

Islands of Green in a Dark Sea? Climate Politics in Trump's USA

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Setting the Stage

- This is a learning moment
- But we need to learn the right lessons
- Through a systematic analysis that is sensitive to history and politics

History and Politics

- History – how is this different from Reagan?
- Politics – people make history under circumstances not of their making
 - Who are the people and what are the circumstances
- But, is Trump the tragedy or the farce?

The Dark Sea Until November 8, 2016

- The sea has long been dark under the surface
 - Congress, courts, republicans, blue-dog democrats
 - Republican control of state legislatures through redistricting
 - Corporate anti-unionism and greenwashing
 - Tea party, right wing libertarians, social conservatives
 - Shifting allegiances of conservative workers, self-employed

The Dark Sea Now

- All of the above and...
- Right wing populism
 - Undergirded by sexism, racism, xenophobia
 - But promising to pay the costs of legitimacy
- Strong opposition to environmental politics and workers' rights
 - But not those of authoritarian unions and perhaps others

The Dark Sea after January

- Direct assault on climate policies (and more)
 - Likely withdrawal from Paris Agreement
 - Certain abandonment of implementation policies such as the Clean Power Plan
 - Weakening of EPA and environmental regulation
- ‘Indirect’ assault on climate policies
 - Support for fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure
 - But most likely this will work to the advantage of natural gas

Competing Dark Seas?

- Infrastructure
 - Through deficit spending?
- Economic Agreements
 - Competing capitals?
- The price of legitimacy
 - Can Trump pay it?

Islands of Green: States and Cities

- State and City environmentalism
 - Varieties of state and city environmentalism
- Product of devolution taking place since 1980s
- A dominant part of US economy (if one includes green products)
- Drives demand for green investments and environmental upgrading

Islands of Green: Green Capital

- Manufacturing
- Infrastructure
- Efficiency
- Finance

Islands of Green: Environmentalists

- The abandonment of liberal environmentalism by Trump (like Reagan and Bush Jr) makes it more difficult to coopt market environmentalists
- Resurgence of social environmentalism in zones of sacrifice

Islands of Green: Green Labour

- BlueGreen Alliance
- Advocates – Labor Network for Sustainability, TUED,
- Labour and Climate Justice
- Labour and local mobilizations

Green Problems

- Divisions amongst labour unions
 - The not so discreet charm of infrastructure
- Green capital and states are not necessarily union or environment friendly
- The lack of a national alternative
 - See debates over future of Democratic Party

pessimistic hypothesis i

- Trump's commitment to infrastructural spending
- Plus opposition to trade agreements on nationalist grounds
- Can well be attractive to conservative unions and workers, expanding the universe of conservative (and authoritarian) unionism in the USA

hopeful hypothesis i

- Green union proposals are likely to persist in:
 - Some states as part of ecological modernization
 - Some states as industrial policy
 - In collaboration with some companies
 - In collaboration with some business associations

hopeful hypothesis ii

- The elements of a green alliance are there –because the lines are drawn sharply- and some unions can play a catalytic role by:
 - Participating and learning from urban and state greening
 - Participating and learning from zones of sacrifice
 - Keeping in mind that the Dark Sea looks smaller if painted in terms of numbers of people and voters

Optimistic hypothesis ii (cont)

- Reclaiming the language of 'working class' and the poor
- Developing a language on 'jobs' that is distinct from that of capital
- Putting climate within a broader environmental agenda that is part of everyday life
- Reclaiming the commons – social and environmental – as they are in the USA
- Offering just transition as a broad narrative based on concrete proposals