

Notes for the 'What's next? Trump in the White House' roundtable

29 November 2016

The Trump election, much like the vote to leave the EU in Britain, is a revolution of the luckiest generation in the history of humankind. In both instances the Baby Boomers (1946-1964) voted overwhelmingly for the ensuing result.

As far as revolutions are concerned, this one is a nostalgic one, a revolution for 'the better times gone by'. And the Boomers are right, because they truly had it grand, though less so in Britain – but even here they enjoyed the postwar prosperity with massively rising quality of life, fairly stable jobs, no student debt, good pensions, better healthcare than ever, and so on.

Growing old, they fear such a world is disappearing or has disappeared. While they did not lay its foundations, it was their parents' generation that did, they did much to tear it down.

The driving emotion behind the vote on both sides of the Atlantic was resentment; and nothing good has ever come out of resentment. Resentment demands a culprit. In the US presidential election, Donald Trump had a more credible one – the non-white people and foreigners. Hilary Clinton tried, speaking (sometimes) against the rich. But on that account she had no credibility – who would believe a rich person railing against the rich?

Every revolution is, in the words of Henry Kissinger written nearly 50 years ago, precipitated by a failure: 'the inability of the "establishment" to come to grips with a fundamental change'. Lenin put it more precisely though: 'It is only when the *"lower classes" do not want to live in the old way and the "upper classes" cannot carry on in the old way* that the revolution can triumph. This truth can be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters).'

Five points for world order follow from these brief observations:

- 1) There will be a need to deal with a revolutionary state. Revolutionary states cannot be reassured. The United States will make demands.
- 2) Nostalgic revolutions can wreak just as much havoc as progressive ones. They have little sense of a building the world anew. They are, however, turf wars.
- 3) Unpredictability is an asset in such conflicts. As Trump said – 'We must as a nation be unpredictable'. The collapse of a rules based system favours, in the short run, the powerful.

- 4) The hopes that deals will be made and hypocrisy will catch up with Trump are unrealistic. In revolutions the radicals are always underestimated in the beginning.
- 5) What revolutions need is a core principle to be turned against the existing order. Here it is the principle of the popular sovereignty

Having a bully in charge, empowers bullies elsewhere, so long as they do not step on the main bully's toes.