

Marxist-Humanists see the role of revolutionary intellectuals assisting in the self-development of the working class so they can become their own leaders – unless we take that seriously, we are just reproducing the same-old shit in a slightly modified form. A new society in which there are leaders and led, with the thinkers in charge, is not the classless society that Marx’s philosophy envisaged or that Marxist-Humanism aims for.

It is because the left so overestimate the role of intellectuals that they engage in what Raya Dunayevskaya (the founder of Marxist-Humanism) called “small-mass partyism”. They project as if they have authority among the masses, not necessarily because they think they already do, but because you never know how quickly things might change under crisis conditions – where their correct revolutionary attitude will be vindicated in the eyes of the masses, as the whole capitalist system wreaks havoc with people’s lives. There is a catastrophist bent to much thinking on the far left, that the worse conditions become the more workers and others will be become radicalised making them ripe for recruitment to the vanguardists banner. This is to completely misunderstand the process of revolutionary change and what is required for it to happen.

The most important source for readiness for revolution is peoples own experience. We have next to no influence on these broader objective circumstances of people’s lives, but nor do we need to. Capitalism is an alienating system of working and living, and people do resent it and aspire to something else. What that something else would be, may only be the vaguest notion of an alternative but nevertheless it is an ever-present sense amongst most workers. This becomes more widespread and acute as capitalism hits one of its crises – as intensification of work, freezes or reductions in pay, and redundancies become commonplace and makes people more desperate. Capitalism itself through its destructive tendencies makes people question why we have to live like this? After many crises people have previously and will again rise up against the system. But as this year’s 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution shows even the masses rejecting capitalism does not mean there is clarity on what better society might replace it. There is nothing automatic in what form this resistance to the effects of capitalism will take. The rejection of the old is what Dunayevskaya, using a Hegelian category, called “first negation.” The necessary “second negation” of answering “what comes after the revolution?”, or “on what basis will a new post-capitalist society be built?” does not arise spontaneously out of people’s experience of living under capitalism. The experience of Russia 1917 proves rather decisively what the lack of preparation for what comes after a revolution can lead to - that is a very bitter legacy we really need to learn the lessons from.

Unlike reformists, revolutionaries do not see the possibility of moving towards socialism in a piecemeal fashion. We do however need to recognise that the conditions for revolution have to be “ripe”. The ability of the capitalist system to make sufficient profits as the means by which it functions and allows those in charge provide for our needs, has to lay exposed as exhausted amongst most of society. In other words capitalism will be in crisis.

If there is sufficient potential for the capitalist economy to meet people’s needs then the risks attendant with so radical a break, as the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, will not be felt as a risk worth taking. Before a revolution becomes the only workable solution, most people will continue to look to reforms within the system, to make the system work better. This means that those who wish to see the creation of a new society have to learn how to critique

those whose “solutions” to the world’s problems lead to an accommodation within capitalism.

This is not a simple task when the experience of a failing capitalism will often provoke some dangerous scapegoating which will undermine our ability to unite for a more constructive solution. So the gains of freedom movements such as civil rights, women’s movement, LGBTQ, migrant rights have all through years (in fact decades) of struggle managed to wrest some concessions from the state to treat people more fairly. The problem is of course that like every gain under capitalism, when the system itself decides it can no longer afford (whether economically or politically) you will get political leaders who will attack these hard won concessions often playing to prejudices against disadvantaged groups that they were ever recognised by the state as deserving protection of their rights.

The reaction to the gains of the oppressed to be treated as equals is obviously the clearest defining feature of what we call right wing. Other aspects of right wing politics such as a belief in free-market individualism or religious conservatism are not nearly as dangerous to an emancipatory struggle as the rejection of equality amongst people. The difficulty is when an inadequate state response such as affirmative action initiatives fails to address the fundamental root causes of inequality but instead attempt something that is symbolically challenging while at the same time does not threaten anything systemic in how those oppressions are created, these state initiatives have to be critiqued in a balanced way.

The question of what the state anti-discrimination policies are purportedly meant to address and the inadequacy of these measures to address them, need to be separated out, in order for there to be an effective left critique. In the context of a right-wing demagogue attacking those inadequate state initiatives as way of attacking the rights of those oppressed groups of people – it becomes essential we are forthright in our opposition to all attempts to denigrate the oppressed, otherwise we can be seen to accept this scapegoating.

Oppression and the denial of equality to groups of people is something that anyone who calls themselves left would be opposed to - it is a definition of being left-wing - that there is a belief in a common humanity. The great thing about the popular protests against Trump is that everyone in them instinctively understood the importance of being united and did not accept any of the divisive rhetoric of Trump.

We are then left with the dilemma of how to respond when someone like Trump or Le Pen attacks demands for freedom by attacking the limited state concessions that were won in an earlier period.

In recent times some of the far-left who consider themselves revolutionary have rather opportunistically also attacked the liberal platform of Clinton/Obama by dismissing their state driven equality initiatives as either unimportant or worse detrimental to equality. In the context in which Trump is playing to white nationalism, for any leftist to go after the Democrats as the greater danger is both reckless and cowardly. Trump was questioning Obama’s place of birth long after it was publicly proved to be Hawaii (foreign born citizens cannot become U.S. president) the clear subtext was that black people are not real Americans wherever they are born, and Trump’s base loved him for it. There are all kinds of criticisms that can be made of Obama but in order to do so from a left standpoint we need to be defending him against that kind of attack. We cannot effectively attack him as a politician

(which there is much to attack him for) without first challenging the intentional racist messaging of the “birther” claims.

The same is true of Clinton when she is denigrated for being physically weak and not having the stamina to be president, it was a signal that no woman was up to the job. Clinton is as problematic as Obama in being in a party that when in power hawkishly represents the interests of a rapacious capitalist power, but that was not the capacity in which Trump was attacking her. When “lock her up” and “burn the bitch” are slogans chanted and screamed at Trump rallies, we have to unambiguously challenge them, not because we are defending Clinton but it is Trump’s way (and that of his supporters) of attacking any woman who would presume to stand for a position of leadership. Even if you are against all bourgeois politicians (as I am) it is important to see the broader nature of this reaction and confront it head on, rather than evade it. To not confront these attacks on Clinton and only then criticise her as a political representative of capitalist interests is to leave the sexism unchallenged.

When Trump said that he would build a huge border wall with Mexico (getting them to pay for it), it is not the time to start making left-wing sounding nationalistic points about migrants being used to drive down wages. Even when this is true – our response should not be to argue that migrant workers are a cheap source of variable capital as though we see them purely as economic units providing abstract labour rather than as actual human-beings. We instead defend the rights of migrant workers and demand full equality for them –recognising that a divided working class is one that will never make a successful revolution. As long as reactionaries like Trump are not politically defeated, those divisive messages will always have a resonance amongst some workers. This is a barrier to workers recognising their common interests across national/racial/sexual lines and therefore to their intellectual self-development. This obviously has enormous practical importance as a divided working class is much easier to defeat.

We should be clear that the use of Marxist terminology stripped of its humanist context and intent does not excuse the chauvinism that is being accommodated to by those who would distort Marx. Marx was always a consistent internationalist, for example supporting the North in the U.S. civil war famously arguing in *Capital* that white workers could not be free as long as slavery existed, and calling for the defeat of England in its oppression Ireland precisely because the acceptance by English workers, of the domination over the Irish actually held back the whole working class.

When Trump was signalling the banning and then scaling back to the “extreme vetting” of all Muslims coming into the US—he was deliberately stoking a racial animus that is already strong amongst sections of the American population. It is not the time to attack Islam’s treatment of women or any of the superstitious beliefs that this religion shares with all others. An attack on Muslims is very different to a defence of secular humanism. And even secular humanism does not offer the potential to transform the world in the way Marx’s humanism does.

To be clear Trump himself does not have to be himself ideologically committed to fascism to pave the way for a large scale racist backlash or reactionary turn. Trump articulates a break with the post-war liberal developments ushered in during the 60’s or 70’s. There is no bourgeois politician who is capable of articulating the interests of humanity as a whole, their commitment to running capitalism in some form means that the contest between any of them

is not how we advance the cause of working class freedom – but, and here is the all important caveat – there are political developments that divide the working class and set us against each other in an extraordinary way. Trumpism is such a development because he represents naked reaction. If politicians abandon the pretence of upholding fairness and equality, it is not that they are being more honest (as some said of Trump in relation to Clinton and others of Le Pen in relation to Macron), it is that the intractable problems of the capitalist system are throwing up a candidate of extreme reaction across the world to suggest responses that have been unacceptable up until now.

MHI called on people to recognise the danger of Trump months before the election. The extent to which the extreme responses of the Trump government have not succeeded as fully as some of us feared is not because they are less dangerous than we thought but because of the massive popular resistance has given the administration pause for thought and perhaps has emboldened some judges and politicians to be firmer in their stand against Trump.

The developments in France with an openly declared racist, Marine Le Pen, managing to secure a third of the popular vote, the highest support for that kind of explicit racism since the Nazi era (although there have been other more covert forms) means we have to be vigilant as to how far these things can go.

It is not that in opposing a fascist we are implicitly endorsing the progressive character of a Clinton or a Macron, they are standard bourgeois representatives who will do savage things to defend their system – and we will oppose them when they do. But to in any way accommodate to the racist authoritarianism of the Trumpist type forces in the world by judging those who oppose Trump, as somehow giving Clinton type figures a free pass - is in fact an idiocy that allows the rejection of democratic norms. These democratic norms are not adequate to realise freedom for us all, but that is because they are framed within a context of maintaining capitalism.

If we reject the democratic norms because of the form in which they try to frame the struggle for freedom and equality within capitalism - , that is very different to rejecting freedom and equality themselves. You cannot accommodate, apologise for, or make false equivalences of Trump-like figures to standard politicians - while pretending to stand for the liberation of humanity. Those who try to strike this pose should be exposed for playing a very dangerous game.

We will only get to a new society by exposing why capitalism will not be able to deliver real freedom and human equality, not by acting in such a way that allows the rise of people who explicitly want to reject freedom and equality as ideals of any worth. These people who call themselves left are nothing of the sort and need to be shown to be siding with reaction and working class division. They may believe that there is some clever route that will allow the masses to reject the status quo and then when more radical solutions are considered it easier to flip them from extreme right to extreme left but this is simply not how the world works. When irrational divisions take hold they can take on a momentum that is very hard to stop, let alone turn in an opposite direction by redirecting peoples energies against the system. The elitist fantasies of these master strategists who will support Trump because they think it will undermine people's acceptance of status quo politics is delusional in the way politics actually works.

If we cannot expose Clinton and the Democrats from the left by consistently upholding ideals of freedom and equality— there is no round-about-way of challenging the establishment via Trump, that is just supporting reaction. Far too many who call themselves left have been supporting reaction. It is not just liberals who stand for democratic norms, revolutionaries have to be even more consistent in defence of them, because a rejection of those ideals undermines our ability to create a society on a new basis, in which they will finally be realised as a practical and lived experience rather than an abstract forever unattainable ideal.