

A passing comment from Clinton: the US election was stolen

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Speaking on Tuesday in Chicago, Bill Clinton made a remarkable statement for an outgoing president. In an off-the-cuff comment during a speech to Democratic Party supporters he acknowledged that George W. Bush and the Republicans, with the assistance of the US Supreme Court, stole the presidential election.

“By the time it was over,” Clinton said, “our candidate had won the popular vote, and the only way they could win the election was to stop the voting in Florida.” Speaking to reporters following the event he added that the Democrats “ran the first presidential campaign that was so clearly winning, a court had to stop the vote in order to change the outcome.”

Clinton's comments warranted only a 30-second clip on a few evening news programs, and have received scant attention in the print media, because he raised an issue that journalists and the political elite would just as soon sweep under the rug. While Clinton may have let the truth slip out, the actual response of the Democrats to the Republicans' political coup has been to submit to it. Indeed, since the Supreme Court handed the presidency to Bush the watchwords of the Democratic Party have been bipartisanship and reconciliation.

The record of the Clinton administration from Election Day through to the present has been to block any fight against the Republicans' hijacking of the presidency. Clinton remained silent throughout much of the post-election crisis, commenting that democracy and the “rule of law” would win out. The Clinton Justice Department also refused to launch an investigation requested by the NAACP and other organizations into the disenfranchisement of minority voters in Florida.

When the Supreme Court called off the vote count in Florida—handing the presidency to Bush—Clinton was one of the first to accept the outcome of the election as

legitimate, the product of the democratic process and the Constitution. He invited Bush to the White House to discuss a “smooth” transition to power.

No Democratic Senator—including the newly elected Senator from New York, Hillary Rodham Clinton—supported a motion initiated by members of the Congressional Black Caucus objecting to the awarding of Florida's 25 electoral votes to Bush. In the spirit of bipartisanship, the Democratic Party leadership has abandoned any challenge to the Florida vote fraud and has no plans to protest the Bush inauguration on January 20.

The contradiction between Clinton's acknowledgment that the election was stolen and the response of his administration only underscores the cynicism and cowardice of the Democratic Party and its cavalier attitude towards the basic rights of the American people. This disinterest in fundamental rights, which were won through bitter struggle over many generations, is likewise reflected in Clinton's failure to provide any analysis of what is, by any definition, a crisis of immense proportions.

If it is true, as Clinton admits, that his successor is assuming office as a result of the disenfranchisement of millions of voters, how is this to be explained? What does this break with democratic norms indicate about the state of bourgeois democratic institutions in the US? What are the underlying social and class contradictions that have given rise to this unprecedented development? What does the breakdown of democratic procedures say about the nature of the much-vaunted prosperity for which Clinton and Gore are eager to take credit? Does this development not have a connection to the staggering growth of inequality which is, in fact, the major legacy of the Clinton years? These are questions the Democrats and

liberal establishment would rather ignore.

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The half-joking manner in which Clinton made his comments on the election is indicative of the lack of seriousness that dominates the political and media establishment. To raise these issues in such a cynical fashion—and then draw no conclusions from them or act upon them—reveals not only the attitude of Bill Clinton as an individual but the entire social layer for which he and the Democratic Party speak. This reflects the outlook not of the broad mass of working people, but rather the most privileged layers of the middle class and sections of the ruling class who have little if any commitment to the defense of democratic rights.

This is not the first time the Democrats have alluded to such issues, only to bury them. Clinton's statements in Chicago were reminiscent of Hillary Clinton's comments at the onset of the impeachment crisis, when she said that the campaign by the Republican right against Clinton amounted to a “vast right-wing conspiracy.” No sooner had she spoken the words than any further examination of the impeachment drive was dropped.

The response from the Bush camp to Clinton's statements was notably subdued. Bush press secretary Ari Fleischer commented that he hoped that President Clinton would want to follow in the tradition “of presidents leaving office with respect for their successors.” Fleischer went out of his way not to make too much of it, conscious of the explosive nature of the issues involved.

It is noteworthy that the *New York Times*, mouthpiece of the liberal wing of the political establishment, was far less restrained in its reaction. Like Fleischer, the *Times* was anxious to bury the issue on its inside pages. At the same time, they could not resist denouncing Clinton for having raised it. In the first paragraph of what was purportedly a news report on the Chicago event, Clinton was attacked as a “partisan provocateur” for even suggesting that the election had been stolen.



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