WHEN MAGIC FAILS
By Pete MacDowell

Since the election most of the “what now?” articles I have read seem to be stuck in the old paradigm: Go on policy defense in DC backed by street action, build the party, and win next time with a better message and a better candidate.

This is a failure of imagination that greatly underestimates what we are up against. Trumpism is not just a new administration. It is an unfolding magical dance of denial—a ghost dance of a dying economic empire.

Trump won the election because he promised to solve a problem that is unsolvable in the present world order. We have hyper-globalism, hyper-automation, and hyper-concentration of wealth and power. The demand for working class jobs is disappearing faster than non-robotic grocery check-out lines.

Uber, Google, and others are hell-bent to eliminate driver-operated trucks and taxi services. Economic demand can no longer be propped up by credit when Henry Ford’s workers can’t buy his cars. Communities and identities are blown up. Climate change, driven by this system, puts the whole pot on a fast boil, driving conflicts, failed states, and refugees. Congress and legislatures and judges and most media are routinely corrupted by corporate elites and despised by the people.

Hope has abandoned the land and the people call for the strong man. With no clear counter-vision, people are driven by the right-wing to the ideology of nostalgia and nativism—with all the racism and sexism that goes with the package.

In walks Trump, a megalomaniac with the emotional maturity of a seven-year-old, offering to be the people’s bully, offering minority scapegoats to be sacrificed and the cult of his own personality. The old economic energy and industrial powers wrap themselves in the flag, put on their Trump hats, and imagine that they have been returned to their rightful place of power.

Trump promises vast expenditures on infrastructure, re-industrialization, the military, and tax cuts for the rich all to be paid for by a tripling of the GDP—driven by the super-deals he will cut. And when his magic doesn’t work; when trickle down stays up again; when the protests get massive; when other countries push back hard, when his polling starts to plummet, then we will have a man who controls more oppressive intelligence gathering, police, propaganda, and military power than any man in history. He and his allies will do all they can to keep power, including possibly martial law, cancelling elections, and unleashing his carefully fed mobs if they have to.
What results is a kind of fascism—a corporatocracy verging on kleptocracy—led by their cult leader, backed by police and military and the mobs. But Nazi Germany or fascist Italy are not the only models. China and Russia are caught in the same desperate contradictions. They will not allow themselves to be pushed around by this rube—especially when the whole nature of warfare is changing with the weapons of software fast making military hardware, and US dominance, obsolete.

But our world is giving birth to another way forward and labor is well advanced. Trump will slap the bottom of the baby that will end his reign. Occupy and Standing Rock help reveal its form: Property is theft and has no legitimacy as oppressive, un-earned, corporate ownership. We will find the way to take back our ownership of the economy, our culture, our land, our atmosphere, and our future. The right’s fight to take personhood back from people, in all our diversity, in the name of corporate elites and consumerist values will be fought by a much deeper, militant, and united movement than we have seen in centuries.

A new paradigm of a resistance culture demanding dedicated lives, new callings, new selves, new community, and a new economic model across boundaries can and must emerge with a power that will awe us. And that resistance movement will have within it the seeds of a renaissance that can make our new world possible. Our imagination has to find its fire adequate to the historical moment.

It will all be dangerous—but much less dangerous than letting the mad men rule.
It will all be difficult—but much less difficult than the dystopia in our present path.
It will take generations. There will be other magicians who promise false salvation.
There will also be catastrophes. Such is the nature of massive change.
It will all be messy and imperfect and evolving. History-making always is.
For better or for worse, it will have to start with us.