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**US Peace Council**

**2016 U.S. Presidential Election — Trump’s Victory and the**

**Urgent Imperatives Before People’s Peace, Justice,**

**and Environmental Movement**

**U.S. Peace Council**

**November 25, 2016**

**Executive Summary:**

*Regarding the election victory of Donald Trump, the US Peace Council first of all salutes the massive demonstrations that call for improving workers’ lives, saving the environment, respecting women, opposing racism, supporting immigrants and rejecting Islamophobia. While much of what Trump said during the campaign and what he stands for is divisive and destructive, it is unlikely that a majority of Trump supporters voted based on Trump’s scapegoating statements. Many if not most of those voters were expressing their anger at decades-long policies of the corporate Establishment and corporate “globalization” that have left them poorer, isolated and unheard. While the USPC calls for opposing the many wars, increased militarization and proliferation of nuclear weapons, Trump’s inconsistent statements offer an opportunity to insist that future President Trump pursue positive positions such as détente with Russia, ending the war on Syria and suggestions that NATO is outmoded. His actions will necessarily either anger the pro Establishment Republicans and Democrats or anti-establishment voters. The peace movement and the other mass movements in the U.S. should follow the words of Mother Jones, “Don’t mourn, organize,” increase our outreach and actions. Organize for what we believe in and welcome the anti-establishment voters into the struggle.*

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After a lengthy and bitter presidential campaign, which, once again, brought to surface some of the ugliest aspects of the social reality we live in, Donald Trump, one of the most controversial presidential candidates in the recent history of the United States, managed to win the election with the help of our antiquated and undemocratic Electoral College system.

Trump’s election has given rise to tremendous amount of fear, puzzlement and despair among tens of millions of Americans — from African Americans, to women, immigrants, Muslims and many other disenfranchised and oppressed groups in our society, as well as the large numbers fearful of climate change and accelerating environmental degradation — leading to immediate mass demonstrations against the election results throughout the country against the election results and many of the president- elect’s expressed attitudes. This has sparked a great amount of discussion and debate in our peace and justice movement about the deep roots of this drastic right turn in American politics, and its future impact on the lives of millions of people in the U.S. and around the world.

There is no doubt that a full explanation of this unexpected development will require more time and in-depth analysis within the people’s movement. Yet, initial estimates of the causes are possible and necessary. Our analysis should focus on the social dynamics and forces that led to the election of Donald Trump as president and its important implications for the struggle for peace.

**Social Context: The Deepening Divide**

The 2016 presidential election occurred at the time when our society was, and still is, at its most divided and polarized state in its recent history. Our society has been experiencing deep divisions along many fault lines for several decades:

— Decades of structural racism, sexism and xenophobia;

* Militarization of the police and increasing police brutality against minorities;
* Flight of capital and investment abroad, which has led to intolerable levels of unemployment and devastated communities, especially among African Americans and other people of color;
* Visibly shrinking the size of the country’s middle class and stagnant wages that have pushed the majority of people into economic hardship, bankruptcy and a deep sense of economic insecurity;
* Expanding poverty and homelessness;
* Lack of adequate healthcare for tens of millions of working people;
* State of perpetual war abroad that has not only led to destruction of many countries and the loss of millions of lives but has absorbed almost all government funds for education, healthcare and building the country’s infrastructure;
* Destruction of the environment and the drastic climate change that is threatening the lives of millions of people not just in the United States but around the world.

All this, and more, had created an angry pole of frustrated people who demand a fundamental change in the way the country is being run. Indeed, it was the same frustrated and angry majority that supported Barack Obama in 2008 with his slogans of “Change You Can Believe In” and “Yes We Can,” which, to everybody’s disappointment, never materialized.

**The Electoral Process**

Very early in the campaign period, the main fault-line was quickly drawn between the pro-establishment and anti-establishment forces, both throughout the society and within the two major parties. This deep divide led to massive support for candidates from both parties who appeared to be on the anti-establishment side: Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders (the first, more fake and the second, more genuine). The pro-establishment leadership of both parties, fearful of the massive shakeup that may result, tried to either contain and remove (in the case of Sanders) or “tame” as much as possible (in the case of Trump) these candidates. The internal machinations against Sanders’ nomination by the pro-establishment leadership of the Democratic Party, which led to the selection of Hillary Clinton as the Party’s nominee, alienated a significant number of the Party supporters and drastically reduced the chances of a Democratic victory.

The stage was thus set for a race between a visibly pro-establishment, pro-war Democratic candidate, whom very few trusted and were hardly motivated to vote for, and a racist, sexist, xenophobic, rightwing Republican billionaire, who was banking on the massive anti-establishment wave of frustration and anger among the people. Still, until the very last minutes, a great majority of observers and analysts in the corporate media kept assuring people that such a racist, sexist and incompetent character as Trump had no chance of winning the election, thus promoting more complacency among the opposition to Trump.

Yet, to everybody’s surprise, Trump won by securing 290 electoral votes despite the fact that Clinton had mustered close to two million more votes than he. This result exposes the undemocratic flaws of our antiquated electoral system in which candidates can win a presidential election with a minority of the popular vote.

**Why Did Trump Win?**

It would be a grave mistake to attribute Trump’s victory solely to the support he received from the racist, sexist, xenophobic, neo-Nazi and fascist forces who were highly motivated and mobilized throughout society by Trump’s rhetoric and behavior during his campaign. True, the dormant beast that he has awakened in our society during this election will be haunting and threatening the very fabric our society for a long time to come. And the people have every reason to be fearful and concerned about the serious damage it is bound to cause.

But it was not mainly these forces that pushed Trump to the top. Historically, these forces have always been present and active in every corner of our society, thanks to the system’s failure to deal with the problem of racism in a fundamental way. In fact, the size and overall impact of racist forces on our society has been continuously decreasing over time as the people’s level of social consciousness and awareness has increased. This by no means implies that their significance or the need for confronting them has diminished. On the contrary, the intensified police brutality and oppression that the African-American and other communities of color have been facing in recent years is a clear demonstration of the fact that racism is losing ground among the majority of U.S. population and that resistance to racism is becoming stronger, not only in the African American community but among other minority communities and the white population as well. In fact, evidence from the recent elections shows that numerous mainly white states, having voted twice for Obama, switched to Trump in 2016, suggesting that racism was not the central motive in their vote.

At the same time, we should bear in mind that the visibly increased activism of the racist and rightwing populist forces in our society is neither happening in vacuum, nor is unique to the United States. History has shown repeatedly that during any phase of systemic capitalist crisis, racism, national chauvinism, xenophobia, and rightwing populist tendencies have become more vocal, active and influential. In Europe, too, rightwing populist parties are growing (Le Pen in France, UKIP in Britain, the Alternative for Germany party; and elsewhere). Growth in their vote represents a growing protest against corporate “globalization” (free trade, open borders, export of capital and jobs, and “regime change” foreign policy; in short, making the world safe for transnational capital by sacrificing the lives of ordinary people).

This is what secured victory for Trump. Not his blatant racism and sexism, but his hypocritical yet vocal opposition to corporate “globalization” that has impoverished billions of people around the world, and the corrupt political establishment in Washington that supports it. This is what resonated with a great number of working people, especially in industrially devastated states in the rust belt of the United States, and secured him the electoral votes he needed despite the overall lack of popular support on the national level.

The corporate media has been trying to distort this fact by claiming that it was the “white” workers that helped him win the election. In other words, it was the racists who got him elected. But nothing can be further from truth. This is an intentional distraction to keep us from focusing on the main causes of Trump’s victory, and a warning for us not to fall in this new trap. Not all who voted for Trump were racist, although he himself is, and all of us should certainly continue to fight against racism vigorously. But a very significant number of Trump voters were protesting a pro-corporate, pro-war system that has devastated the lives of the majority of the population. And this is what brings all of us together regardless of whom we voted for in this election.

**What Can We Expect from the Trump Administration?**

The question is: Now that Trump has won the election as a right wing populist, will he govern as a right wing populist? Let us look some of the contradictory promises he made on issues of foreign policy and war, which are of central interest to the peace movement.

Trump wondered out loud whether NATO was outmoded, and said that there should at least be better burden sharing by allies to pay for NATO. He favored cooperation with Putin’s Russia instead of confrontation. He expressed caution about supporting the “moderate rebels” in Syria, saying that it would lead to war with Russia.

On the other hand, he threatened to use nukes against ISIS and revive the use of torture. At one point he pledged more evenhandedness on Israel/Palestine, but at the same time pledged to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem. He also expressed a cavalier attitude to the use of nuclear weapons and stressed the need for “restoring” US military strength by increasing the already enormous U.S. military budget. He said he would keep Guantanamo open, while his Vice-President-elect, Pence, for his part promised to undo Obama’s limited normalization of relations with Cuba.

Certainly Trump’s foreign policy proclamations are mixed bags. But some, if pursued, will be running against the present establishment policies. It is incumbent on all of us to demand that he honors his populist positions and discards the reactionary ones. And we only have a chance of succeeding if there is enough mass pressure built up from below.

We know very well that no U.S. President makes policy decisions singlehandedly. There are many signs that the conventional corporate Republicans in Congress and all the corporate interests behind them are surrounding him to ensure that his populist positions are forgotten ASAP, and that only his racist and rightwing policies remain. Pro-establishment Democrats and liberals will not challenge him to honor his populist positions either. We will learn soon enough which side of Trump will triumph over the other as the key staff and Cabinet appointments and the budget priorities become evident.

His problem is that either direction he chooses, he is bound to anger and lose a significant part of his support base: either his anti-establishment supporters who want change, or the establishment Republicans (and Democrats) who wish to maintain the pro-corporate status quo. History has shown that in the absence of a strong, unified and active popular movement, the chips always fall on the side of the corporate establishment.

**Our Path Forward**

Based on all this, it is imperative for the peace and justice movement to focus its attention on the social dynamics, social forces, and policies rather than focusing on Trump as an individual. Despite all the negatives and dangers that Trump’s election has given rise to, one silver lining in the process is that his election has laid bare all the contradictions of the existing system at all levels: racism, sexism, xenophobia, the devastation caused by corporate globalization and perpetual war, and the deep corruption of the political establishment in Washington, DC.

Trump’s victory was not a mandate for war and racism. There is reason for worry, but not for despair. The vote mainly reflected a widespread voter desire for change. The Trump campaign’s use of racism, Islamophobia, and sexism does not negate this reality. There are some positive features in Trump’s contradictory campaign positions on foreign policy, for example, his openness to a more pragmatic attitude toward Russia. Of course, the pro-war forces will move heaven and earth to ensure that the populist elements in his statements will fall by the wayside and we will be left with a conventional right-wing Republican Administration. Therefore we must step up the struggle for peace, and get out into the streets in vast numbers.

By focusing on the popular demands that were raised during this election, be it by Trump, Clinton, Sanders, or Jill Stein, we can bring together and unify all the popular forces, including the majority of those who voted for Trump (either as a protest vote or based on a desire for fundamental systemic change) in the broadest possible movement, one that addresses all the structural flaws of the system that are directly linked with the imperialistic corporate exploitation and military-industrial war-mongering.

This, in our view, is the only way to undo the negative effects of this election and enforce the fundamental changes that the people of our country and the world have been struggling to achieve for many decades.