

Trump's first 5 months - this isn't normal...

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In the week following Donald Trump's shock election as president of the United States John Oliver, the comedian and presenter of the satirical HBO program *Last Week Tonight*, encouraged Americans to keep reminding themselves that 'this isn't normal'. In the months since last November the continued controversies that have followed the new administration, such as claiming that the Obama administration used UK intelligence at GCHQ to tap his phone(!)¹, have relegated incidents that would merit intense and prolonged coverage in 'normal times' to mere footnotes between the seemingly endless Trump administration crises and continual blunders - not to mention Trump's twitter account.

Trump's campaign plumbed the depths of racism, Islamophobia, misogyny and sexism, emboldened the far right and took as its stock-in-trade outlandish claims and personal insults. Even from the earliest days of his campaign, when almost no serious commentator or analyst gave him even an outside chance of the Republican nomination let alone the presidency Trump has rarely been out of the media. With promises like banning all Muslim immigrants, building a wall

on the Mexican border and making Mexico pay for it, comments about Mexican immigrants being rapists, suggestions of deliberately targeting and killing the families of suspected terrorists and attacks on almost every piece of news coverage as 'fake news' Trump was treated by much of the media more as an item of entertainment and/or ridicule than a prospective president with deeply troubling policies. The reality of the situation dawned very late for many with CNN President Jeff Zucker admitting that

If we made any mistake last year, it's that we probably did put on too many of his campaign rallies in those early months and let them run.

Adding that one of the reasons they had done this was that

because you never knew what he would say, there was an attraction to put those on air.²

With a campaign dominated by bombastic statements of intent like those just mentioned and a shocking inconsistency on key issues such as abortion rights where his policy often differed over days or in some cases hours it was difficult to predict what Trump would do once in office. In his first five months the administration has been dominated by controversial decisions, like repeated attempts to implement a travel ban on Muslims entering the country, almost unbelievable incompetence and scandals. Press Secretary Sean Spicer justified Trump's decision to bomb an airbase in Syria over chemical weapons attacks by the Assad regime by

¹'Trump stands by unsubstantiated claim that British intelligence spied on him' *The Guardian* [theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/17/white-house-will-not-be-repeat-claims-gchq-spied-trump-](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/17/white-house-will-not-be-repeat-claims-gchq-spied-trump-)

²'CNN's President Says It Was A Mistake To Air So Many Trump Rallies And 'Let Them Run' *BuzzFeed News* [buzzfeed.com/maryanngeorgantopoulos/cnn-president-mistake-to-air-so-many-trump-rallies?utm_term=.ui2yvzW9r#.meNAZ8JzX](https://www.buzzfeed.com/maryanngeorgantopoulos/cnn-president-mistake-to-air-so-many-trump-rallies?utm_term=.ui2yvzW9r#.meNAZ8JzX)

claiming that Hitler ‘didn’t even sink to using chemical weapons’ before backtracking and saying that he had sent Jews to ‘Holocaust centers’ but that he ‘was not using the gas on his own people in the same way that Assad is doing’. The most serious scandal has been that regarding contacts with Russia during the election campaign and has led to the resignation of National Security Adviser Michael Flynn after only 24 days in office, with the Attorney General Jeff Sessions recusing himself from the investigation after lying about Russian contacts during his confirmation hearing. This in turn has led to the firing of FBI director James Comey and to Trump himself coming under investigation for possible obstruction of the investigation into Michael Flynn.

Politically Trump’s presidency has been a frantic affair with barely a pause between major decisions or actions. While most are in many ways the type of straightforward conservatism and neoliberal economics expected from a Republican president others have put him at odds with at least significant sections of his own party. Before looking at some of these it is worth examining briefly at how we got here.

The Economy... and a whole lot of stupid

Much has been made of racism as a factor in the election and Trump’s campaign was certainly deeply racist. Yet although he won a majority, 58 percent, of white votes the narrative that Trump won the election due to an appeal to racism in the poor white working class is oversimplified. Many articles have been written debunking this myth and it is worth noting that much of the definition of a vote’s class used in the US media is based primarily on educational attainment

(college graduate or not) and income. Obviously from a Marxist perspective this ignores the key component of class - the relation to the means of production - and as an article by Kim Moody in *Jacobin* noted

There are also millions of Americans who don’t have a college degree, who are not working class, and who are actually more likely to vote than the ‘left behind’ industrial workers. There are some 17 million small business owners without that degree. As a 2016 survey by the National Small Business Association tells us, 86% of small business owners are white, they are twice as likely to be Republicans as Democrats, almost two-thirds consider themselves conservative (78% on economic issues), and 92% say they regularly vote in national elections.

They drew an average salary of \$112,000 in 2016 compared to \$48,320 for the average annual wage. Add in the spouses, and this classically petty bourgeois group alone could more than account for all the 29 million of those lacking a college degree who voted for Trump.³

Analysis of voter income also reveals that those who earned under \$50,000 were slightly more likely to vote for Clinton while those earning over \$50,000 were more likely to vote Trump, although by a similarly small margin⁴. This is exacerbated by the fact that those who earn a higher income are more likely to vote, about 25 percent of US households have an income greater than

³Kim Moody ‘Who put Trump in the White House?’ *Jacobin* jacobinmag.com/2017/01/trump-election-democrats-gop-clinton-whites-workers-rust-belt/

⁴‘Exit polls and election results – what we learned’ *The Guardian* theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/12/exit-polls-election-results-what-we-learned

⁵Interview with Lance Selfa ‘Who’s to blame for Trump’s victory?’ *Socialist Worker.org* socialistworker.org/2016/11/14/whos-to-blame-for-trumps-victory

\$100,000⁵ yet 34 percent of voters in the election had an income greater than \$100,000. That being said the question of how Trump won the election remains⁶.

The election didn't happen in a vacuum and has to be taken in a wider international context. Following the global financial crash in 2008 ordinary people around the world were forced to endure vicious austerity measures in order to bail out many of the institutions responsible for the crash in the first place. While in many instances the initial resistance was slow to materialise over the intervening years it has resulted in a polarisation in politics across the globe. While what Tariq Ali has called the extreme centre has suffered new forces to the right and left have emerged. On the left we have seen the rise of Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and in Ireland Solidarity-People Before Profit took 6 Dáil seats in addition to a number of other Independents from radical left backgrounds. On the right we have seen Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary, Marine Le Pen and the Front National in France, UKIP in the UK and Gert Wilders' Freedom Party in the Neatherlands. The US has not been immune to this polarisation and while Trump represents the populist right the left was represented by the self described democratic socialist Bernie Sanders who came close to securing the Democratic Party nomination only to lose to Hillary Clinton.

While Trump was stoking up racism, to a level that gained him the endorsement of former Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke, amongst other white supremacists⁷, he was also couching it in terms that could appeal to many in the de-industrialised 'rust belt'. In a very right-wing way he addressed some of the very real economic concerns of large sections of the US population. While his tax cuts may be

for the benefit of a tiny and wealthy elite his talk of bringing back US manufacturing jobs and tearing up the free trade agreements, like NAFTA, blamed for jobs moving out of the US, of economic nationalism and import tariffs on foreign goods, and a promise to 'make America great again' resonated with large numbers.

While Trump was able to capture support from the right Bernie Sanders was able to capture it from the left. Running on a platform emphasising income inequality, promising higher taxes for the wealthy and talking about a 'political revolution' he was able to appeal to the many Americans who feel left behind in a shockingly and increasingly unequal society. Once Hillary Clinton won the Democratic nomination, with the support of the leadership of the Democratic Party, Sanders radical message which had resonated with many, particularly with younger generations, was lost. Bill Clinton's 'slogan' from his 1992 election win over George Bush Snr, 'the economy, stupid', seems to have been entirely forgotten in the intervening years.

In an election where being an outsider was a distinct advantage the Democrats chose as their candidate the ultimate Washington insider. The advantages of being seen as an outsider are not entirely new and even the lessons of her loss to Barack Obama for the Democratic nomination in 2008 went unheeded. Obama's messages of 'hope' and 'change' were ultimately enhanced by his brief time in Washington. As the New York Times noted in early 2016 Obama was encouraged to run for the nomination in 2006

...precisely because he had spent such a short time in Washington that he had not built up the legislative record or earned the insider image that could weigh him

⁶Of course Trump actually lost the popular vote by nearly 2.9 million votes but still won due to the archaic electoral college system used in the elections.

⁷'Meet the Horde of Neo-Nazis, Klansmen, and Other Extremist Leaders Endorsing Donald Trump' *Mother Jones* motherjones.com/politics/2016/09/trump-supporters-neo-nazis-white-nationalists-klks-militias-racism-hate/

down like, say, Hillary Clinton.⁸

Or as former Democratic Senate leader Tom Daschle put it

It was almost a liability to have any experience or ties to Washington.⁹

In contrast to the promise of Obama's 2008 campaign Clinton's campaign offered nothing beyond a continuation of Obama's policies - policies which many had long since grown disillusioned with - just think of the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement sparked by multiple videos of US police shooting black people, under the country's first black president! If anyone is to blame for Trump sitting in the Oval Office it is the Democratic Party with their determination to maintain a neoliberal status quo and an inability to address the issues facing working people in America. Just like the Blairites in the British Labour party who seemed to prefer a loss to the Tories to an election victory under Jeremy Corbyn, the Democratic Party stuck with the candidate of the political and economic elite resulting in an election between two of the most unpopular candidates in US history. What lessons they will take from this remains to be seen but their excuses so far don't wash. Simply lamenting the fact that anyone could vote for Trump over Clinton is not enough. It should go without saying that measuring yourself against a baseline of Donald Trump is setting the bar unfeasibly low.

Those first five months

Attempting to deal with everything the Trump administration has done over the

past five months would take up far more space than is available so I will limit my focus to a few key policies and events.

'Draining the swamp' - the richest cabinet in US history

Trump has assembled a cabinet that is the richest, and among the most conservative, in US history¹⁰. Despite the campaign pledge to 'drain the swamp' in Washington his cabinet relies heavily on a mix of big business and finance figures as well as longstanding Republicans and Washington insiders - picks that sit uncomfortably with his campaign criticisms of the elite.

Trump has defended his picks wealth in characteristic style telling supporters at a rally in Iowa.

So somebody said, 'Why did you appoint a rich person to be in charge of the economy?' I said, 'Because that's the kind of thinking we want ... because they're representing the country. They don't want the money. And they had to give up a lot to take these jobs.' We can't have the world taking advantage of us anymore, And I love all people, rich or poor, but in those particular positions, I just don't want a poor person, Does that make sense? If you insist, I'll do it — but I like it better this way, right?¹¹

As shocking as equating wealth with suitability for top government jobs is for many of us the ideological issues surrounding Trump's cabinet picks only get worse, some

⁸'Obama Cleared Way for Today's Outsider Candidates' *The New York Times* [nytimes.com/2016/02/02/us/politics/obama-cleared-way-for-todays-outsider-candidates.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/02/us/politics/obama-cleared-way-for-todays-outsider-candidates.html)

⁹*ibid.*

¹⁰Estimates of the cabinets net worth vary from \$6 bn to \$14 bn, see Tom Kertscher 'Do 17 picks for Donald Trump's Cabinet have a higher net worth than one-third of Americans?' *Politifact.com* [politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2016/dec/30/mark-pocan/do-17-picks-donald-trumps-cabinet-have-higher-net-/](https://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2016/dec/30/mark-pocan/do-17-picks-donald-trumps-cabinet-have-higher-net-/)

¹¹'President Trump Says He Doesn't Want a 'Poor Person' in Cabinet Role' *Time.com* [time.com/4828157/donald-trump-cabinet-iowa-rally-poor-person/](https://www.time.com/4828157/donald-trump-cabinet-iowa-rally-poor-person/)

of the stand out appointments include¹²: Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, a billionaire former equity fund manager and former head of Rothschild Inc.; Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, a former top Goldman Sachs executive and hedge fund manager; Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, former CEO of Exxon Mobil; Attorney General Jeff Sessions, former Senator for Alabama with a troubling history of racism¹³ including calling a black attorney ‘boy’ while Attorney General for Alabama and saying he believed the Ku Klux Klan was OK (until he learned its members smoked marijuana); Secretary of Health and Human Services Tom Price, a major opponent of Obamacare; Energy Secretary Rick Perry, former Governor of Texas who pledged to abolish the Department of Energy when running for the Republican nomination for president in 2012; Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, former chairwoman of the Republican party in Michigan and a major supporter of private charter schools; Head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Scott Pruitt, former Attorney General of Oklahoma who in that capacity sued the EPA in an attempt to block Obama administration climate rules (the case is still ongoing); White House Chief of Staff, Reince Priebus, the former chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC).

These cabinet level appointments were also supplemented by other appointments, such as Chief Strategist, Steve Bannon, the former executive chair of the far-right Breitbart News and key figure in the Alt Right movement. There is also his choice of Vice President, former Indiana Governor Mike Pence. Pence is deeply conservative and

has tried to pass legislation severely limiting abortion access and a ‘religious freedom’ bill widely seen as discriminating against LGBT people.

Exactly how Trump can square the circle of running an anti-establishment campaign only to fill his cabinet with figures that are the very definition of establishment remains to be seen but his choices do reflect a key element in his rise to power. Throughout his campaign Trump managed to attract significant support from many groups within the Republican Party. Indeed the often fractured nature of the party over the last decade or so and Trump’s own chameleon like policy platform may well have been significant factors in allowing him to attract votes from traditional Republicans (probably best represented by Reince Priebus), the Tea Party Movement (typified by Steve Bannon) and the evangelical wing (à la Mike Pence’s deep social conservatism). How this fragile balance can be maintained is an open question for Trump and his inner circle and also for the wider Republican Party.

Muslim travel ban

In the aftermath of terrorist attacks in France Trump announced that as president he would temporarily ban all Muslims from entering the US and shortly after taking office he signed an executive order, on January 27¹⁴, banning entry to the US for 90 for citizens from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. The order also indefinitely halted refugees from Syria.

The ban was met with outrage and ongoing protests at airports across the country¹⁵. The following day, January 28, a Federal Judge in New York temporarily blocked part

¹²For a full list of appointments, although not necessarily a full list of their misdeeds, see ‘The Donald Trump Cabinet Tracker’ *The Atlantic* theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/04/trump-cabinet-tracker/510527/

¹³‘Jeff Sessions’s chequered past’ *The Guardian* theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2009/may/05/jeff-sessions-arlen-specter-judiciary-committee

¹⁴For a timeline of Trumps attempted travel ban see ‘A timeline of President Trump’s travel bans’ *CNN* edition.cnn.com/2017/02/10/us/trump-travel-ban-timeline/index.html

¹⁵‘Protesters mass at airports to decry Trump’s immigration policies’ *CNN* edition.cnn.com/2017/01/28/politics/us-immigration-protests/index.html

of the order as did another Federal Judge in Massachusetts on 29 January. On February 3 District Court Judge James Robart blocked the ban nationwide and this decision was upheld on February 9.

On March 6 Trump signed another executive order. This time Iraq was removed from the list with the new version banning entry to the US for 90 days for citizens from Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, and all refugees for 120 days. Just hours before it was due to take effect a court in Hawaii blocked this version too, leaving yet another horrible Trump policy in ruins.

With the dubious state of this policy with respect to constitutional rights to freedom of religion it was always going to be a near impossible policy to implement once people resisted and added to this are reports from *The Washington Post* about a Department of Homeland Security report which stated that

...assessing the terrorist threat posed by people from the seven countries covered by President Trump's travel ban casts doubt on the necessity of the executive order, concluding that citizenship is an 'unreliable' threat indicator and that people from the seven countries have rarely been implicated in US-based terrorism.¹⁶

Given all of this it is hard not to view the travel ban as deeply cynical exercise in self promotion for Trump, allowing him to engage in racist and islamophobic dog whistle politics to play up to some of his far right base.

¹⁶'DHS report casts doubt on need for Trump travel ban' *The Washington Post* [washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dhs-report-casts-doubt-on-need-for-trump-travel-ban/2017/02/24/2a9992e4-fadc-11e6-9845-576c69081518_story.html?utm_term=.a8f6564c84ec](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dhs-report-casts-doubt-on-need-for-trump-travel-ban/2017/02/24/2a9992e4-fadc-11e6-9845-576c69081518_story.html?utm_term=.a8f6564c84ec)

¹⁷See here for a time line of the attempts to replace Obamacare. 'Comparing Trump's health care push to Obamacare's timeline' *ABC News* abcnews.go.com/US/comparing-trumps-health-care-push-obamacares-timeline/story?id=47229063

Obamacare or Trumpcare

Obamacare or the Affordable Care Act, which makes healthcare available to some of the poorest people in the US, was a signature achievement of Obama's first term in office and has long been a bone of contention with Republicans who see it as an unwarranted intrusion into the 'healthcare market'. Unsurprisingly repealing the act and replacing it was a key election pledge for Trump - as indeed it would probably have been for any incoming Republican president. Shortly after his election however he softened his stance and indicated he would keep some elements of Obamacare.

In March Trump supported a bill in the House of Representatives to replace Obamacare but struggled to get it through even his own party. While some on the extreme right of the party felt it didn't go far enough in fulfilling the pledge to repeal Obamacare others worried about the effect of the bill on their own election prospects, particularly after the Congressional Budget Committee released a report which estimated that the bill would result in about 14 million more people being uninsured by next year¹⁷. Such was the division in the Republican Party that the bill was pulled from the floor of the House, at Trump's request, shortly before it was to be voted on.

Eventually the Republicans managed to pass a new bill on May 4, however it still needs to be passed by the Senate and despite the majority held by the Republicans it is widely expected that it will be significantly altered before it can be passed. While the Republicans are clearly united in their opposition to Obamacare they are far from united on what to replace it with and the long standing tensions from different wings of the party will pose a serious obstacle for

Trump and his Senate supporters to navigate.

Build the wall!

Undoubtedly one of the most outlandish pledges made by Trump during his campaign was to build a wall along the Mexican border AND getting Mexico to pay for it. While most commentators dismissed it as more of Trump's overblown campaigning it is worth mentioning briefly as it was such a major part of his campaign that it has rumbled on - in no small part due to Trump still bringing it up on a regular basis. His most recent missive on the subject as this article goes to print was to suggest it be a 'solar wall'

You know, people don't realize we're already spending a lot of money on design, but I'll give you an idea that nobody has heard about yet. And I'm not sure, but I'm a builder. That's what I love to do. That's probably what I do best. I'm a builder, and we're thinking of something that's unique. We're talking about the southern border: lots of sun, lots of heat. We're thinking about building the wall as a solar wall, so it creates energy and pays for itself. And this way, Mexico will have to pay much less money, and that's good, right?¹⁸

'Building the wall' probably encapsulates the message that Trump campaigned on more than any other of his policies. It has

¹⁸'LOL: Trump Pushes For 'Solar Wall' *The Daily Wire* dailywire.com/news/17838/lol-trump-pushes-solar-wall-elliott-hamilton

¹⁹Donald Trump, *Twitter* November 6 2012, twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/265895292191248385?lang=en

²⁰'The first new US coal mine of the Trump era will employ fewer people than an average supermarket' *qz.com* qz.com/1004295/the-first-new-us-coal-mine-of-the-trump-era-will-employ-fewer-people-than-an-average-supermarket/

²¹'Trump pushes coal mining in Gunnison National Forest days after repudiating Paris climate agreement' *High Country Conservation Advocates* hccacb.org/trump-pushes-coal-mining-in-gunnison-national-forest-days-after-repudiating-paris-climate-agreement/

allowed him to address many of the issues which galvanised his supporters. There is the dog whistle politics of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment, the economic nationalism in forcing Mexico to pay for it as some sort of perverse revenge for the manufacturing jobs lost under NAFTA, keeping Americans safe from supposed criminals and drug dealers, and of course it offers Trump an ability to do what he does best - grandstand.

Given that he is still promising to build it, the wall may well add another site of resistance to Trump. It can be opposed for many reasons, from its inherent racism to its likely extravagant cost and of course its likely total ineffectiveness at stopping either people or drugs entering the country.

Climate

Trump has long been notorious for his climate change denial stance. In 2012 he tweeted that

The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive.¹⁹

Following on from his campaign pledges to open new coal mines one has already opened in Pennsylvania²⁰ and he has pushed ahead with plans to lease 1,700 acres of wilderness in Gunnison National Forest in Colorado to Arch Coal. This will allow them to expand their existing mining operations in the region, mines that EPA data have shown to be the largest industrial emitter of methane in Colorado between 2013 and 2015²¹. This is on top of the continued extraction of shale gas via fracking.

Of course by far the most damaging anti-climate move of his administration to date has been pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord. After refusing to confirm or deny his intention to do so at a G7 meeting in Italy in May he announced his decision at a press conference dripping with economic nationalism not far removed from the infamous tweet about China and global warming mentioned earlier.

We're getting out. We don't want other leaders and other countries laughing at us any more. And they won't be. The same nations asking us to stay in the agreement are the countries that have collectively cost America trillions of dollars through tough trade practices and in many cases lax contributions to our critical military alliance.²²

Trump's attitude to climate change is of course typical of many in the Republican Party and shouldn't be a surprise from a president who appointed the former CEO of Exxon Mobile as his Secretary of State. Denial of climate change or even just refusal to do anything significant about it has long been evident among those who hold strongly neoliberal economic views. When faced with plans for regulation which may hurt their profits fossil fuel companies are more than capable of utilising their vast wealth and power to scupper those plans without a thought to the long term consequences for themselves, let alone the rest of the planet.

Foreign policy

Trump's foreign policy has largely been 'more of the same' although with some im-

portant differences. His talk during the campaign of reducing the US commitment to NATO so far hasn't materialised but at the G7 summit in Italy there were sharp divisions over issues such as the Paris Climate Accord – which Trump subsequently pulled out of – and although Trump seemed to row back on some of his protectionist policies regarding trade tariffs the meeting still only resulted in an agreed statement six pages long, this compares with the last G7 meeting which ended in a statement 32 pages long and may well indicate that Trump's 'America first' approach is going to lead to some additional division in the main Western powers²³.

Trump has also continued the policy of US support for Saudi Arabia, announcing a \$110 bn arms deal on a visit to the country.²⁴

While he may have largely inherited the mess in the middle east he has shown no signs of a change in strategy. So far he has continued to bomb Yemen, in support of a Saudi Arabia led coalition. Dropped the so called 'mother of all bombs', the largest non-nuclear weapon in the US arsenal in Afghanistan – the first time it has ever been deployed in combat. Air strikes also continue against ISIS in Iraq and in Syria where there have also been strikes on Assad regime forces.

As previously noted it is links with Russia that have led to the largest and most prolonged crisis of the administration, going so far as to suggest serious talk of impeachment even if Republican majorities in the House and Senate make it an unlikely outcome. Throughout the campaign Trump indicated he would pursue closer relations with Russia, relations which have been strained since the annexation of Crimea which saw Russia kicked out of the then G8. The strong evidence that Russian based hack-

²²'Trump dismays, angers allies by abandoning global climate pact' *Reuters* [reuters.com/article/us-usa-climatechange-trump-idUSKBN18R1J4](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-climatechange-trump-idUSKBN18R1J4)

²³'G7 leaders divided on climate change, closer on trade issues' *Reuters* [reuters.com/article/us-g7-summit-idUSKBN18L2ZU](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-g7-summit-idUSKBN18L2ZU)

²⁴'Trump faces growing Senate resistance on Saudi arms deal' *Politico* [politico.com/story/2017/06/08/trump-senate-saudi-arabia-arms-239259](https://www.politico.com/story/2017/06/08/trump-senate-saudi-arabia-arms-239259)

ers gained access to the DNC email servers during the election combined with Trump's proposed change of attitude toward Russia should really have made his team much more circumspect in dealings with Russia during the transition period between the election and inauguration but this was not the case and contacts with Russian officials have impacted on National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Trump's son in law and advisor Jared Kushner. Trump's handling of the investigation into Flynn has led to him being placed under investigation for possible obstruction and also led, at least in some part, to the firing of FBI director James Comey.

Trump has also revealed top secret information, given to the US by Israel, to Russian officials during a White House meeting – without clearing the release with his own officials or the Israeli government. Such diplomatic incidents from a US president do not auger well for global stability.

Yet despite all this Trump's relations with Russia have not been as close as his campaign might have suggested and tensions still run high particularly since missile strikes against an Assad regime air base and the shooting down of a Syrian plane. How these tensions are resolved remains an open question but clearly Trump has deviated from his own advice in 2013 when he tweeted

We should stop talking, stay out of Syria and other countries that hate us...²⁵

Finally it is worth mentioning the firing of James Comey, in which some have seen signs of a possible clash between Trump and the 'deep state' in the US. While there would seem to be a deal of tension between Trump and the 'intelligence community' it doesn't appear to have escalated to a stage where there are likely to be any moves against him – however much they might like rid of him

²⁵Donal Trump, *Twitter* September 12 2013, twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/378389940671107072?lang=en

and however willing they may be to instigate regime change elsewhere that is unlikely to be a precedent they would wish to set in the US itself.

Conclusions: We are only five months in, what next?

Trump's presidency has been met with resistance from day one: protests erupted while votes were still being counted. The day after the inauguration hundreds of thousands descended on the Washington Mall for the Woman's March, with simultaneous protests in cities across the US. On April 22, Earth Day, tens of thousands protested against Trump's anti-science views, with a particular emphasis on his denial of global warming. Airports around the US were surrounded by protesters after the travel ban was implemented. On February 16 many immigrants in the US went on a one day strike on 'the day without immigrants', closing businesses across the country. The Black Lives Matter movement has continued to protest state racism. In addition there have been countless smaller events around the country on many diverse issues such as restrictions to abortion services.

While these protests have been supported by the radical left they have not been led in a significant way by them. Politically the revolutionary left in the US is tiny and thus marginal however these are not 'normal times' and the election has provided some of the best opportunities for the radical left to spread its message and grow.

The main political focus of much of the opposition to Trump remains with the Democratic Party which is, to put it very mildly, problematic. There is one big positive though and that is that there is now a much larger focus on Bernie Sanders and his 'democratic socialism'. The enthusiasm that grew behind Sanders in the primary race has not dissipated and he still has wide sup-

2013, twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/378389940671107072?lang=en

port - but this is still tied to the Democrats, a party wedded to the system and neoliberal through and through. Recently Sanders undertook a 'Unity' tour with the head of the Democratic National Committee, Tom Perez²⁶. While the purpose may have been to promote unity it has also shown up some stark divides with early stops marked by 'anti-DNC catcalls'²⁷. At one rally in Miami a Sanders supporter rushed on stage to grab the microphone and shout 'Bernie would have won!²⁸'.

This suggests an audience for the radical left, those attracted to Sanders and his message yet disillusioned with the Democrats. The question for the radical left then is how to relate to and engage with these people.

Clearly the response cannot just be electoral in simply promoting Sanders or someone similar as the Democratic candidate in 2020. Resistance must be immediate and attempt to involve those in the Democrats who support Sanders and the many groups outside of the party who share many of the same views. This means campaigning in genuine united fronts, fighting against Trump's policies, and demanding change for the better in movements far larger than the existing radical left. Without hiding their politics they will have to engage in these struggles and argue for a way forward that emphasises people power and struggle over electoralism. They must debate, in an open and friendly spirit, with those whom they may have strong disagreements with on many is-

ues but who also share common goals.

As is already noted these are not 'normal times' and the opportunities to do this are many. From local actions in communities to large campaigns like Black Lives Matter and Standing Rock, protest movements have been galvanised in recent times and know they have to fight just to stand still. The radical left has the potential to play an important part in these fights. In addition to these protest movements, the radical left needs to make links with groups like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). The DSA had its roots in the Socialist Party of America and elements of the 'New Left' of the 1970's. They primarily work within the Democratic Party because, as they see it, 'Much of progressive, independent political action will continue to occur in Democratic Party primaries'²⁹. The DSA has been an obvious port of call for Sanders supporters critical of the Democratic Party and their membership has reportedly jumped from 6745 in 2016 to over 21,000 now³⁰. The radical left needs to work alongside such people in campaigning on concrete issues while working to win them away from the Democrats.

For those of us in Ireland and elsewhere outside of the US the best form of solidarity we can show is building the same type of movements in our own countries and pressuring our own leaders to oppose the Trump agenda wherever possible.

²⁶ 'Sanders' Unity Tour With DNC Chair Exposes Rifts But Also Suggests Common Goals' *NPR* [npr.org/2017/04/22/525089501/sanders-unity-tour-with-dnc-chair-exposes-rifts-but-also-suggests-common-goals](https://www.npr.org/2017/04/22/525089501/sanders-unity-tour-with-dnc-chair-exposes-rifts-but-also-suggests-common-goals)

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Democratic Socialists of America *Where We Stand: Building the Next Left* dsausa.org/where_we_stand#strat

³⁰ Membership figures from *Wikipedia* wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Socialists_of_America