

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE OF

Is socialist revolution in the US possible?

Below is an article by Segun Ayobolu in *The Nation* newspaper, one of the largest dailies in Nigeria.

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“A book of 73 pages seemingly implausibly and surreally titled ‘Is Socialist revolution in the U.S. possible?’ largely compromised of contributions by Mary-Alice Walters, a member of the Socialist Workers Party National Committee, editor of New International and president of Pathfinder Press, to a debate on the subject matter was published in the U.S. in 2009. Such a debate would have been considered outrageously out of place in a country like the US perceived as bastion of conservatism and vanguard of neo-liberal capitalism some two or three decades ago. My first instinct was to completely ignore the publication considering it a product of a fringe, extremist political and ideological group of microscopic consequence to mainstream American politics.

In the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election that produced the eccentric and utterly unpredictable Donald Trump as leader of the most powerful country in the world, however, I have taken the time to peruse sections of the book and ponder Mary-Alice Walters rather unconventional but difficult to dismiss postulations. The unexpected electoral triumph of Trump, a billionaire businessman and unpretentious TV star, who campaigned as a populist Messiah of a largely alienated, frustrated, estranged and angry section of the populace was a function of not just a broken and deeply fractured political system but a capitalist economic system in the throes of profound crisis.

Of course, Trump did not just emerge magically from wonder land to occupy the apex of political authority in the world’s foremost liberal democracy. The American polity had been waiting for a charismatic demagogue since two and a half decades earlier when no

less rabble-rousing aspirants like Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan had made waves on the political scene. They spouted divisive racist rhetoric. They inveighed against immigrants. They promised to clean up the mess in Washington, ‘drain the bureaucratic swamp’ and return governance to the people.

They flaunted their capacity to amass immense personal affluence as evidence of their ability to create prosperity for the majority of marginalized Americans and reduce the abysmal degree of inequality in the country. At last Trump, a much more extreme version of Perot and Buchanan has been given the opportunity. If he fails as a radical, unconventional candidate of the right, as he is most certainly likely to, would an even more disoriented and disenchanting American electorate not most likely go for anti-establishment radical candidates of the left? Is Mary-Alice Walters then completely off the mark?

To discountenance the possibility of radical socialist revolution in the US, even if in the long term, Mary-Alice Walters argues, “You would have to believe that there won’t again be economic, financial, or social crisis on the order of those that marked the first half of the twentieth century. That the ruling families of the imperialist world and their economic wizards have found a way to “manage” capitalism so as to preclude shattering financial crisis that could lead to something akin to the Great Depression; to growing assaults on the social, economic, and political rights of the toilers; spreading imperialist war; to the rise of mass fascist movements in the streets”. The auguries are not encouraging. Even where rabidly right wing nationalist groups disdainful of foreigners and immigrants have not come to power in many parts of Europe,

they have risen in political influence largely as a result of a protracted global capitalist economic crisis that has produced not only sustained fall in profits for investors but loss of jobs and increasing impoverishment and inequality for the underprivileged classes.

Unfortunately, the mainstream media in the US treat Trump as some kind of entertainer who has no idea what he is doing. The famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, and social critic, Professor Noam Chomsky, does not think so. In his words, “Trump’s buffoonery, which gets endlessly covered by the media, widely differs from the actual policies he is trying to enact, which receive less attention...It is enough that attention is diverted from what is happening in the background. There, out of the spotlight, the most savage fringe of the Republican Party is carefully advancing policies designed to enrich their true constituency: the constituency of private power and wealth, “the masters of mankind” to borrow Adam Smith’s phrase”. While Trump’s antics distract attention, legislations and executive orders are being enacted that “undermine workers’ rights, cripple consumer protection, severely harm rural communities, devastate health programmes, and remove critical regulatory constraints on the predatory financial system”.

Nothing illustrates better the crisis of capitalism in the industrialized West than the attempt of their governments and International financial Organizations, as the author, Teresa Hayter put it, “to open markets throughout the world, and especially in the Third World, so that multinational corporations and private banks can profit from taking over public services and industries and exploiting natural resources while at the same time they are imposing ever harsher and more brutal restrictions on the movement of people (unless they are white, or exceptionally rich). And at the same time they are demanding policies which create unemployment and poverty and which are at least partly responsible for the wars and political repression from which people flee”.

The late Professor Bade Onimode made the same point when he asked in Y2000, “Why should free trade, liberalization and globalization be good for manufactured products, capital and technology (intellectual proper-

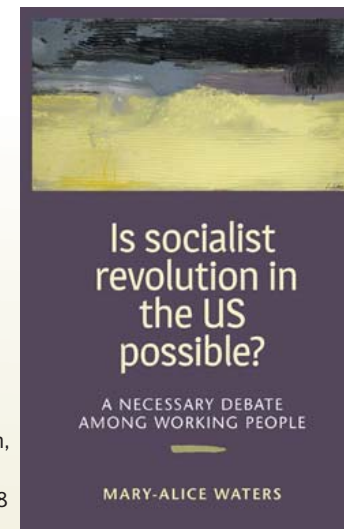
ty rights) and be bad for labour? Is this not simply because of the inequality between the powerful owners of commodities, capital and technology, on the one hand, and the weak atomized owners of labour power on the other?”

But is it just Trump and the Republicans that are overly fixated with drastically checking and containing immigration? This is certainly not the case. It is a bipartisan agenda in a futile bid to save neoliberal capitalism from its own excesses. According to one report, “With overwhelming bipartisan backing, President Clinton in September 1996 signed into law the Illegal Immigration and Reform Responsibility Act that, among other things, aims to double the number of border police the following five years. The law also authorizes some \$12 million to build a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border south of San Diego; eliminates constitutional protections in order to speed deportations; and imposes other draconian measures against immigrants and those seeking asylum...Under the Clinton legislation, immigrants are now being deported within a few hours of being detained, with no right to an attorney or legal proceedings of any kind”. Thus, Trump is doing nothing new. He is only less hypocritical as regards his fierce anti-immigration stance.

Indeed, during the campaigns, Trump promised a less militarily aggressive and interventionist foreign policy than Hillary Clinton. For instance, he very sensibly wanted to strengthen cordial relations with Russia. In power he has discovered that massive and largely unjustified military expenditure is critical to sustaining and accelerating economic growth while enabling huge corporations involved in the Pentagon military-industrial complex reap humongous profits. Every American President, Democratic or Republican – must therefore seek to create real or imaginary enemies – Libya, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Nicaragua, Russia, Afghanistan etc – to justify heavy expenditure on what has been described as a form of reflationary ‘military Keynesianism’.

For instance, Barak Obama looked like a dove compared to the bullish and hawkish Trump. But the online magazine, ‘truthout’, reports that “A very important study in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists published in March, 2017, reveals that the Obama nu-

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clear weapons modernization program has increased “the overall killing power of existing US ballistic missile forces by a factor of roughly three – and it creates exactly what one would like to see, if a nuclear-armed state were planning to have the capacity to fight and win a nuclear war by disarming enemies with a surprise first strike”.

Is Trump’s economic program, particularly his large tax cuts that benefit the rich largely, likely to help salvage and rejuvenate American capitalism despite what may be a short term and transient economic boom? I doubt it. What then are the alternative futures America may have to choose from? The words of Noam Chomsky may prove instructive in this regard: It’s no secret that in recent years, traditional political institutions have been declining in the industrial democracies under the impact of what is called “populism”. That term is used rather loosely to refer to the wave of discontent, anger, and contempt for institutions that has accompanied the neo-liberal assault of the past generation, which led to stagnation for the majority alongside a spectacular concentration of wealth in the hands of a few ...The most startling event in the American election was not the election of Trump; it was the success of Bernie Sanders. Sanders came along, no corporate funding, no wealthy funding, dismissed and disregarded by the media, a guy who was almost totally unknown, and he was using scare words like ‘socialist’ and he practically, if it hadn’t been for party shenanigans and mangers, he might have won the election. That’s not only a radical change from American history but also a very promising and hopeful sign for the future”.