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## Xi, Trump and Geopolitics

By Andrew Stewart

May 29, 2017

RANJAN BALAKUMARAN: What's going to happen in the U.S. with the fact that Trump went to this left-wing thing for unions and stuff like that?

DAVID GRAEBER: Classic.

RANJAN BALAKUMARAN: Where do you see all that going?

DAVID GRAEBER: It's interesting. It's clear that he was serious, at least at first, about trying to do what he said he was going to do. You could tell, because he got all these crazy people to be his deputies and his major officials. He chose the kind of people you would choose if you wanted people that didn't have loyalty to the institution but would exactly be loyal to you personally because you're trying to shake things up. It's clear that there's been a battle, and he's given ground on most of that stuff, which is too bad, because even though he's an evil racist bastard, but it's also true that if anybody is going to be able to dismantle the American empire, it would have to be a right-wing populist. Left-wingers wouldn't be allowed to get away with it.

—Donald Trump is a Classic Corporatist, May 17, 2017

Trump's election, like Brexit, represented a populist referendum that undeniably and totally rebuked the neoliberal political order. Did both of those referendums have as captains of the ship deeply xenophobic media personalities whose anti-Black/brown racism is undeniable? Yes. But, in the sense that imperfect captains of such vehicles can and do create new worlds that they might never have intended to create, so we must see these rebukes on the level of a world historical epoch, something Dr. Tony Monteiro has been saying for months now. In an April 18 interview (<https://www.thenation.com/article/trump-is-just-tearing-off-the-mask-an-interview-with-eric-foner/>), Eric Foner seconded this when he said "Neoliberalism was destroyed. Though it lingers on like a zombie walking the earth, it has no intellectual legitimacy anymore. But what is to take its place?"

I'd like to point to three moments in history which were undoubtably both key turning points in the historical record towards progressive change and simultaneously moments with deeply flawed captains of the ships navigating these waters.

The first is the American Civil War. Abraham Lincoln and Gen. William T. Sherman were both very flawed men. Lincoln, for instance, sent a message to the President of Haiti saying "You can tell the president of Haiti that I shan't tear my shirt if he does send a n\*gger here." Sherman's march to the sea was a column of death, destruction, and depravity that was not a divine revolutionary angel for slaves; indeed, the treatment of uncooperative freedmen in the way of that column was quite awful, particularly at a place called Ebenezer Creek.

The second is the Popular Front government of the Second Spanish Republic during that country's near-legendary Civil War. While there certainly are plenty of admirable elements to that Good Fight, there is a ghastly fact that ultimately is to blame for that loss. As part of the Popular Front line, the Communist Party of Spain, as well as the Comintern, abandoned their anti-colonial principles as a sign of appeasement for Socialists and Liberals. This rippled out from the declaration of the Popular Front toward Madrid with dire implications. Franco's main supply line of shock troops of course were from Spanish Morocco. During the war, the Republic posted broadsides of anti-Black racist propaganda about the dread Moors that would have been right at home in Dixie. Although anarchist Camillo Berneri had proposed that the Republic offer independence to the Moroccans, instead the Republican government rebuked this idea and the Moroccan envoys who came forward looking for arms and materiel. [Noam Chomsky](#) has argued previously that this was the cause of the Republic's loss and that Berneri's idea might have changed history for the better.

Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, is the third. In 1939, after his country had spent over a decade trying to build an international coalition to oppose fascism, Stalin accepted the obvious and commissioned a non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is a key moment in the historiographical discourse of the American Left, and the western Communist movement in general, because it was a significant moment for millions of men and women. Many Jewish Communists left the Parties in a mass-exodus owing to their disgust with Stalin's deal with the authors of the Nuremberg race laws that were actively used to persecute and murder their cousins in the old country. The fact that Stalin used the old imperial practice of partition in Poland, formerly a colony of the tsars, to gain secure footing in the corridor used by Napoleon's invasion was not lost on many. The great essayist Isaac Deutscher,

a quasi-Trotskyist whose writings created consternation if not outright antipathy within the ranks of various groups which bore that label in the postwar era, expressed throughout his career both an anxious condemnation of the Stalinist Thermidor, which cannibalized the founding generation of the Soviet Union, but also a guarded, skeptical celebration of how Stalin's statesmanship ended up furthering Trotsky's vision of the Permanent Revolution. In a 1964 introduction to an anthology of Trotsky's writings, [Deutscher writes](#):

Stalin's triumph, long-lasting though it was, turns out to have been as transitory as the situation that had produced it. 'Socialism in a single country' can now be seen as the ideological reflex of temporary circumstances, as a piece of 'false consciousness' rather than a realistic programme. The next act of Permanent Revolution began long before the USSR came anywhere near socialism. (It is a travesty of the truth to claim that the Soviet Union is – or was in Stalin's days – a socialist society; even after all its recent progress, it still finds itself somewhere halfway between capitalism and socialism.) Stalin's famous 'statesmanship' is now repudiated and ridiculed by his former acolytes, who describe his rule as a long Witches' Sabbath of senseless violence inflicted upon the Russian people. These denunciations must be taken with a grain of salt, for they tend to obscure the deeper underlying realities of the Stalin epoch. The isolated Russian Revolution could not cope satisfactorily with the tasks it had set itself, because these could not be resolved within a single state. Much of Stalin's work consisted in squaring the circle by means of mass terror; and his single-country socialism was indeed, as Trotsky maintained, a pragmatist's Utopia. The Soviet Union abandoned it to all intents and purposes towards the end of the Second World War, when its troops, in pursuit of Hitler's armies, marched into a dozen foreign lands, and carried revolution on their bayonets and in the turrets of their tanks. Then, in 1948-49, came the triumph of the Chinese Revolution, which Stalin had not expected and which he had done his best to obstruct. The 'pause' definitely had come to an end. The curtain had risen over another act of international revolution. And ever since, Asia, Africa and even Latin America have been seething. In appearance each of their upheavals has been national in scope and character. Yet each falls into an international pattern. The revolutionary dynamic cannot be brought to a rest. Permanent Revolution has come back into its own, and whatever its further intervals and disarray, it forms the socio-political content of our century.

I point to these three instances because they all share a common factor, imperial means to a progressive end. It is impossible to deny that there was a colonial element at play in these circumstances. But it is also impossible to deny that these efforts did have a progressive desired outcome that in the long run made substantial gains for humanity. To quote Monteiro, we live in what James Baldwin called "the long meantime", the time of America's long and terrifying racial counterrevolution." Existing in a reactionary era means that we must not grasp at straws that would provide false hope as much as rely on the certainty of words like those written by Zinoviev in 1924:

'So what, in your opinion, is the working class, a Messiah?' To this we answered and answer now: Messiah and messianism are not our language and we do not like such words; but we accept the concept that is contained in them: yes, the working class is in a certain sense a Messiah and its role is a messianic one, for this is the class which will liberate the whole world... We avoid semi-mystical terms like Messiah and messianism and prefer the scientific one: the hegemonic proletariat.

Such is the case now with China and its President Xi. Having read [his speech](#) at Davos from January, I cannot help but recognize it as a truly Marxist piece of writing. He closed it by saying “World history shows that the road of human civilization has never been a smooth one, and that mankind has made progress by surmounting difficulties. No difficulty, however daunting, will stop mankind from advancing. When encountering difficulties, we should not complain about ourselves, blame others, lose confidence or run away from responsibilities. We should join hands and rise to the challenge. History is created by the brave. Let us boost confidence, take actions and march arm-in-arm toward a bright future.”

From where I am sitting, I think it is clear that Xi exerts a tremendous amount of power over both Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. The former has personal business connections to the People’s Republic that (pardon the pun) trump all else. The latter, in the face of a series of crippling Western sanctions, has been offered a life preserver by China, who has agreed to both finance infrastructure in Russia over the coming years and is including the Kremlin in the creation of the One Belt One Road Eurasian trading bloc. While Trump rattles his saber about China for a bunch of fire-breathing neocon/neoliberal pundits and journalists domestically who have the political economy of a lemonade stand, it is clear on the balance sheet that China is in charge and that furthermore the destruction of the TPP, a trade deal intended to start a war with Beijing, has significantly lowered tensions between the USA and PRC.

China has expressed interest in participating in the rebuilding of Syria and even injecting troops into the theater. They have agreed to help build up the Russian economy. They are also doing the same with Tehran. The worldwide political order seems set to be defined for the next several decades by Beijing.

So the operative question then becomes quite obvious, is it possible to describe the Chinese Communist Party as remotely close to Bolshevism? Did Deng Xiaoping undeniably and irreversibly corrupt and make heretical the CPC? In the eyes of many a Western radical, particularly Maoists and anarchists/autonomists, the answer is a simple yes, the CPC has as much to do with communism as General Motors.

But this thought experiment bears much relevance and should be grappled with maturely. Was Lenin still a Communist when he initiated the series of policies known as the New Economic Policy (NEP)? Was Bukharin a Communist after he proposed his notion of a mixed economy? Because if both of them were, it must be accepted that Deng was adamant about how he was implementing their policies in China when he took power. The narrative which argues otherwise is essentially and undeniably one which can and should be compared to a typical borderline anti-Semitic corruption and fall narrative. Such narratives, besides Other-ing Jews, were documented by Edward Said in his classic *Orientalism* to be found in literature about the Orient. The idea that Deng made the CPC abandon enlightened European philosophy for instinctual wily Asian notions is plainly racist.

China is the real man behind the Trump curtain owing to selfish concerns of the Donald. We should consider ourselves lucky in this regard. Whether it be because Trump will try to stitch together a coalition to his left now that those to his right have been showing themselves to be duplicitous and with no loyalty or because the gridlock will leave America in stasis while the rest

of the world leaves it in the dust, it seems plainly obvious that, in this sense, neoliberal policies would otherwise have been implemented with efficiency had Hillary Clinton been elected president.

Consider the recent delivery of his budget, a turd he left standing at the altar on the day it was unveiled by choosing to be out of town and away from the prying eyes of reporters. I don't think he could have come up with a better prank to pull on Paul Ryan.

There are two possible scenarios here. On the one hand, Trump could be offering the most insane proposed budget seen in decades purposefully with the most milquetoast style possible so to further alienate his base from the mainstream Republicans like Paul Ryan, who quite obviously loathe Trump. This petit bourgeois heightening of the contradictions is another instance of him [gaslighting the party](#) he took over whose base loves him and superstructure loathes him. Trump the accelerationist?

On the other hand, Trump actually is into this manifesto of kleptocratic lunacy and intends to oversee the total destruction of the social safety net. If that be the case, well, I think you might enjoy Tariq Ali's recent words of wisdom: