

The Republican right prepares for violence

The Editorial Board
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The frenzied response of the Bush campaign and its allies in the media to Tuesday's ruling by the Florida Supreme Court has highlighted a political fact of immense significance: the Republican Party has become the organ of extreme right-wing forces that are prepared to use extra-parliamentary and violent methods to achieve their aims.

Spokesmen for George W. Bush and pro-Republican media outlets reacted to the court's decision, which simply affirmed the constitutional requirement that all votes be fairly counted, with calls for the Florida legislature to defy the court and appeals to the military of a semi-insurrectionary character.

The barrage of lies and misinformation—charging the court with “changing the rules” and “rewriting the election statutes,” denouncing Democratic candidate Al Gore as a thug out to steal the election, appealing to racist and anti-Semitic sentiments—had its intended effect. On Wednesday morning a mob of Bush supporters besieged the Miami/Dade County board of canvassers, grabbing a Democratic lawyer and threatening to assault those involved in manually recounting the ballots. A few hours later the Democratic-controlled board announced it was abandoning its recount, effectively disenfranchising hundreds of Gore supporters whose votes were not registered in the original machine tally.

The official responses of the Gore and Bush campaigns to the court ruling provided a stark contrast. Gore went on national television late Tuesday to appeal for a show of national unity and a public commitment by the Bush campaign to abide by the ultimate result of the Florida recount. Repeating his offer to meet with his Republican opponent, Gore spoke as a bourgeois politician worried over the prospect of an open breach within the political establishment that could undermine an orderly transfer of power, with unpredictable and potentially explosive consequences.

Bush's representative, former Secretary of State James Baker, did not even bother to acknowledge Gore's appeals for unity or his offer to meet with the Texas governor. Instead he denounced the Supreme Court ruling as “unacceptable” and incited the Republican-controlled state legislature to defy the court, saying, “One should not now be surprised if the Florida legislature seeks to affirm the original rules.”

Baker was taking his cue from the *Wall Street Journal*, which had editorialized in advance of the court decision: “The legislature has an option, it seems to us a duty, to make clear that it stands ready to resolve any dispute between Mrs. Harris [the Republican Secretary of State and co-chair of the Bush campaign in Florida] and the Supreme Court Democrats. Since the Republicans now solidly control the legislature, they hold the winning hand.”

Paralleling its role in the impeachment conspiracy against Bill Clinton, the *Wall Street Journal* has served as the mouthpiece for the extreme-right forces that have sought from election day on to pollute public opinion with wild accusations and disinformation and hijack

the election for the Republicans. It has spearheaded the effort to foster a veritable mutiny within the military against a possible Gore victory, using as the pretext the rejection of several hundred legally deficient absentee ballots from overseas military personnel.

On Wednesday the *Journal* carried an incendiary column entitled “The Democratic Party's War on the Military.” Calling the exclusion of the military ballots “one more battle in the ongoing culture war between the core of the Democratic Party and the US military,” the column exuded racism, homophobia and hatred for the working class. The author spoke of the “twitching carcass” of the Democratic Party's “left”—“teachers' unions, feminist activists, gay victimologists, black churches, faculty clubs.”

As the election crisis has progressed, thinly disguised appeals to racism and anti-Semitism have with increasing frequency appeared in the broadsides of Bush supporters. Republican backers have seized on the role of Jesse Jackson to whip up anti-black prejudice and fastened on the large number of Jewish retirees in Palm Beach to galvanize their fundamentalist partisans.

The *Journal* has not refrained from such methods. In the editorial cited above it employed loaded terms to take a swipe at Florida's Jewish population, charging that Mrs. Harris is “under fire for being a Southern aristocrat rather than a New York sophisticate.” It went on to denounce the Democrats for “import[ing] Jesse Jackson for some race-baiting.”

The editorial as a whole was a call for the Republican Party to forego traditional constitutional restraints in its drive to capture the White House. It concluded with a barely disguised injunction for a victorious Bush campaign to fashion an administration along authoritarian lines:

“The conventional wisdom is that if with this hassle Governor Bush does become President he will be a crippled one. Perhaps. But we find it equally plausible that facing down the kind of assault now being waged in Florida would be precisely the best preparation for what may lie ahead. It is Governor Bush's nature to extend the velvet glove, but he will be much more successful if he and his party can show that within it there is some steel.”

Significantly, the editorial was entitled “The Squeamish GOP?” The *Journal* chooses its words advisedly, in this case employing a term that connotes an aversion to bloodshed. The meaning of the newspaper's editors was unmistakable—a Republican president must be prepared to use violence and repression to impose its reactionary social agenda. Gaining the White House by suppressing votes and riding roughshod over the popular will is an excellent preparation for dealing with “what may lie ahead”—i.e., widespread popular opposition.

It is high time to stop masking the character of the Republican right with the complacent term “conservative.” These are fascistic elements who are breaking with the traditional methods of bourgeois

democracy.

There is a logic to politics. Once influential sections of the ruling elite conclude they cannot achieve their aims through democratic means and take the path of conspiracy and repression, they are well on the way to civil war.

It is not here a matter of predicting the imminent imposition of a military dictatorship. But it would be the height of folly to ignore the signposts of such a danger looming ahead. If the campaign the Republicans are waging to gain the White House begins to resemble a covert operation akin to those mounted by the CIA against US imperialism's liberal and leftist opponents in Latin America—for example, in Chile—then it must follow that an option under serious consideration is the Pinochet solution. No one should doubt that *Wall Street Journal* editor Robert Bartley and the reactionaries on his staff are already working out the arguments to justify the use of violence against their political opponents and the working class.

The *Wall Street Journal* speaks for powerful sections of American big business. These forces within the financial elite have increasingly adopted the standpoint of the extreme right, and sponsored, financially and otherwise, the growth of this fascistic element, precisely because they have come to realize that they cannot impose their social agenda through normal democratic channels.

They rely on the right-wing rabble that populate the corporate-controlled media to conceal their anti-democratic aims and fill the airwaves with half-truths and lies. Their strength does not lie in any great popular support—on the contrary, their support in the general population is marginal.

Rather, the strength of the Republican right consists in the fact that it articulates more consistently and uncompromisingly than any other bourgeois political grouping the requirements of the American corporate elite. The radical right knows what it wants and is prepared to ride roughshod over public opinion in order to get it. The Republicans do not play by the normal constitutional rules, while their bourgeois opponents in the Democratic Party wring their hands as impotent and passive onlookers. They embody a demoralized liberalism, whose watered-down perspective of reform has been discarded by the ruling class.

At the same time the Republican right senses that it has a narrow window of opportunity for realizing its ambitions. It was staggered by the results of the election, which registered a victory in the popular vote for Gore and, if the intent of Florida voters were officially acknowledged, a Democratic victory in the electoral vote as well. The combined vote for Gore and Green Party candidate Ralph Nader showed, broadly speaking, that a significant majority of the electorate supported policies of a liberal and leftist character, and opposed the increasingly naked domination of corporate power over American politics.

A look at the electoral map underscores the fact that the overall trajectory of American society does not favor the forces of the radical right. Bush piled up the vast majority of his electoral votes in the more backward and rural regions of the country—the South, the Southwest, sections of the Midwest. The more urbanized, industrialized, densely populated and culturally vibrant regions went for Gore. Within this general scheme, the decisive pro-Gore margin in the popular vote was provided by blacks and other highly oppressed sections of the working class, whose vote expressed deep distrust of the Republicans and a determination to defend past gains in civil rights and social conditions.

Moreover, the economic conditions fostering the rise of *nouveau riche* layers that comprise a critical component of the Republican

right's social base are clearly receding. The stock market boom, based to a considerable extent on speculative capital, parasitism and outright swindling, is breaking up, leaving in its wake a society more economically polarized than at any other period in the past half-century, and a spectacle of corporate greed and criminality of unprecedented dimensions.

The response of the Republican right is growing hysteria. Its frenzy and recklessness bespeak a rebellion by a minority that feels it must stake all on immediate victory, because its future prospects are dwindling. The Republicans sense that the 2000 election is their best, and perhaps last, chance to seize hold of all the branches of government. If they lose the White House, they face the prospect of internal warfare and political disintegration.

Notwithstanding the many obvious differences, there are striking parallels between the political crisis arising from the 2000 election and the convulsive period that led up to the Civil War of 1861. One of these is the similarity in psychology and methods between the Republican right of today and the political representatives of the Southern slave owners 150 years ago. In both cases, the most reactionary social forces in the nation were driven by a sense of desperation, arising from the fact that the momentum of historical development was moving against them, to employ the most provocative and reckless methods.

One great difference, to extend the historical analogy, is the absence within any faction of bourgeois politics today of a force either willing or able to take on and defeat the radical right. As they have repeatedly demonstrated, the flaccid ranks of liberalism, institutionalized in the Democratic Party, are organically incapable of waging a serious struggle in defense of democratic rights. That task now falls to the working class, which must construct its own mass, socialist party to carry it out.

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