

# Lessons to be learned from the US Elections\*

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The prevailing view within the international Left, which today is dominated by the reformist Left (i.e. the left which does not challenge the institutional framework of the market economy and representative “democracy”) is that we have been living through a temporary nightmare over the last four years. A nightmare in which certain neo-conservative extremists, led by a god-fearing sheriff, have taken over the hegemonic section of the transnational elite and have been building a new empire. This empire has supposedly been aiming to spread an extreme version of neoliberal globalisation and the parallel unilateral imposition of its hegemony by utilising every means at its disposal, from the economic strangulation of other peoples to the infliction of brutal violence. All that were needed, therefore, according to this view, would be for the US electorate to have been persuaded to vote out of office the Bush gang, which has been accused anyway of usurping power in the previous elections by means of various vote-wrangling tricks. This would have enabled a return to the “middle road”, which was supposedly followed by previous governments. It is for this reason, as I mentioned elsewhere<sup>[1]</sup>, that the entire international reformist Left joined the “Anybody but Bush” current, which in practice meant supporting Kerry – since Nader had, in effect, been ostracised through the employment of various electoral expedients by the Democrats.

This impression is, of course, totally simplistic, since the “progressive” Clinton administration also supported the spread of neoliberal globalisation with great zeal, while the use of brutal violence to integrate the Gulf and the Middle East in general into the New World Order had already begun with the first Gulf War and the crippling embargo against Iraq which followed it. And of course, the implementation of domestic neoliberal policies had started even earlier with Thatcher and Reagan, and simply continued under Bush (father and son), Clinton, Blair and their allies in Australia and elsewhere.

As far as the EU members of the transnational elite are concerned (apart from Blair), they have merely been attempting, all these years, to give neoliberal globalisation a human face – what we have called “social liberalism”. This is because attempts by leading social democrats to go against the stream of neoliberal globalisation had led either to economic crisis (Francois Mitterrand), or to their “defenestration” under pressure from local capital, which had been unable to survive the competition brought about by open and liberated markets (Oscar Lafontaine). Thus, the difference between the two main echelons of the transnational elite, the American and the European, was essentially confined to whether the integration of other areas into the New World Order would take place unilaterally (US) or multilaterally (EU), with a corresponding distribution of the loot between them.

The myth on which the reformist Left's view is based collapsed completely with the almost landslide victory of the "neo-conservatives", which followed the corresponding recent re-election of adherents to similar policies in Australia, and which is expected to be repeated yet again with the re-election of Blair's social liberals in the forthcoming elections in Britain. In this way, the impression is created that there is popular vindication for the policies which led to the widening of inequality and the increase of poverty in these countries (Bush has added another 4.3 million Americans to the 35.9 million already living below the poverty line), the continued undermining of the welfare state, the growing privatisation of health, education, pensions etc., yet more tax relief for corporations (i.e. for the rich who control them – Bush handed out another \$145bn in corporate tax breaks shortly before the election[2]) to attract more business investment, as well as the further expansion of flexible labour markets which negate decades of working class conquests (the Kok team argues that Europeans should work more hours on a lifetime basis, with older employees encouraged to stay at work beyond the retirement age)[3]. At the same time, the impression is also created that the criminal policies which, in Iraq alone, have already led to the deaths of at least 100,000 people[4] (for the sake of their "liberation"!) have been vindicated by a significant electoral majority.

The question is, however, are we speaking about real or fictional majorities, or, to put the question more accurately, what kind of democracy are we talking about? Specifically, when the usual participation rate in the US is 50%, and when, in the last elections, despite the whole campaign led by the reformist Left to increase participation with the supposed aim of achieving significant changes in policy, this rate had only gone up to 55% – a fact which meant that only 28% of the electorate approve of neo-conservative policies – what kind of majority and democracy are we talking about?

Could it be, perhaps, that those who were not interested in voting - chiefly those belonging to the lower income strata, i.e. the main victims of neoliberal globalisation – abstained, precisely because, contrary to what the reformist Left argue[5], they could not see any significant difference between the two main political parties competing for power? Particularly so, since their experience all these years had taught them that whichever party they voted for, the same policies would be implemented with only some minor differences.

Could it also be that, in this kind of "democracy", where the people (as Jean-Jacques Rousseau stressed) believe that once every four years they become sovereign and have the power to decide, the electors' choices, and the election agenda itself are, in actual fact, predetermined? Predetermined by the systemic mass media, which have persuaded many voters that the main problem they face is not unemployment or the growing concentration of power at the hands of the elite, but the threat of terrorism. Predetermined also by the dominant individualistic and religious values massively promoted by the same media and the education system, which has led to the prevalence of a curious ideological mix of fanatical Puritanism and consumerism among many Americans.

If the answers to the above questions are affirmative, and if we accept that, within the present institutional framework of open and liberated markets, neoliberal globalisation is a one-way street, then it is obvious that only the development of a strong antisystemic movement, which would fight for the creation of new institutions and values, would be able to offer a way out of the present multidimensional (political, economic, ecological, social) crisis which is deteriorating daily.

\* This is a translation of an article that was first published in the fortnight column of Takis Fotopoulos in the mass circulation Athens daily *Eleftherotypia* on 13/11/2004

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- [1] See T. Fotopoulos, "[Kerry and the Left](#)", *ID Newsletter* #3 (November 1, 2004).
- [2] "The shape of a second term", Suzanne Goldenberg et al., *The Guardian* (November 4, 2004).
- [3] "Europe losing growth race", David Gow, *The Guardian* (November 4, 2004).
- [4] *Lancet* (October 2004).
- [5] Michael Albert, "Tomorrow Is a Long Time", *Znet* (November 4, 2004).