

Bush prepares a government of reaction and militarism

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The political contours of the incoming administration of President-elect George W. Bush are already becoming visible: it will be a government committed to a far-reaching program of social reaction at home, combined with the aggressive assertion of unilateral American power overseas.

While Bush's December 13 speech on national television, in response to the concession speech by Democratic candidate Al Gore, was low-key in tone, its substance was to reiterate the three main proposals of the Republican campaign: a huge tax cut for the wealthy, partial privatization of Social Security, Medicare and education, and an accelerated buildup of the American military.

Bush claimed "a remarkable consensus about the important issues before us," even though his campaign was rejected by a clear majority of those who went to the polls, and his ultimate victory came about through judicial intervention to suppress the counting of legal votes.

In subsequent meetings and public appearances Bush has repeated his support for the full \$1.3 trillion tax cut he proposed during the campaign, more than \$800 billion of which would benefit the wealthiest one percent of American families. He cited economic figures showing the growing danger of recession as an additional justification for the tax cut, although a recession would put an end to the budget surpluses out of which the tax cut was supposedly to be financed.

As the *Washington Post* reported in a front-page story December 14: "Aiming broadly despite the absence of a clear mandate, President-elect George W. Bush is planning to defy political gravity by pursuing undiluted versions of his campaign proposals to cut every citizen's taxes and put a free-market stamp on Medicare and Social Security."

Bush's selection of Gen. Colin Powell as his nominee for Secretary of State underscores the militaristic and aggressive foreign policy to which the incoming administration will be committed. The former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Persian Gulf War declared his support for the continuing economic blockade of Iraq, which has killed more than one million people since the end of the war.

While Powell's appointment was greeted with near-unanimous approval in the media and from both Democratic and Republican politicians, there was no attempt to explain why, with the United States essentially unchallenged worldwide as a military power, it was necessary to put a general in charge of US foreign policy.

Powell is only the third military commander named to head the State Department. The previous two were George C. Marshall, who was called out of retirement to lead the transition from post-World War II demobilization to the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union, and Alexander Haig, the former NATO commander who was chosen by Reagan in 1981 to signal a US offensive against the USSR.

In the days since the Supreme Court handed Bush the presidency by shutting down the recount of disputed votes in Florida, a consensus has emerged among media pundits that Bush will be compelled to "move to the center" because of the narrow margin of Republican control in Congress and the unprecedented means by which the Texas governor attained the White House.

The very fact that this is the consensus of the mainstream media should be enough to call the validity of these assertions into question. The media has been consistently wrong in its predictions, not only in this election year, but going back to the impeachment crisis, the initial attempt by extreme-right elements to usurp the presidency and overturn the results of an election.

In Congress the Republicans have a 221-212 margin in the House of Representatives and will depend on the vote of Vice President-elect Richard Cheney to break the 50-50 tie in the Senate. But the policies of the next administration will be determined, not by the parliamentary arithmetic in Washington, but by the social dynamics which lay behind the 2000 election.

Bush gained the White House because of all-out backing by the extreme-right, especially the Christian fundamentalists who propelled him to the Republican presidential nomination over Arizona Senator John McCain, and then provided his margin of victory in the general

election in many Southern and Western states.

One analysis based on exit polling has found that Bush piled up a margin of seven million votes among “born-again” Christians—meaning, of course, that among the vast majority of Americans who are not in that category, Gore won by an even larger margin. Patrick Buchanan never became a factor in the presidential race, unlike his “left” counterpart Ralph Nader, because his potential supporters were so firmly lined up behind Bush.

When the votes of fundamentalists were not sufficient to give Bush a majority, either in the popular or electoral vote, other far-right forces stepped in to hijack the presidential election in Florida:

- * the right-wing-controlled state government, headed by Governor Jeb Bush, the president-elect's brother, and Secretary of State Katherine Harris, who led a successful effort to keep tens of thousands of black and minority voters from going to the polls or having their ballots count;

- * the fascist-minded Cuban exile community, which not only voted overwhelmingly for George Bush, but helped intimidate local officials in Miami-Dade County to halt the recount that would likely have given Gore a victory;

- * operatives from the staffs of House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, House Majority Leader Richard Armey, and other leaders of the congressional right, who led the mob which precipitated the shutdown of the Miami-Dade recount;

- * right-wing radio talk show hosts and television commentators, who worked assiduously to confuse public opinion and portray Bush's antidemocratic methods in Florida as a legitimate and even praiseworthy;

- * the Republican-controlled Florida state house of representatives, headed by Speaker Tom Feeney, once labeled “the David Duke of Florida,” which adopted a resolution that would have awarded Florida's electoral votes to Bush regardless of the outcome of the popular vote

- * the US Supreme Court, whose five-member majority issued an unprecedented and legally specious ruling to bring the recount to an end and award the White House to Bush.

An administration which has come to power through undemocratic and unconstitutional methods, fueled by the greed and prejudice of the most reactionary forces in American political life, will not suddenly be transformed into a government of compromise and sweet reason, whatever the hopes of the editorialists of the *New York Times* or *Salon*.

As for the opposition of the Congressional Democrats, no more should be expected from this quarter than was demonstrated in the presidential camp of Al Gore, in which he mimicked the Clinton policy of continuous adaptation to the right wing. In the 36-day battle over the Florida recount, Gore issued a number of statements warning of the attack on

democratic rights by the Bush campaign. But in the end, after the Supreme Court ruling, he capitulated and pledged his support to the new Republican administration.

A better idea of the agenda of the incoming Bush government can be found on the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, which spearheaded the impeachment campaign against Clinton and then led the attack on Gore in Florida, repeating endlessly the “big lie” that the Democrats were seeking to steal that state's electoral votes because they demanded that all legally cast ballots should be counted.

In an editorial published December 15, the *Journal* dismissed any suggestion that Bush should be restrained in his ambitions in the White House. It called for a series of initial bold strokes, ranging from unilateral abrogation of the ABM Treaty, to set the stage for a US anti-missile system, to the introduction of school vouchers.

The *Journal* hailed Bush's nationally televised address December 13 as an indication that he would press ahead with an agenda of huge tax cuts and privatization of Social Security privatization, education and Medicare. “Mr. Bush's program represents a historic shift from a transfer society to a producer society,” the newspaper declared.

Such jargon of the extreme right requires translation. A “transfer society,” as the *Journal* puts it, is a capitalist society in which a very small portion of the surplus value extracted from the working class is returned to it in the form of government social programs such as Social Security, Medicare, unemployment compensation, etc. A “producer society” is one in which all such deductions from profit have been eliminated, where health and safety regulations and other restraints on profit-making are abolished, where the capitalists reign unchecked, and, therefore, where the real producers, the working class, have no rights at all.



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