

A brief report on the US elections from a stunned (but not surprised) US member of ARC•PEACE

New York, 15 November 2016

Dear colleagues,

Sixty per cent of voters surveyed as they left the polls said that Trump was “not qualified” to be President. But approximately fifty-five million voted for him. Over 40 million people did not vote at all. They are angry and filled with resentment toward the status quo. Trump has won by denigrating human values. In retrospect we should not be surprised that so many have fallen for his cynical exploitation of their insecurities. We must now work to neutralize Trump, the demagogue.

Anger and resentment are understandable coming from a decisive number of US citizens who live in the vast lands between the two coasts and experience joblessness (even though the national unemployment rate is less than 5%), stay at home watching TV that bombards them with misleading reporting from all sides, too many consumed by opiates, and scrambling monthly to pay their bills. In that context, it is small wonder that they would respond to a demagogue who hears their voices, echoes their fears and distrust of the “system”, and promises to “fix” their problems – and meanwhile has contributed to their plight. Since he gave no proposals for us to evaluate, the struggling members of our electorate felt no need to demand a platform before going to vote. What were fifty-five million fellow Americans thinking? Trump won the presidency despite having been shown repeatedly by the national media to be a chronic liar, sexual predator, serial tax-avoider, and race-baiter that has attracted the support of the likes of the Ku Klux Klan. I believe that their anger, fears, frustration and feeling of abandonment by the system fueled their votes more than any actual support for Trump’s despicable values and outrageous behavior.

During his campaign, Trump promised to deport US citizens. He also promised to create a system of surveillance targeted specifically at Muslim Americans. He also promised to build a wall on the border with Mexico, advocated war crimes, endorsed torture, and repeatedly threatened to jail his opponent. The recent progress internationally on climate change will suffer horrible setbacks and at least four years of dismantling before anyone will have the possibility to rebuild programs that were finally getting some traction. There is much more to say about climate change and sustainability, the one topic that knows no boundaries.

The election of Donald Trump to the presidency is an enormous setback for the US and its Constitution and will necessitate years of rebuilding to get back on a hopeful track. Sadly, this election, of course, follows an international current of populism completely in disarray with demagogues everywhere and people from many countries totally disenfranchised, witness Brexit, Le Pen, and more catastrophic social and cultural chaos throughout the world.

Under Trump’s leadership, the US will inevitably become protectionist, isolationist, trade weary, and even viler than now on matters of immigration. US citizens take pride in our democracy’s achievements; however, today we feel anger and shame about increasing inequality, insufficient representation, widespread corruption, voter suppression, and powerlessness in the face of economic decline. Tragically, anger and shame were the engines that drove the electorate last week. Vicious divisiveness was accompanied by a virulent nihilism.

How to fight back against Trumpism? My hope lays in promoting local, tangible, community governance as an antidote to the dark clouds over globalism. Feelings of helplessness and creeping ennui may dull our senses. Before that happens we must keep our eyes and ears on the ground close to where we live, close to mechanisms that allow us to have an impact. Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, concluded that many votes were cast as “declarations of

disbelief". He has researched this issue in detail and has written on how critical it is to marshal the powers of small communities. ARC•PEACE activists have adopted this position and are already taking on challenges in cities where 70% of world population lives, People can feel more in control of their lives and be engaged in their community when they are surrounded by the "drama of inclusion", Taylor says.

Unfortunately, in towns where jobs are disappearing, where main streets are empty, and church attendance is down, the notion of "community" rings hollow, and people end up sitting at home alone with no sense of control over their own lives. I believe that our supposed access to the world through Facebook and YouTube actually distorts our world view and exaggerates the social and political order that seems in such disarray.

When we become better connected to our local body politic, we will find traction in projects located near to us in which we can have impact as a group. A hopeful outcome will be less nihilism and a greater stake in the future. With any luck, Mr. Trump will be neutralized by his own ignorance, or, resign when he does not immediately obtain success as he is unlikely to do, or is impeached for his already many misdeeds giving us back ownership over a version of democracy that has worked, if imperfectly, for 250 years. None of these paths are likely and every day since the election the Trumpian landscape worsens.

In the meantime, many Americans are in a demoralized funk. We are now, all of us, disenfranchised by every measure: class, race, rich and poor, ethnicity, and political persuasion. It is some solace to me to read the imaginings of Joshua Rothman in the New Yorker Magazine a few days ago:

"One imagines what (a) rooted, meaningful democracy might look like. A political life centered on local schools, town governments, voluntary associations, and churches; a house in the woods with the television turned off. Inside, family members aren't glued to their phones. They talk, over dinner, about politics, history, and faith, about national movements and local ones; they feel, all the time, that they're doing something. It's a pastoral vision, miles away from the media-driven election we've just concluded. But it's not a fantasy."

My thanks go to Joshua Rothman a New Yorker journalist, from whom I have become aware of Charles Taylor, an 85 year old Canadian philosopher. PS links will bring you to various articles by Taylor, Rothman and other New Yorker writers that I have found informative.

Best wishes to all,

Paul Broches
FAIA, ARC•PEACE UN Representative

PS:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taylor_\(philosopher\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taylor_(philosopher))

<http://www.newyorker.com/books/joshua-rothman/a-spiritual-march-on-washington>