

Trumped Up Democracy

10 Reflections on the 2016 Elections and the Future

by Greg Coleridge

Trump up: “to devise deceitfully or dishonestly, as an accusation; fabricate.”
-dictionary.com

The 2016 election was one massive and long trumped up affair – full of deceit, dishonesty and fabrications. The perpetrators were both major Presidential candidates and their campaigns, although it more often than not seemed the very phrase was coined upon hearing and seeing Donald Trump on the campaign trail over the last 18 months.

It’s critical to understand the social, economic and political context of the election; the lessons learned from his campaign; the inherent economic and political flaws of our system that led to his rise; and the implications for people dedicated to peace, justice, democracy, nonviolence and sustainability over the next few years.

What follows are 10 reflections based on the above.

1. There’s always a context for any event that should be identified for better comprehension. In the case of the 2016 election, there were a number of significant economic, political and social realities.

Economic context: Large sections of our nation, particularly the Midwest, haven’t recovered from the deindustrialization following the movement of manufacturing abroad, especially to Mexico and Asia. Large sectors of the economy have seen massive technological changes with machines replacing workers. A cause and result of these changes have been the gradual “financialization” of the economy since the 1970’s (and most rapidly since the late 1980’s) with money from the financial industry shifted from the “real” economy where companies produced goods and services toward financial “products” and short-term speculation in anything yielding greater returns. There was no significant recovery from the Great Recession in many parts of the nation despite what many politicians and media pundits kept repeating. Economic anxiety, job loss, wage stagnation (despite increased worker productivity), decline of benefits, rapid increase in the rich-poor gap of wealth and income, expansion of welfare payments, increase of the national debt, and overall

inability to have a voice in the economic direction of lives and communities are just a few of the impacts.

Political context: The combination over many years of the inability to be heard by elected representatives of both major political parties, government bureaucrats, and regulatory officials on the one hand and growing visible political corruption – evidenced by the relevant Clinton Foundation pay-to-play emails — shifted in the minds of many of a *perception* that the political system is fixed to benefit “the establishment” to a *reality*. Huge investments of campaign contributions to established political candidates, both Republicans and Democrats, by the super rich and “special interests,” beginning in the primaries, worsened by the *Citizens United vs. FEC* 2010 Supreme Court decision, added to the sense of outrage. The belief of many Trump supporters that turned out to be false was the charge that there was massive voter fraud by the Democratic Party that funneled legions of undocumented immigrants to the polls and

organized the same individuals (mostly inner city African Americans) to vote multiple times. What was fact was voter suppression where multiple states erected barriers for certain groups of individuals (i.e. people of color, low income, students) from voting and purging individuals from voter rolls.

Social context: The public re-emergence of xenophobia against Mexicans (who were supposedly stealing domestic jobs from US citizens) and Muslims at home and abroad, racism against African Americans (including President Obama), sexism against women (including Hillary Clinton) and homophobia against the LGBTQ community were fueled by Trump and the right-wing media in response to widely felt cultural “political correctness” (but what others called simple anti-prejudice) throughout large segments of the white community. Many whites saw the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement against police brutality and for basic human dignity as a threat to the police and to law & order. Many from rural areas and “fly over” parts of the country felt the bi-coastal “liberal establishment” ignored or mocked them. US national “pride” was seriously tarnished by Russia’s Putin, ISIS, China, and Syria’s Assad who crossed the US imposed “line in the sand” without consequences. Working people and whites were angry, frustrated and desperate.

2. Donald Trump possessed just the right combination of skills and traits to connect with disaffected whites and working people. He was well known in

cultural, economic and political circles, was comfortable in communicating directly through the popular media, projected himself (the consummate business insider) as the political outsider, was exceedingly confident in his ability to accomplish anything and repeated ad nauseam about “winning”—boosting the hopes and morale of people who felt on the economic, political and social defensive over the last decade or more. Trump provided the unequivocal and confident voice these individuals didn’t have.

3. Several of Trump’s strategies and tactics were an assault on basic democracy principles.

- Even when his statements were documented as false by the media or opponents, he continued to intentionally repeat them – following the adage of “if you just keep repeating something over and over, eventually people will believe it.” Facts simply didn’t matter. Voters didn’t seem to care. Emotions trumped the truth.
- He comforted supporters by proclaiming, most forcefully during his acceptance speech at the RNC, that he and he alone would solve all problems. Citizens only needed to vote for him. No further engagement was necessary. Not to worry about holding him accountable. Don’t bother aligning with others in organizing to challenge people or institutions. He had it covered.
- His racist, sexist and xenophobic remarks divided and thus weakened individuals and constituencies who shared

much economically and politically in common and who could have effectively held him accountable.

- While exceedingly long on promises, Trump may have provided the least specific plans on issues of any Presidential candidate in modern times. It was thus impossible for voters to judge his ideas and plans. Generalities abounded while specifics were absent. Perception became reality.
- Trump coopted humane populism. His rhetoric against Wall Street, the “rigged” political system, big media, trade agreements like NAFTA that exported jobs, and the “political establishment” connected with voters. His lack of specific solutions and linking his populist rhetoric to hatred and prejudice, however, undermined long-standing community-based and democracy groups who have made the same accusations minus the hatred of historically oppressed constituencies. Moreover, it tarnished the very legitimate need to expose and offer alternatives to our economic, political and media institutions controlled or captured by the wealthy few and corporate interests. Trump’s populism is very different that the bottom-up populism affirming the dignity and respect of all people.

4. The major corporate “mainstream” media is in part responsible for Trump’s ascension. Media over exposure of Trump was 24/7. The corporate press, whether supportive or antagonistic, couldn’t help themselves.

Trump and the corporate media needed one another. Major corporate “mainstream” network and cable TV and news dailies have seen viewers and readers plummet. His simple, stark, controversial and often-bizarre statements produced massive ratings and profits for the major corporate press, which is primarily in business after all to make a profit – whether that’s done by covering news objectively or sensationalizing statements or event. A Trump Presidency is a dream come true for the corporate press. While not per se “the press,” Facebook in particular also played a role in permitting unedited a flood of “fake news” stories to appear in their newsfeeds – a disproportionate share of which either supported Trump or attacked Clinton. As a side note but related, the corporate “mainstream” media almost completely ignored anything from the two major alternative parties and their candidates – Libertarian and Green.

5. Key promises made during his campaign will be impossible to deliver. There will be no Mexican wall with the Mexicans paying for it. The physical and financial implications of such a project are monumental. Manufacturing plants with hundreds of thousands of jobs will not return stateside. Those few that may will employ far fewer workers due to automation. Trump’s commitment to support working people in general, however, must be questioned given his history of unjust treatment of workers at his own companies. Hillary Clinton will not be locked up. ISIS or the next manifestation of extremists

will continue to resist those opposing Western occupation of the Middle East. His suggested requirement that all Muslims in the US carry a special ID card noting their faith is flat out unconstitutional. Serious efforts, however, will be directed at implementing other promises. These include abolishing Obamacare, deporting immigrants who are not citizens and have remained beyond their legal duration, and gutting scores of laws and regulations protecting workers, consumers, communities and the environment.

6. When it becomes apparent that Trump can’t or has no interest in delivering on many of his promises, especially those to improve the economy, blaming “the other” will quickly surface as it did during the campaign, most definitely when the next economic bubble bursts sometime during his administration, with the impact far more severe than during the Great Recession. African Americans, the poor and immigrants will be “trumped up” as the most likely targets for blame. This will strongly resonate with that part of his most loyal base that saw his victory as legitimizing hatred, bigotry and misogyny. Divide and conquer is a time-tested technique to prevent solidarity against oppression. Expect it to be used over and over again. Knowing that their tenure may be short, expect to see laws proposed and passed that seek to reduce civil rights and liberties, disenfranchise voters and make it more difficult to organize. Of course another time-tested technique by those in power to distract from economic difficulties at home is warfare – expect his

administration to stoke the flames of conflict in many regions of the world.

7. The administration of the self-described political “outsider” will include many political and economic insiders. That’s what happened with Barack Obama as his campaign’s economic advisors were replaced with Wall Street insiders after his election but before he took office. Expect those with direct ties to Wall Street and the military industrial complex to assume key roles in his administration. Long time right wing Congresspersons and Senators with a demonstrated track record of promoting policies harmful to women, working people, and people of color will be prominent voices surrounding him.

8. It’s going to be a very difficult period for a majority of individuals in the US (and many abroad), but most brutal for women, people of color, immigrants, Muslims, and even working people – many of whom voted for Trump. We must build unity domestically and internationally around issues and constituencies. Those targeted, especially individuals from communities historically oppressed, must become the main voices that the rest of us listen to and legitimately work with. Much of our support work will need to focus on resisting proposed economic, social and political policy assaults. This means mass education, advocacy and organizing, including amassing power through mass lobbying, mass public demonstrations and strategic forms of civil disobedience.

9. Since the President, the House and Senate are now all in Republican hands and the Supreme Court likely to remain “conservative” following the appointment of the open seat by President Trump, those dedicated to justice, peace, democracy and sustainability can’t depend on government for protection. We must resist the horrors to come by building truly independent, diverse and democratic mass movements. However, we must be extremely wary of being co-opted by the Democratic Party, which is where social movements historically have gone to die. The Democratic Party largely ignored or was sometimes even hostile toward mass movements when in power, be it Occupy, Black Lives Matter, many environmental campaigns and Move to Amend. Many who previously focused on the electoral arena will now gravitate toward movements now that they possess virtually no formal power. Social movements should be open to those from all parties (Democrats, but also Republican who voted against Trump in the primaries and many who may have voted for him in November who will come to oppose his policies), but only if they commit to principles of justice, peace, democracy, nonviolence and sustainability. Movements for change cannot be co-opted.

10. It will not be easy, but it’s imperative that people of conscious to not simply respond to harmful proposed laws and regulations. There must also be an intentional commitment to exposing the

fundamental contradictions of our political and economic systems. Donald Trump lost the popular vote, yet will become President because of one of numerous profoundly undemocratic provisions of the U.S. Constitution – the Electoral College. Our political and economic systems are fundamental unsustainable. The environment is headed toward a profound collapse. Relations between blacks and whites and between men and women have further deteriorated. The Trump years will hasten these crises, forcing more than cosmetic changes to be considered. They will provide openings to examine and advocate for multiple avenues to democratize our society in all its forms – constitutionally, politically and economically – from the local to the global. They will widen the awareness of how corporate constitutional rights violates basic democratic self-governance. They will create the space to reveal how our banking-controlled, debt-based monetary system contributes to the plunder of the planet and climate change. They will further expose the entrenched racism and patriarchy in our culture and institutions. They will widen and deepen the local building of alternatives that individuals can control which meet basic needs without relying on large-scale institutions. And they will cause serious reexamination of the US military, economic and political role in the world. It will not be easy to counter the “trumping up” that will surely come in all its forms that seeks to distract, distort and discombobulate. Keeping our “eyes on the prize” to (a) resist

the multiple assaults to come, (b) promote profound structural alternatives and (c) build local alternatives that meet immediate needs must become our direction as we lay the groundwork for a just and sustainable transformed society that comes next.

A Publication of the PROGRAM ON CORPORATIONS, LAW & DEMOCRACY

By What Authority (ISSN: 524-1106) is published by the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy. The title is English for *quo warranto*, a legal phrase that questions illegitimate exercise of privilege and power. We the people and our federal and state officials have long been giving giant business corporations illegitimate authority. Today, a minority directing giant corporations and backed by police, courts, and the military, define our culture, govern our nation and plunder the earth. **By What Authority** reflects an unabashed assertion of the right of the sovereign people to govern themselves.

POCLAD is a group of 10 people instigating democratic conversations and actions that contest the authority of corporations to govern. Our analysis evolves through historical and legal research, writing, public speaking and working with organizations to develop new strategies that assert people’s rights over property interests.

BWA is a tool for democracy proponents to rethink and reframe their work. To that end we encourage readers to engage us with comments, questions and suggestions.

POCLAD
P.O. Box 246
South Yarmouth, MA 02664-0246
508-398-1145; 508-398-1552 (fax)
people@poclad.org; www.poclad.org

POCLAD is a project of the Jane Addams Peace Association
David Cobb, CA Karen Coulter, OR
Greg Coleridge, OH Mike Ferner, OH
Jim Price, AL Virginia Rasmussen, NY
Mary Zepernick, MA

Distribution policy: POCLAD welcomes all interested people to join our mailing list. Please consider an annual minimum contribution of \$25 to support POCLAD’s ongoing work (or whatever you can afford). Copyright 2014 by the Programs on Corporations, Law and Democracy. The content of BWA has been copyrighted only to ensure that it is not appropriated by others. POCLAD encourages the noncommercial reproduction and widespread distribution of material in BWA without prior approval, provided the material is unchanged and attribution is given to both BWA and the author(s). Please send us two copies of any material. Thank you! attribution is given to both BWA and the author(s). Please send us two copies of any material. Thank you!