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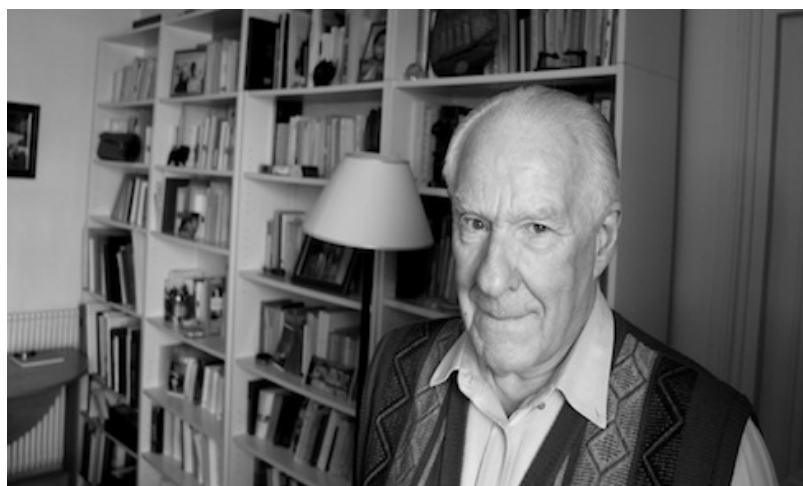
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## Alain Badiou: Reflections on the Recent Election



*On November 9th, Donald Trump was elected as the 45th President of the United States of America. Alain Badiou responded in a talk at the University of California, Los Angeles, co-sponsored by the program in Experimental Critical Theory and the Center for European and Russian Studies. Below we share the transcript of his response, originally published at Mariborchan — an eloquent reflection not only on the specific events that unfolded last week, but on the situation of the world today.*





### Badiou Reflections on the Recent Election 11 9 ...



I was thinking about French poetry, which is in a play of Racine, in fact. It's a beautiful, beautiful sentence. In French: "*C'était pendant l'horreur d'une profonde nuit.*" In English: "It was during the horror of a profound night." Maybe Racine was thinking of the election of Trump. It was during the horror of a profound night. And so, it was like an obligation for me to speak, to discuss, that sort of event, in a negative sense, because it's impossible for me to be here in front of you and to speak of something very interesting in academic terms. I think it's a necessity to think, to discuss, what happens during the horror of the profound night, just yesterday. You know, for me, but I think for many people, it has

been, in some sense, a sort of surprise. And we are often, in that sort of surprise, under the law of affects: fear, depression, anger, panic, and so on. But we know that philosophically, all these affects are not really a good reaction, because in some sense, it's too much affect in front of the enemy. And so, I think it's a necessity to think beyond the affect, beyond fear, depression, and so on — to think the situation of today, the situation of the world today, where something like that is possible, that somebody like Trump becomes the president of the United States. And so, my goal this evening is to present, not exactly an explanation, but something like a clarification of the possibility of something like that, and also some indications, submitted to discussion, concerning what we must do after that; what we must do, which is not precisely to be under the law of affect, of negative affect, but at the level of thinking, action, political determination, and so on.

So, I begin by a very general vision, not of the situation of the United States today, but the situation of the world today. What is the world of today, where that sort of fact is possible? And I think that the most important point to begin is the historical victory of globalized capitalism. We must be in front of that fact. In some sense, from the 80s of the last century of the last century to today, that is for forty years, so almost half a century, we have the historical victory of globalized capitalism, for many reasons. First, naturally, the complete failure of socialist states — Russia, China — and more generally the failure of the collectivist vision of economy and social laws of countries. And, this point, is not a small point. This point is really a change not only in the objective situation of the world today, but maybe at the level of sub-

jectivity too. During more than two centuries, there existed in public opinion, always two ways concerning the destiny of human beings. We can say that, before approximately the 80s of the last century, we have always at the very general level, the subjective general level, two possibilities concerning the historical destiny of human beings. First, the way of liberalism, in its classical sense. Here, liberal has many significations, but I take liberal in its primitive sense, that is, fundamentally that private property is the key of social organization, at the price of enormous inequalities, but the price is the price. At the end, for liberalism, private property must be the key of social organization. And on the other side, we have the socialist way, the communist way — there are different words — in their abstract sense, that is, the end of inequalities must be the most fundamental goal of human political activity. The end of inequalities even at the price of violent revolution. So on one side, peaceful vision of history as the continuation of something which is very old, that is, private property as the key of social organization, and on the other side, something new, something which probably begins with the French Revolution, which is the proposition that there is another way, that in some sense, the continuity of the historical existence of human beings must accept a rupture between a very long sequence where inequalities, private property, and so on are the law of collective existence, and another vision of what is that sort of destiny, and the most important being in fact the question of equality and inequality, and this conflict between liberalism in its classical sense, and the new idea under many different names – anarchy, communism, socialism and so on — is probably the great signification of the 19th century and of a big part of the next cen-

tury too.

So, during approximately near two centuries, we have something like a strategic choice, concerning not only the local events of politics, the national obligations, the wars and so on, but concerning what is really the historical destiny of human beings as such, the historical destiny of the construction of humanity as such. In some sense, our time, from the 80s to today, is the time of the apparent end of this choice. The progressive disparition of that sort of choice. We have today in fact the dominant idea that there exists no global choice, that there is no other solution. It was the word of Thatcher: no other solution. No other solution except, naturally, liberalism, or today generally we speak of neoliberalism. No other solution. And this point is very important because Thatcher herself is not saying that this solution is a very good one. It's not the problem for her. The problem is that it's the only solution. And so you know in the contemporary propaganda, the point is not to say that globalized capitalism is excellent, because it's clear that it's not. Everybody knows that. Everybody knows that monstrous inequalities cannot be a solution of the historical destiny of human beings — everybody knows that. But the argument is, "Okay, it's not so good, but it's the only real possibility." And so, in my opinion, the definition of our time is the attempt to impose on humanity at the scale of the world itself, the conviction that there is only one way for the history of human beings. And without saying that this way is excellent, that this way is a very good one, but by saying that there is no other solution, no other way.

So, we can define our moment as the moment of the primitive conviction of liberalism as dominant in the form that private property and free market compose the unique possible destiny of human beings. And it's also a definition of a human subject. What is, in this vision, a human subject? A human subject is a beggar, a consumer, an owner, or nothing at all. That is the strict definition today of what is a human being. So that is the general vision, the general problem, and the general law of the contemporary world.

Now, what are the political effects of all that, at the level of political life? What are the consequences of this dominant vision of a world in which we can find only one way? All governments must accept that it is the case; in the world today we cannot be at the direction of the state without acceptance of the vision of the unicity of the way. We have no government in the world which is saying something else. And why? Why, finally, if we examine the position of the "socialist" French government, of the *dictature* [dictatorship] of the Communist Party in China, or the government of United States, or the government of Japan, of India, everybody says the same thing — that globalized capitalism is the unique way for the existence of human beings. I think that all political decision, at the level of the state, today, is in strict dependency of what I name a 'monster': globalized capitalism and its inequalities. In some sense, it's not true that a government today is something free. It is not free at all. It is inside the global determination, and it must affirm that what it is doing is in dependency of this interiority of the global determination. And the monster is more and more a monster. We must know the real situation concerning inequalities. We have the fundamental phenomena of concentration of capital.

fundamental phenomena of concentration of capital, the concentration of capital is something extraordinary today. We must know that today 264 persons have as their property the equivalent of 3 billion other people. It's much more than in the primitive existence of monarchy and so on. Inequality today is much more important than in every other situation in the history of human beings. And so that sort of historical monster which is also the unique way for the existence of humanity is really in the dynamic of more and more inequalities, and not at all of more and more freedom.

And the position of the state today is the same everywhere. It's accepted law by the French government, by the Chinese Communist Party, by the power of Putin in Russia, by the Islamic State in Syria, and naturally it's also a law of the president of the United States. So, progressively — and that is the most important consequence concerning the election of Trump — progressively, all the political oligarchy, all the political class, becomes the same group, at the level of the world itself. A group of people which is only abstractly divided: Republicans and Democrats, Socialists and Liberals, Left and Right, and so on. All that sort of division today is purely abstract and not real, because all that lies in the same economic and political background. This political oligarchy today in the Western world, is progressively losing control of the capitalist machinery — that is the reality. Across crises, false solutions, all classical political governments create, on a big scale, in their people, frustration, misunderstanding, anger, and obscure revolt. All that against what is the unique way proposed by all members of the political class today, with some differences, but some small differences. The exercise of politics today is the exercise of very small

differences inside the same global way. But all that has many effects on people in general; effects of disorientation, total absence of orientation or direction of life, no strategic vision of the future of humanity, and in that sort of situation a big part of the people search in obscurity on the side of false novelties, irrational visions, and return to dead traditions, and so on. So, in front of political oligarchy, we have the apparition of new sort of activists, new supports of violent and vulgar demagogy, and these guys are much more on the side of gangsters and mafia than on the side of educated politicians. And so the choice here has been the choice between that sort of guy and the rest of the educated politicians, and the result has been the legal choice of the new form of political vulgarity and something subjectively violent in the political proposition.

In some sense, this new political figure — Trump, but many others today — are near the fascist of the 30s. There is something similar. But first without alas their strong enemies of the 30s, which were the communist parties. It's a sort of democratic fascism — a paradoxical determination — a sort of democratic fascism, that is, they are inside the democratic plane, inside the democratic apparatus, but they play something different, another music, in that sort of context. And, I think it's not only the case here, with Donald Trump — racist, *machiste* [macho], violent, and also, which is a fascist characteristic, without any consideration for logic or rationality; because the discourse, the mode of speaking of that sort of democratic fascism is precisely a sort of dislocation of language, a sort of possibility to say anything, and the contrary of anything — there is no problem, the language is not the language of explanation, but a language to create some effects; it's an



ation, but a language to create some affects; it's all affective language which creates a false unity but a practical unity. And so, we have that with Donald Trump, but it has been the case before in Italy with Berlusconi. Berlusconi may be, I think, the first figure of that sort of new democratic fascism, with exactly the same characteristics: vulgarity, a sort of pathological relationship to women, and the possibility to say and to do, publicly, some things which are unacceptable for the big part of human beings today. But that was the case also with Orbán in Hungary today, and in my sense, in France, it has been the case with Sarkozy. And it's also the case progressively in India or the Philippines, and even in Poland or in Turkey. So it's really, at the scale of the world, the apparition of a new figure of political determination which is a figure which is very often inside the democratic constitution but which is in some sense also outside. And I think that we can name fascists — because it was the case in the thirties; after all, Hitler was also victorious in elections — so I name fascist that sort of guy who is inside the democratic play, but in some sense also outside: inside *and* outside. And inside to finally be outside. So it's really a novelty but a novelty which is inscribed inside the general figure of the world today because it's also something for many people, not of a solution but a new manner to be in the democratic play, where, on the side of classical oligarchy, there is no difference at all. In some sense, the principle effect of Trump is an effect of something new. In fact, in the details, there is nothing new, because it's impossible to think that it's new to be racist, *machiste* [macho], and so on — very old things, very old things. But in the context of the classical oligarchy today, this very old thing seems to be something new. And so, Trump is in the position to say that the

new. And so, Trump is in the position to say that the novelty is 'Trump', in the moment when he's saying things which are absolutely primitive and absolutely old, old-fashioned. And so, we are also in the time where something like a return to the old existence of something can appear as something new. And this conversion of the new in the old is also a characteristic of that sort of new fascism.

All that describes, I think, our present situation at the level of politics. We must consider that we are in a fatal dialectics of four terms.

First, the complete brutality and blind violence of the capitalism of today. Okay, in the Western world, we are not seeing completely this brutality or violence, but if you are in Africa, we see that, really, and if you are in the Middle East too, and finally if you are in Asia too. And so it's a term, a fundamental term, of our world today. It is the return to capitalism to what is in fact its very sense, that is, savage conquering, savage fight of everybody against everybody, for domination. So, complete brutality and blood violence of the savage capitalism of today: the first term.

Second term: the decomposition of the classical political oligarchy. The classical parties — Democrat, Republican, Socialist, et al. — decomposition in the direction, finally, of the apparition of a sort of new fascism. We don't know the future of that sort of apparition: what is the future of Trump? In some sense, we don't know, really, and maybe Trump doesn't know his proper destiny. It was visible in the night. You have the Trump before the power and the Trump in the power, who is in some sense afraid; not completely satisfied, because he knows that he cannot sneak as freely as before. And to

...the first theatre cannot be seen as free, as before, to speak freely was exactly the potency of Trump, but now with the government, the administration, the army, economists, bankers and so on, it's another story. And so, we have seen in the night Trump passing from one play to another play, from one theatre to another theatre; and in the second theatre it was not so good, not so good as before. But we don't know, really, we don't know what is the real possibility of that sort of guy when he becomes president of the United States. In any case, we have really a symbol of the decomposition of the classical political oligarchy, and the birth of the new figure of a new fascism, with a future that we don't know, but I think is certainly not a very interesting future for people in general.

Third, we have the popular frustration, the feeling of an obscure disorder, in the public opinion of many people, and principally the poor people, the people of provincial states, the peasants of many countries, and also the workers without a job, and so on — all that population, which progressively is reduced by the brutality of contemporary capitalism, to nothing at all, which has no possible existence, and which stays, in some places, without jobs, without money, without orientation, without existential orientation. And this point is the third very important term of the global situation today. The lack of orientation, of stability, the feeling of the destruction of their world, without the construction of another world; so a sort of void destruction.

And the last term, the fourth term, is the lack, the complete lack, of another strategic way; the absence, today, of another strategic way. There exist many political experiences — I don't say that there is nothing at all on this side. We know how riots, how occupation of places

THIS SIDE. WE KNOW NEW THINGS, NEW OCCUPATION OF PLACES, new mobilisation, new ecological determination and so on. So, it's not the absence of all forms of resistance, protestation — no, I don't say that. But the lack of another strategic way, that is, something which is at the same level as the contemporary conviction that capitalism is the only way possible. The lack of the strength of the affirmation of another way. And the lack of what I name an Idea, a great Idea. A great Idea which is the possibility of unification, global unification, strategic unification of all forms of resistance and invention. An Idea is a sort of mediation between the individual subject and the collective historical and political task, and it's the possibility of action across and with very different subjectivities, but under the same Idea in some sense.

These four points — the general and strategic domination of globalized capitalism, the decomposition of classical political oligarchy, the popular disorientation and frustration, and the lack of another strategic way — compose in my opinion the crisis of today. We can define the contemporary world in the term of a global crisis which is not reducible to the economic crisis of the last years, which is much more, I think, a subjective crisis, because of the destiny of human beings is more and more unclear for themselves.

After that, what is to be done? The question of Lenin. I think, concerning the presidential election here, the election of Trump, I think we must affirm that one reason for the success of Trump is that the true contradiction today, the real contradiction today, the most important contradiction cannot be between two forms of the same world. The world of globalized capitalism,

of imperialist wars, and of lack of any idea concerning the destiny of human beings. I know that Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are very different — I am not saying we should identify Trump and Hillary Clinton, but this difference, which is important... there exists a level where this difference, that is the difference between new fascism and old political oligarchy — and all political oligarchy is less horrible than new fascism, so I understand perfectly that at the end we prefer Hillary Clinton — but we cannot forget that in some sense this difference is inside the same world. It's not the expression of two different strategic visions of the world. And I think the success of Trump is possible only because the true contradiction of the world cannot be expressed, cannot be symbolized, by the opposition between Hillary Clinton and Trump, because Hillary Clinton and Trump are in the same world — very different, but very different in the same world. And so, in fact, during all the preparation of the election, during the primaries, the true contradiction, in my opinion, has been between Trump and Bernie Sanders. It was a true contradiction. We can think what we want concerning the two terms of this contradiction. We can say that Trump is maybe something excessive, on the side of a new fascism and so on, and we can say that Bernie Sanders is something which is in some sense of socialist nature, finally, Bernie Sanders is in the necessity to go on the side of Clinton and so on and so on, but I think at the level of symbolization, which is so important, the true contradiction of our world was symbolized by the opposition of Trump and Bernie Sanders, and not by the opposition of Trump and Hillary Clinton, because we have in Bernie Sanders, the proposition of Bernie Sanders, something, some points which are beyond the

world as it is. And we do not have something like that in the proposition of Hillary Clinton. And so, we have a lesson of dialectics; that is, the theory of contradictions. In some sense, the contradiction between Hillary Clinton and Trump was a relative contradiction and not an absolute one; that is, a contradiction in the same parameters, in the same construction of the world. But the contradiction between Bernie Sanders and Trump was in fact the beginning of the possibility of a true contradiction; that is, a contradiction with a world and something which is beyond the world. In some sense, Trump was really on the side of reactive and obscure popular subjectivity, inside the world as it is, but Bernie Sanders was on the side of rational, active and clear popular subjectivity, oriented beyond the world as it is, even in something which was unclear — unclear, but beyond the world as it is.

So the result of the election is of a conservative nature, it's purely conservative, because it's the result of a false contradiction, in some sense, a contradiction which is not a true contradiction, and which is also, across this election, the continuation of the crisis of today, the crisis of the four terms I explained before. Today, against Trump, we cannot desire Clinton, or somebody of the same figure. We must create a return, if it is possible, to the true contradiction; it's the lesson of that sort of terrible event. That is, we must propose a political orientation which goes beyond the world as it is, even if it is, at the beginning, in a not completely clear manner. When we begin something, we have not the complete development of that thing. But we must begin. We must begin, which is the point. After Trump, we must begin. It's not only to resist, to negate and so on. We must begin something. really. and this question of the beginning is the

beginning of the return to the true contradiction, to a real choice, to a real strategic choice concerning the orientation of human beings. We must reconstruct the idea that against the monstrous inequalities of the present capitalism, against also the new gangsters of classical politics, like Trump, it's possible to create, once more, a political field with two strategic orientations, and not only one. The return of something which has been the occasion of the great political movement of 19th century and of the beginning of the last century. We must, if I can say something in a philosophical manner, we must go beyond the One, in the direction of the Two. Not one orientation, but two orientations. The creation of a new return to a new fundamental choice as the very essence of politics. In fact, if there is only one strategic way, politics progressively disappears, and in some sense, Trump is the symbol of that sort of disparition, because, what is the politics of Trump? Nobody knows. It's something like a figure and not a politics. So the return to politics is by necessity the return of the existence of a real choice. So, finally, at the level of philosophical generalities, it's the dialectical return to the real Two beyond the One, and we can propose some names for that sort of return.

As you know, my vision is to propose the corrupted word of 'Communism', corrupted you know by bloody experiences and so on. The name is only a name, so we are free to propose other names, not a problem. But we have something which is interesting in the primitive meaning of this old and corrupted word. And this meaning is in fact composed of four points, four principles, and these sort of principles can be a support for the creation of a new political field with two strategic

orientations.

The first point is that it's not a necessity that the key of social organization lies in private property and monstrous inequalities. It's not a necessity. We must affirm that it's not a necessity. And we can organize limited experiences which demonstrate that it's not a necessity, that it's not true that forever private property and monstrous inequalities must be the law of the becoming of humanity. It's the first point.

The second point is that it's not a necessity that workers will be separated between noble work, like intellectual creation, or direction, or government, and, on the other side, manual work and common material existence. So the specialization of the labor is not an eternal law, and especially the opposition between intellectual work and manual work must be suppressed in the long term. It's the second principle.

The third is that it's not a necessity for human beings to be separated by national, racial, religious or sexual boundaries. The equality must exist across differences, and so difference is an obstacle to equality. Equality must be a dialectics of difference itself, and we must refuse that in the name of differences, equality is impossible. So boundaries, refusal of the Other, in any form, all that must disappear. It's not a natural law.

And the last principle is that it's not a necessity that there exists a state, in the form of a separated and armoured power.

So these four points can be resumed: collectivism against private property,, polymorphous worker against specialization, concrete universalism against closed



identities, and free association against the state. It's only a principle, it's not a programme. But with this principle, we can judge all political programmes, decisions, parties, ideas, from the point of view of these four principles. Take a decision: is this decision in the direction of the four principles or not. The principles are the protocol of judgement concerning all decisions, ideas, propositions. If a decision, a proposition, is in the direction of the four principles, we can say it's a good one, we can examine if it is possible and so on. If clearly it's against the principles, it's a bad decision, bad idea, bad programme. So we have a principle of judgement in the political field and in the construction of the new strategic project. That is in some sense the possibility to have a true vision of what is really in the new direction, the new strategic direction of humanity as such.

Bernie Sanders proposes to construct a new political group, under the title, 'Our Revolution'. The success of Trump must open a new chance for that sort of idea. We can trust him for the moment, we can judge if it's really a proposition which goes beyond the present world, we can judge if something is proposed which is in conformity with the four principles. We can do something. And we must do, because if we do nothing at all, we are only in the fascination, the stupidity of fascination, by the depressive success of Trump. Our revolution—why not—against their reaction, our revolution, it's a good idea. In any case, I am on this side.

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