

Shock in Europe over Trump's election victory

By Peter Schwarz
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Europe's ruling elites responded with shock and horror to the election of Donald Trump as the next US president. Hardly any government or newspaper expected such a result. They now fear that Trump's presidency will not only destabilise the United States, but also the rest of the world.

"The financial markets are in chaos, the political world is holding its breath," commented German financial daily *Handelsblatt*. "Even if Trump implements only some of his announcements, this planet will not be the same as it once was—not geopolitically, not economically and also not culturally."

Britain's *Financial Times* saw "a moment of great peril" in Trump's victory. After the Brexit referendum vote in Britain, it "looks like another grievous blow to the liberal international order," the paper writes. "Mr Trump must decide, by his actions and words, whether he intends to contribute to the great unravelling, at incalculable cost to the west."

Guardian columnist Richard Wolffe calls Trump's victory "nothing short of a revolution. ... America and its relationship to the world has fundamentally changed overnight. ... Taken together, Trump's victory ushers in the most tumultuous period of American history since the Great Depression and the start of world war two. It will challenge the core concepts of American identity and global security as we have known them for generations."

Even German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, obliged to speak cautiously and respect diplomatic norms, warned of sharp conflicts in his statement on the election result. "I think we have to expect that for us, American foreign policy will be less predictable and we must expect that America will increasingly prefer to take its own decisions," said

Steinmeier. "In other words: I don't want to put a brave face on it. Nothing will be easier, many things will be more difficult."

Many commentators in the European press noted that the result was not a vote of confidence in Trump, but a vote against the political establishment, and that it displayed parallels to Europe.

"After the Brexit vote in Britain, this is the second time this year that a neglected and almost forgotten section of the population has won a hearing and power," commented Stefan Kornelius in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. "There are forces at work here that even Donald Trump can't contain. He merely exploited them." The rebellious mood goes well beyond Trump. The majority in the US wanted "a revolution. And they have got one now."

Handelsblatt also identified social divisions in the US as the reason for Trump's victory. Trump had "managed to mobilise forces who had long been rumbling below the surface." His rise was "a symptom of deeper problems in American society as a whole."

Both parties bear responsibility for this, according to *Handelsblatt*. The Republicans had "deeply divided the country with their tax policy" and destroyed "the credibility of the US and all its values [with] an ideological and neo-imperialist foreign policy." The Democrats deregulated the financial markets; the "banks began to gamble," provoked "the world financial crisis" and were rescued "thanks to massive state assistance."

French daily *Le Monde* took a similar view. "The Democrat Hillary Clinton is not the only loser of this vote. A wave of protest is shaking the traditional elites on both sides of the Atlantic. The election of Donald Trump is a fundamental transformation, an historic date for Western democracies. Like the fall of the Berlin

Wall, like 11 September, 2001, this marks the beginning of a new world whose outlines remain as yet hard to recognise but from which one feature is already clearly visible: in this world everything is conceivable that previously seemed impossible or unrealistic.” According to *Le Monde*, “Europe will not be protected from the earthquake that has rocked Washington.”

This “protest wave,” which has shaken the traditional elites, this widespread social opposition, which found extremely reactionary and distorted expression in Trump’s election victory, is feared much more by the European elites than the new president himself. They are concerned that he will lose control of the spooks he has unleashed.

At the same time, they have not uttered a word on why a semi-fascist billionaire like Trump was capable of channelling widespread social anger in a right-wing direction. At most, they blame the alleged backwardness of “white” American workers.

But the real reason is the right-wing policies of the Democratic Party and President Obama, which represent the interests of Wall Street and privileged sections of the middle class, as well as the role of Bernie Sanders and his pseudo-left supporters. In the Democratic primary, the senator from Vermont won 13 million votes because he portrayed himself as a socialist and agitated against the “billionaire class”—only subsequently to lend his backing to Hillary Clinton. He thus left the way clear for Trump to present himself as the only “anti-establishment” candidate.

In Europe, the ruling elites rely on the pseudo-left to suppress social opposition. Greece’s Syriza, Germany’s Left Party and many other organisations portray themselves as opponents of capitalism so as to sabotage any struggle against capitalism, and—should they come to power—to impose even more brutal measures against the working class.

A typical representative of this policy is the leader of Britain’s Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. He writes (correctly) that “Trump’s election is an unmistakable rejection of a political establishment and an economic system that simply isn’t working for most people. It is one that has delivered escalating inequality and stagnating or falling living standards for the majority, both in the US and Britain. This is a rejection of a failed economic consensus and a governing elite that has been seen not to have listened. And the public

anger that has propelled Donald Trump to office has been reflected in political upheavals across the world.”

Having said this, he calls for the most complacent response imaginable.

He speaks of “some of Trump’s answers to the big questions facing America, and the divisive rhetoric around them” being “clearly wrong,” before asserting, “I have no doubt, however, that the decency and common sense of the American people will prevail, and we send our solidarity to a nation of migrants, innovators and democrats. ... Americans have made their choice. The urgent necessity is now for us all to work across continents to tackle our common global challenges: to secure peace, take action on climate change and deliver economic prosperity and justice.”

Overall, Europe’s ruling elites are responding to Trump’s election victory by shifting further rightward. On domestic issues, political representatives argue that it is possible to halt the rise of far-right parties in Europe—who all hailed Trump’s success—by adopting their policies, particularly when it comes to deterring refugees and internal security.

On foreign policy, they are responding to the expected tensions with the US by accelerating military rearmament. As German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen remarked on the election outcome, “Europe must get used to looking after itself better.” This includes an increased defence budget. An article in *Der Spiegel* even went as far as calling this week for Germany to develop its own nuclear weapons.

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