

Trump's Comeback:

THE DEATH OF LIBERALISM



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No more kneeling for BLM, crying liberal prime ministers, and selfies with refugees.

Donald Trump's second election as U.S. president marks the death blow of the liberal post-Soviet order. The American empire is not defeated, and liberalism is not finished as a political force. But liberalism is dead as the dominant ideology of the western imperialist ruling classes.

2024 is not 2016. Back then, Trump's election was seen as an aberration. It provoked a frenetic reaction from liberals, who doubled down in defense of the status quo and the progressive values it supposedly stood for. In 2020, Biden defeated Trump and populist forces around the world suffered setbacks in the wake of the Covid pandemic. These developments were greeted with a collective sigh of relief in

by G. Perrault

Washington, London, Brussels, Berlin and Tokyo: "Trump, populism, Covid, this was all just a bad dream."

But it wasn't. From Afghanistan, Ukraine and Palestine to the domestic situation in the U.S. itself, the Biden presidency oversaw the continued collapse of the liberal status quo. The very party supposed to embody global enlightenment oversaw the genocide in Gaza, the greatest crime in generations. While an air of fatuous optimism hung around Biden and his administration, militarily, economically and politically the ground was eroding from under their feet.

As a result, in all Western imperialist countries the forces of right-wing reaction are ascendant. Yesterday's triumphant

liberals are being thrown out one after the other. Kamala Mania—the hope that a non-senile person could keep the status quo going just a little longer—represented the last burst of energy of agonizing liberalism. It was as deluded as it was short-lived. Trump’s victory on November 5 both symbolizes and confirms the defeat of the liberal wing of the imperialist establishment.

This is not a fluke. The shift away from liberalism has much deeper causes than Donald Trump, social media and disinformation. At bottom this ideological shift in the American ruling class is a reflection of U.S. hegemony slipping away. When the U.S. stood as the uncontested world power, it could afford the luxury of liberal democracy at home and abroad. Now that the pressure is increasing on all fronts, liberalism is an unnecessary hindrance to U.S. global dominance. There was always a mailed fist under the velvet glove. But now the glove is too expensive and it’s coming off.

Before the U.S. elections, liberals were already ditching their own “values” as fast as they possibly could. Open borders, international law, trans rights, multiculturalism, anti-racism—finished are the days when the ruling class itself proclaimed to stand for these high principles. Finished are the days of Trudeau, Jacinda Arden and Obama. Now Sir Keir Starmer is what passes for left-wing in ruling circles.

Is the situation hopeless? For those who place their faith in the enlightenment of the progressive elites, the situation is indeed hopeless. All they can do is curse the masses for being backward as they themselves prepare to kowtow to reaction. But it is precisely among the working masses, including the millions who supported Trump, that hope is to be found.

Defeating the liberals is the worst thing that can happen to the forces of populist reaction. Now they will have to navigate the impossible currents of a collapsing world order themselves. It is one thing to channel the deep popular anger at the elite. It is another to solve the underlying cause of this anger. Trump and his international co-thinkers will have no choice but to repress and grind down the working class of the world; eventually, the masses will turn against them. In which direction will this energy be channeled? This is the great question of our time.

A little over 30 years ago, communism was proclaimed dead and the triumph of liberal democracy over the Soviet Union was heralded as the “end of history.” Today everyone knows that history hasn’t ended. Almost everyone knows, or feels, that liberal democracy is utterly bankrupt. As for communism, it isn’t dead, but nor is it quite alive. Splintered, sclerotic and isolated from the working class,

communists have a steep slope to climb. As a new period of reaction opens, it is our task to make up the lost time and prepare the working class for the struggles to come.

If the forces of the revolutionary left continue to clutch in vain to the coattails of liberals, they will continue to alienate the working class and be an irrelevant factor. The greatest danger in the coming period is for the left to wait in expectation for the liberals to lead the “resistance.” Equally bankrupt will be the impulse of some to separate themselves from the masses and seek refuge in abstract phrase-mongering about revolution. Both these trends have been dominant these past decades. Both must be discarded. The only way Marxists can become a living factor is if they draw the appropriate lessons from the last 30 years of failure and offer a path forward for the working class, in a complete rupture with both liberalism and right-wing populism.

In the immediate period, defensive struggles will no doubt be on the order of the day. As the liberals abandon the oppressed groups they claimed to champion—black people, Muslims, trans people, immigrants, women—communists must be in the vanguard of their struggles. But they must seek to build these movements on stronger foundations, away from the moralism and sentimentalism of the liberals and intricately linked to the material interests of all workers. Ultimately, the working class will be the deciding factor. To win its allegiance, communists must show, through the course of class struggle, that unlike the traitors leading them today, they have a program that can materially advance its interests and lead to its liberation. ■



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