contradiction. Yes, Betsy DeVos and teachers experience mutual hatred, but on the other hand, she is in agreement with the most ignorant part of parents, who are confident that the less children learn in school, the better it is for them.

President, like most of his voters, does not believe in global warming, but he believes in free markets and low taxes. At the same time, he believes that the US domestic market should be protected from unfair foreign competition. Simply speaking: liberalism for "our own" protectionism from the "strangers".

This is exactly how American capitalism was developing in the first third of the 20th century.

Alas, the times have changed. Transnational capital, formed by the end of the twentieth century, has changed the rules of the game not only globally, but also in the domestic market. These new rules brought the world to the current systemic crisis. The collapse of the neo-liberal world order is a spontaneous and natural process, generated by its own self-destructive logic, and not by the ideological views of anti-globalists or Trump. Ironically, globalization by weakening and destroying domestic markets, the public sector and the welfare state undermined global demand. Weaker states in the long run mean that we are going to experience not more economic growth and faster expansion of international trade, but on the contrary we are ending up with global stagnation. This process of decay began long before the arrival of the current President in the White House. The victory of Trump is itself a consequence of the crisis, which has already fully unfolded and penetrated into all pores of the society. To the dismay of liberal intellectuals in London, Moscow and New York, this decay is irreversible. Either you change the system or things will only get worse, whether you like it or not. In 2016, politics finally synchronized with the economics.

The principal difference between the 45th US president and his liberal opponents is not that he does not believe in globalization, but that he is aware of its collapse, and therefore does not attempt to save the crumbling system, but seeks to build a new policy which would take the new reality into consideration. The question is: which direction this policy will take.

If the collapse of the old system is, to some extent, a natural process, at least at the economic level, the formation of a new social order does not happen automatically. As a consequence of his intent to reconsider the rules of the game, Trump is faced with the need to introduce his own positive program. And here he inevitably faces the objective contradiction between the interests of different social and economic groups which see the necessity of change.

Consistent implementation of protectionist policies intended to restore the internal market will not be effective without measures aimed at regulation and reconstruction of the US economy. One may call for re-industrialization of the United States on the basis of market principles, but the nature of these principles objectively prevents them from resolving this problem. If the situation were different, not only would the problem have been already solved to a certain extent, but also Trump would probably not have had a chance to occupy the Oval Office at the White House.

Attempts to balance the budget by increasing import duties, while reducing taxes to encourage production without reducing profits of financial corporations and raise wages of workers without affecting the interests of entrepreneurs, sooner or later will lead the US president's policies to a logical impasse. It will be impossible to come out of it without making a political choice in favor of one party or another. Contradictions are only worsening as the government is forced to make decisions on matters of foreign policy, provoking disagreements and crises within the administration.

In fact, the contradictions of Trump's policy reflect the contradictions within the broad cross-class coalition that brought him to the White House. No matter what the liberal pundits say, these were the votes of workers who brought him the victory. Not the so-called "white men", but the working class, who openly and, largely, in solidarity, made a stand against the Washington establishment. To a large extent his election campaign reproduced the ideas and slogans of the Left. The Republican candidate was supported by farmers, clerks and provincial intelligentsia. This really was an uprising of the forgotten and resentful provincial America against the spoiled people in California and the cosmopolitan officials from Washington, who comfortably exploit cheap labor of illegal migrants, against the liberal elite, who turned their back on their own country long time ago.

It's not surprising that we're seeing a rise of the working class. But a substantial part of the bourgeoisie is also unhappy with the current situation. Donald Trump is not a worker or a farmer. He and his entourage are very typical representatives of a medium size American enterprise which is tied to the domestic market and is in conflict with transnational corporations.

All groups that have supported him were equally offended and humiliated by the policies pursued by the metropolitan liberals and were interested in reconsideration of these policies. They all need protectionism. But at this point their unity ends. The interests of classes and groups, who led Trump to the White House, do not coincide in the positive part of the program.

Trump's attacks on political correctness are by no means a manifestation of his personal feelings, his lack of restraint and rudeness; it's a deliberate strategy to consolidate the social groups that have suffered under the dictatorship of political correctness. No matter how different they are, all of them have been hit financially, losing incomes, jobs and revenues.

Trump's propaganda is effective, not because, as intellectuals believe, it resonates with the feelings and prejudices of the people, but because it reflects their real interests, even if expressed in a distorted form. Even Trump's statements that seem ridiculous and anecdotal, such as the promise to build a wall to fence off Mexico, are not totally without meaning. Building the wall would create hundreds of thousands of jobs, not only in the US but also on

the opposite side of the border. In fact, it's a Keynesian project, even if fairly absurd from the standpoint of ordinary logic.

Of course, there is nothing progressive about Trump's ideology, but this is not about ideology, which is not so much a factor of social mobilization, as a tool for manipulation. The defeat of financial capital, no matter who brings it about, would open a new era in the development of Western society, inevitably strengthening the working class, and reviving its organizations. The change is under way, not only because of the political and social logic, but also due to the fact that all possibilities of maintaining the current neo-liberal model of capitalism have been exhausted. If the left is unwilling or unable to fight, it will be the right-wing populists like Donald Trump in the US or Marine Le Pen in France who strike the fatal blow against it. Some people will be outraged at the "prejudice" and "irresponsibility" of the working class, but the real moral responsibility would still lie with the leftist intellectuals, who, in times of crisis, will have demonstrated their class position by advocating and defending the interests of financial capital.

Trump formed a broad coalition for change, something leftists used to talk about for decades but never achieved in practice (and did not even try seriously to achieve). This is what populism is about and this is what made Trump's victory possible in the first place.

The ability to unite a broad cross-class coalition around a single leader or a party has always been the main source of strength for the populist movements. However, the objective contradictions of class interests have invariably been their stumbling block. The long-term success, and often the physical survival of populist leaders have always depended on whether they were able to, by changing the configuration and maneuvering, prevent the collapse of the block they lead. Would the leader be able to reshape it on the go, making a choice in favor of the correct forces at the right moment? Sooner or later the necessity will arise not only to side with one part of his supporters against the other, but also to sacrifice many of his political friends, and sometimes even the interests of his own class.

Donald Trump will inevitably face such choices. Not just a place of 45th president in US history, but also his personal fate, which has potential to be more than dramatic, depends on when, how and for whose benefit he will make these choices. The political and institutional crisis of American society has gone too far. The country is split, and the old order, for the restoration of which the Liberals are clamoring, is not only impossible to restore, but receives blow after blow every day. And the organizers of the liberal opposition campaign are themselves smashing the very public institutions, which they previously have relied upon for their power.

In order to get rid of Trump, they need a coup. Whether this scenario will be tried in the hard (force) or soft (impeachment) variant, it would be a major blow to the institutions of American democracy. And it is exactly the anti-Trump campaign of the Liberals which is creating preconditions for massive populist mobilization of the low class forces that were for decades alienated from politics and rediscovered their strength through voting Trump into the White House.

It can be assumed with good reason that the historic mission of Trump is the destruction of the existing liberal order. The positive work will be performed by other politicians and social movements. But these movements and leaders will only emerging in the struggle that is unfolding today. And how that happens, depends on the fate of Trump and the reforms

initiated by him. In that sense the really important struggle is not about supporting Trump or trying to bring him down but about influencing the course of change initiated by the new administration and fighting for progressive reforms whether they are supported by the White House or opposed by it. A new progressive agenda will be formed by grass-root struggles reflecting the practical needs and interests of working people. And this agenda has nothing to do with the ideology of politically correct liberalism.

Institutional crisis, undermining the existing two-party system in the United States and the dominance of the Washington establishment, creates prospects for the left to participate in serious politics. The sudden success of Bernie Sanders in the primaries in 2016 demonstrated the possible scale of the opportunities. But the Left will only be able to use these opportunities on one condition – if it does not allow the Liberal circles to transform them into political extras fighting to protect the dying order. Otherwise, they will go to the bottom together.

This struggle is not only about the future of America, it dramatically affects the rest of the world, creating new dangers, but also impressive new opportunities for social change in many countries. The more the United States becomes involved in solving its own domestic crisis, the more freedom to act will have anti-establishment political forces elsewhere. But which forces will gain from these new conditions? If the international left wants to win the day, it has to reshape itself dramatically, disconnecting itself from the culture of liberal political correctness and returning to the old principles of class struggle based on real practical interests of the masses.

This is the only way to make the Left great again.

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