

Republicans escalate election conspiracy

Florida legislature moves to override vote and name pro-Bush electors

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The move by the Republican-controlled Florida legislature to name its own slate of presidential electors marks an escalation of the drive by George W. Bush to capture the White House by means of conspiracy and political usurpation.

With their vote to convene a special legislative session to choose a pro-Bush slate of electors, the Republicans have declared their readiness to defy the will of the voters, both in Florida and nationally, and impose a government on the American people.

The action is a transparent attempt to circumvent the November 21 ruling of the Florida Supreme Court ordering the secretary of state to include in the state's official vote tally the results of manual recounts in three south Florida counties. The Republican plan is to reject electors committed to Democratic candidate Al Gore, in the event that court-ordered recounts ultimately give Gore the margin of victory in the state's popular vote, and instead certify their own hand-picked slate of Bush supporters.

The fact that Florida Governor Jeb Bush, the brother of the Republican candidate, publicly endorsed the legislature's action underscores the contempt of the Bush camp for both constitutional principles and public opinion.

For the first time in more than a century the ruling elite in the United States is about to place its official imprimatur on what it knows to be a stolen election. The Bush clan, the camp of Democratic candidate Al Gore, the Republican Congress, the courts, the media—all are well aware that more voters in Florida cast votes for Gore than for Bush. This basic truth is buttressed by ample evidence, in the form of thousands of uncounted presidential ballots from heavily Democratic precincts, and the fact that all of the legal and propaganda efforts of the Republicans are concentrated on preventing a fair and accurate count of the votes.

The longer the electoral impasse continues, the greater the mass of evidence of fraud and voter intimidation on the part of the Republican apparatus in Florida—from police

intimidation of minority voters in Tampa and Tallahassee, to the withholding of voter registration cards from likely Democratic voters, to the padding of ballots for Bush in Nassau County, to the collusion between election officials and Republican operatives to furtively fix absentee ballot applications in Seminole and Martin counties.

To carry through this plot against the democratic rights of the American people, the Bush campaign has enlisted the support of co-conspirators within the military brass and the media, and worked to incite the religious right, the gun lobby, racist and anti-Semitic militia elements, anti-Castro zealots in southern Florida, and the rest of the rabble that comprise the fascistic wing of the Republican Party.

Bush's actions, and the role of the corporate-controlled media in condoning them, reveal that a substantial section of the ruling elite in the US has broken with the traditional methods of bourgeois democracy. This element, whose most prominent mouthpiece within the establishment press is the *Wall Street Journal*, exhibits the frenzy of a small minority that knows it cannot democratically win popular support for its social agenda. It is well aware that it faces a working population increasingly bitter over the concentration of wealth at the top of the economic ladder and the domination of corporate power over every aspect of American life.

In its effort to impose its will on the people, the Republican right is prepared to defy basic constitutional principles and undermine legal precedents that have served for a century or more as cornerstones of bourgeois democracy in the US. The extraordinary action of the Florida legislature, taken in defiance of the Florida Supreme Court, is a direct challenge to the principle of judicial review, established in the landmark US Supreme Court decision of 1803 known as *Marbury v. Madison*. That decision, which clarified the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches, established the principle that legislative acts were subject to review by the judiciary, which had the power to strike down laws or

actions determined by the courts to be inconsistent with the Constitution.

Furthermore, by arrogating to itself the right to disregard long-standing constitutional procedures and effectively determine the outcome of a national election, the Florida legislature is setting a precedent for state legislatures and governments throughout the country to defy federal authority, raising once again the banner of “states’ rights” that was used by the Southern slave-owning class to justify the rending of the union and plunge the nation into civil war 139 years ago.

Not since the Civil War has the country faced a political conspiracy comparable to the present campaign of the Republican right to gain power through pseudo-legal means. This political element lacks mass popular support, but it is well connected and well financed. It knows what it wants and is prepared to go to any lengths to get it.

Its opposing faction within the ruling elite, represented by the Gore campaign and the Democrats, has little enthusiasm for waging a serious struggle. In recent days Gore has taken to the airwaves in an attempt to rally flagging support within the Democratic Party and convince the US Supreme Court and the financial oligarchy of the political dangers for American capitalism inherent in the actions of the Bush camp. At the same time Gore has gingerly appealed to the democratic instincts of the population at large, insisting that the basic issue in the electoral crisis is the right to vote and the sovereignty of the people.

In his nationally televised address Monday night Gore declared, “If we ignore the votes of thousands in Florida in this election, how can you or any American have confidence that your vote will not be ignored in a future election?” This was an entirely legitimate question. But Gore refused to spell out its implications.

A government installed on the basis of the suppression of votes is a government imposed in defiance of the popular will. Such a government is, by any objective standard, a dictatorship. Yet as Gore and the Democrats have made clear, they are prepared at the end of the day to endorse such a government and call on the American people to rally behind it. The Republicans, by contrast, have made it clear they will consider a Gore administration, should one emerge out of the crisis, to be illegitimate.

There is much talk in the media and the political establishment, including from sections of the Democratic Party, that Gore must be prepared to concede the election “for the good of the country.” It is not the task of socialists to give advice to the Democratic Party, which is a political instrument of American big business. However, it is necessary to address this issue because the fundamental question at stake in the present crisis is not the fate of Gore

or his party, but the democratic rights of the working class.

Were Gore to really act in defense of democratic rights he would go before the American people and explain why he would not, under any circumstances, concede the election to Bush until and unless every vote in Florida was counted. The concession speech is a convention of American politics developed over many generations. It has a definite significance—namely, the acknowledgment on the part of the loser that the election embodies the democratic will of the people, and consequently he respects the results and calls on his supporters to do likewise.

In the present situation such a declaration would be a travesty of democratic principles, since Gore not only won the popular vote nationally, but in Florida as well, and would have been granted the state’s electoral votes and therefore the presidency, had not the Republican apparatus in Washington and Florida conspired to rig the election and thwart the will of the voters.

Gore will make no such statement, no more than he will expose before the American people the extreme right-wing character of the conspirators in the Bush camp or the authoritarian agenda they aim to carry out. The impotence of the Democratic Party and American liberalism before the Republican right was definitively demonstrated in the anti-Clinton impeachment campaign. The failure of Clinton and the Democrats to expose the conspiracy of right-wing forces in the Republican Party, the judiciary and the media that underlay the impeachment and Senate trial of Clinton set the stage for the present drive by the same forces to hijack the election.

There is only one social force that can defeat the right-wing assault on democratic rights—the working class, which constitutes the vast majority of the American people. The conflict within the ruling elite that has erupted in the election crisis will inevitably draw broader layers of the working population into struggle. The initial stirrings of the masses are already evident in the angry protests of minority workers and others in Florida over the actions of the Republican authorities. This instinctive resistance to the attack on democratic rights and social gains won through bitter struggle must find conscious expression in the construction of an independent political party that unites all working people on the basis of a democratic and socialist program.



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