



10-12 Rue Guimard
1040 Brussels, Belgium

office@youngsocialists.eu
Tel. +32 (0) 2 548 90 90

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LEARNING FROM TRUMP'S VICTORY IN THE US

Submitted by MJS France and Labour Youth Ireland

Donald Trump's victory in the recent US Presidential elections has come as a surprise to most. It is a frightening development especially for all those in the US who will suffer from the policies that will be implemented in the next year by Donald Trump and the Republican chambers. This campaign has reached an unprecedented level of hate speech against ethnic minorities, women, LGBTI people which is most worrying as this rhetoric has been legitimised by the result of the election. YES sends all its support to progressive activists in the USA, who have led a brave and courageous campaign. We are all the more saddened of these developments as the US have also seen very promising social mobilisations in the past years, for example the fight for 15, the Black Lives Matter movement or Occupy Wall Street.

At this point, it is our utmost responsibility to reflect on the Left's failure in this election, since it has common feature with the situation we live in Europe. We can and should learn lessons from this election and understand why all political levels in the US are now Republican in spite of inequalities and the need for progressive policies.

First, the strategy of the lesser evil does not work. For the left to be successful it needs to carry an ambitious project to transform society, and oppose point by point right wing ideology. Far right movements have never been so successful since the late 1930s, social inequalities are booming and global warming is threatening the very existence of the human race : social democrats cannot hide themselves behind the comfort of reforming at the margins. Only an ambitious progressive project can harness all forces of changes in civil society and among citizens, and win against the neoconservative offensive we are facing. This reality explains why Bernie Sanders' radical project raised so much hope during the Democratic primaries.

Second, social liberalism is an illusion. This election once again demonstrates that socialists cannot consider social and economic inequalities as a marginal issue. Our platform must include a strong criticism of the neoliberal system, of the expansion of the market to all spheres of society, and of the unacceptable power of finance over our lives – and it must offer an alternative to that system. It is clear that in spite of the outraged reactions in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, almost nothing has been done to control financial transactions. Speculation levels are at least as high as they were after 2008, there is still no financial transaction tax in Europe. On the contrary, the response to this crisis of neoliberalism has been more neoliberalism through austerity and the reduction of public spending, the

privatisation of public services, the obsession of deficit rates and the liberalisation of workers' rights, leading to joblessness, precariousness and a degradation in the quality of public services.

Socialist values challenge the capitalist economic system. The transformation of the economic system through wealth redistribution policies, the reinforcement of workers' rights, the development of a social economy, democracy in the workplace and the non-profit sector should be at the core of our platforms, campaigns and actions. In Europe, we need to fight much harder for social and fiscal harmonisation and the implementation of a common minimum wage.

Fighting for more social equality is the only way to counterbalance the hate speech that otherwise gains support because it is wrongly perceived as the only alternative to the current system.

The Clinton campaign failed because they ignored the working class voters that they and other leftist parties have always needed and will always need to win elections. They ran the presidential campaign as establishment insiders, focussed on only attacking Trump's temperament and winning over "educated" rich Republican voters. They offered no positive vision of their own, and ignored the issue of the economy. Their strategy, which fitted with the mindset of leading American Democrats and European social democrats for the past thirty years, failed. Rich Republicans voted in their class interests as they have done in the past and supported Trump. But turnout among Democrats fell, and a large number of worker class voters switched to Trump. Trump became president because Democrats lost a wave of "rust belt" states suffering from deindustrialisation and poor economic prospects. Unions in these states were warning that there was a problem for months. They were ignored, just as they have been ignored by centre-left parties for the past thirty years.

Much talk has been given on the rejection of the system or the elites after the US Presidential election. Trump comes from a very wealthy family and has always had access to all spheres of power, political, economic and in the media. In no way is he "outside the system", he is a very product of the oligarchy, and yet ironically he benefitted from an anti-elite speech. It is not that much elites in themselves that are rejected but the fact they are perceived as one homogeneous bloc, regardless of their political obedience. Politicians are seen as a class protecting its own interests instead of serving the people they are elected by. This conception is fuelled by the fact that most of the times politicians come from similar social backgrounds, have been in the same schools and universities, and are well connected with economic elites. The fact that there is less and less difference in the economic policies pursued by the right and the left, and that they sometimes even do it together, reinforces this assumption.

It is thus urgent for social democrats to distinguish themselves from conservatives and neoliberals both in their political discourse and actions. The third way and social-liberalism have been illusions that we must put behind us. We must be ready to lead the fight against the power of big businesses, for wealth redistribution. Only that way will the people's vote transform into an actual voice.

Furthermore, we should also question ourselves on the internal dynamics that lead the same people to the most powerful political positions. Our parties cannot be allowed to continue as hollowed out machines built only around PR and electoral organisation, and detached from wider society. As long as this continues the gap between people and political "elites" will only continue to grow. Existing party structures need to be rebuilt from the ground up to reflect the feelings and voices of ordinary people. The selection of candidacies and policies cannot continue to be confined to small circles of party elites. We need open processes such as open primaries at all levels to allow people from different background, age, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation to be in leading positions in our parties, and to challenge our parties' current establishment. We call for open primaries in the Party of European Socialists for the nomination of its candidate for President of the European Commission – with open nomination procedures allowing for a wide contest and with candidate chosen directly by the members of PES member parties. The dramatic development and radical threat that a Trump

presidency represents cannot possibly be dealt with by the continuing to treat politics the way our parties have for the last thirty years To do that would simply mean opting out of history and allowing far-right extremism to take on the mantle of change at one of the most important times for the future of our democracies. The task is far too important for us to allow personal conveniences or the comfort of old routines to override it.

We stand in solidarity with all those under threat from Trump and the rest of the far-right. We assert the basic democratic principle of equal dignity and protection for all people more loudly than ever. And we recognise our privilege and responsibility to take up the challenge of defeating these movements, and of changing our own parties so that we can.