

What political conclusions must be drawn from Trump's Super Tuesday?

David North
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In the aftermath of Super Tuesday, not even the political establishment and media can deny that the United States is in the throes of a profound political crisis. The candidacy of Donald Trump can no longer be dismissed—as it has been until very recently by so many pundits—as merely a bizarre and even somewhat entertaining sideshow. While the outcome remains uncertain, the front-runner for the Republican Party's presidential nomination is a candidate whose persona and appeal are of a distinctly fascistic character.

During the past few weeks, as it became increasingly evident that he was poised to emerge from Super Tuesday as the leading candidate for the Republican nomination, some of Trump's critics began to acknowledge that he was a "Frankenstein's monster" created by the party's decades-long cultivation of racist elements. This can be dated all the way back to the 1960s, when Richard Nixon inaugurated the Republican Party's "southern strategy," which aimed to appeal to lingering hostility to the civil rights movement. In August 1980, immediately after winning the Republican nomination, Ronald Reagan chose Philadelphia, Mississippi—where three civil rights workers had been murdered 16 years earlier—as the site of his first public campaign speech as the party's presidential candidate.

There is no question but that the racist political culture of the Republican Party has provided an ideal environment for the development of Trump's career and his present-day baiting of Muslims and immigrants of Hispanic origin. However, inasmuch as overt appeals to racism are the stock in trade of virtually all the Republican candidates, it does not explain the political phenomenon of Trump's dramatic rise.

More than any other Republican candidate, Trump has pitched his message to the intense anger and frustration of tens of millions of Americans who feel—quite justifiably—neglected and scorned by a political system that is indifferent to the problems with which they are confronted every day of their lives. It was only a matter of time before one or another right-wing demagogue would recognize the political potential of an appeal to the economic and social insecurity of millions of desperate people.

Exit polls taken of voters in the Republican primaries establish that the phrase used by Trump supporters to describe the candidate is, "He tells it like it is." What does that mean? Quite simply, Trump proclaims that "America is failing." That assessment of the state of the country sounds a good deal closer to the truth than the usual declaration—which has become an obligatory applause line in every annual presidential State of the Union address—that America is doing great.

Trump talks about high unemployment, low wages and the disastrous state of health care. The fact that he has no solution to the

problems—or only absurd, reactionary and even insane "solutions"—counts for less than the perception that Trump is describing a reality of relentless economic decline that the voters can relate to. In an article posted Tuesday, the *Los Angeles Times* states:

Polling data from the early-voting states confirm that many of Trump's supporters complain they are falling behind financially. A plurality of Trump voters so far stopped their education at high school, limiting the job prospects.

It's partly a reflection of the nation's stagnant incomes since the Great Recession. At \$32,089, per capita income for white Americans has only barely rebounded to what it was in 2005. Economic conditions in the Southern states, which have lost manufacturing jobs at a steady clip, have been particularly difficult as workplaces change and begin to demand higher skills and education levels. In South Carolina, where voters handed Trump an easy victory last month, new technology-rich automotive manufacturing plants have replaced shuttered textile mills. But the median household income, \$44,929, still hasn't caught up with its inflation-adjusted, pre-recession high of \$50,484, set in 2006.

Tennessee, which, like Georgia, is expecting record voter turnout on Tuesday, saw its median income last peak in 1999, at \$51,910, adjusted for inflation; today it is \$43,716.

Trump invokes a mythical past and promises to "Make America Great Again." America is the ancestral home of snake oil salesmen. Mark Twain's Duke of Bilgewater marketed a substance that he claimed would remove tartar from teeth. Unfortunately, it also burned off the enamel.

Trump peddles his economic and political wares to the desperate and discouraged. Some of his media and political critics believe that Trump can be discredited if it can be shown that many of his businesses ended up in bankruptcy court. They are sorely mistaken. The story of Trump's bankruptcies and subsequent resurrections offer a strange sort of hope to those who know what it means to lose everything they have. If Trump rose phoenix-like from the ashes of his many business failures, perhaps he can share with others, and even the entire country, the secret formula of his success. He will apply "The Art of the Deal" to the problems of America. Trump offers the promise of miracles to those who are on their last legs.

Whether or not Trump is worth the billions he claims to have is a matter of debate. Whatever the exact amount of his personal fortune, it

seems strange that a right-wing real estate mogul should find support among significant sections of low-income white workers. Why, it must be asked, hasn't this substantial layer of the population been drawn to the left?

To answer this question one must take a hard look at what is generally represented as "left" politics in the United States.

Official "left" politics is constituted by the Democratic Party, which is—no less (and in some respects even more) than the Republican Party—the political instrument of Wall Street and substantial sections of military and intelligence strategists. The Obama administration, which entered the White House promising "change you can believe in," continued and expanded the policies of the Bush administration. Its economic policies have been dedicated entirely to the rescue and enrichment of Wall Street. Its signature social initiative was the restructuring of health care in a manner designed to massively expand the power and boost the profits of the insurance industry. Obama's administration has institutionalized assassinations as a central instrument of American foreign policy and overseen a dramatic escalation of attacks on democratic rights.

Of what, then, does the "leftism" of the Democratic Party consist? Its "left" coloration is defined by its patronage of various forms of identity politics—fixated on race, ethnicity, gender and sexual preference—promoted by a broad swathe of political organizations and groupings that represent the interests of affluent sections of the middle class. They have no interest in any substantial change in the existing economic structure of society, beyond achieving a more agreeable distribution of wealth among the richest 10 percent of the population.

The essential characteristics of this political milieu are complacency, self-absorption and, above all, contempt for the working class. In particular, the affluent "left" organizations—or, to describe them more accurately, the "pseudo-left"—make little effort to suppress their disdain for the white working class, for which they can find no place within the framework of identity politics. A vast segment of American workers is written off as "reactionary." Their essential class interests—decent jobs and a safe workplace, a livable income, a secure retirement, affordable health care, inviolable democratic rights, peace—are ignored.

In this insidious way, the struggle against racism acquires a thoroughly demagogic character. Genuine socialists have always insisted that all forms of divisions among workers—whether of ethnic, national or racial character—can be overcome only to the extent that workers become conscious of their common class identity and the underlying economic source of their oppression.

This is no less true in the fight against other forms of discrimination related to gender and sexual identity. The attitude of socialists toward such important democratic issues is that they must be fought for on the basis of the political mobilization of all sections of the working class against capitalism.

The hostility of the pseudo-left organizations to this perspective is so great, they have declared that the slogan "Black Lives Matter" must be counterposed to the elemental democratic conception that "All Lives Matter." This reactionary stance plays into the hands of Trump and his ilk.

As for the campaign of Hillary Clinton, the efforts to promote this corrupt veteran of two reactionary administrations—that of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama—as a champion of the oppressed is nothing less than grotesque. Her presidential bid is a monument to the deceit of identity politics. The administration of her husband presided over the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, which cleared the path for the

corruption that led to the crash of 2008. The first President Clinton eviscerated welfare payments, which had a devastating impact on the living standards of millions of African-American workers. The crime bill passed with the support of the Clinton Administration led to a vast increase in the rate of incarceration.

And yet, it is argued that the election of this Lady Macbeth of American politics—who instigated the Libyan invasion that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people—will be a triumph for American womanhood! The pillar of "left-liberal" politics in the United States, the *Nation*, carried an article by a wealthy feminist in a recent issue entitled, "Why I Am Supporting Hillary Clinton, With Joy and Without Apologies." The author noted, in passing, that her daughter was on the payroll of the Clinton campaign.

The campaign of Senator Bernie Sanders, broadly identified as a socialist, has gained widespread support and demonstrated the existence of a desire within large sections of the working class for an alternative to capitalism. Significantly, polls have indicated that Sanders would do substantially better against Trump than Clinton.

However, by conducting his campaign within the Democratic Party, Sanders is directing the popular opposition to capitalism into a dead end. With each passing day his campaign acquires an ever more conservative character. He now defines his socialism as nothing more than support for Social Security. Observing the strict conventions of bourgeois politics, references to the working class have disappeared entirely from his speeches. Sanders now identifies himself as a "fighter for the middle class."

Sanders, in this way, seeks to block the emergence of an independent movement of the working class against capitalism and for socialism.

The Republican Convention is still three months away. The November election is more than a half-year away. The explosive character of international politics, the extreme economic instability and the growing social tensions within the United States impart to the 2016 election a high degree of uncertainty. However, the Trump phenomenon is a serious political warning. The American political system is rotten to the core. Even if Trump were to disappear tomorrow, it would not be long before another fascistic demagogue would emerge to take his place. There is no small number of discontented military and police-intelligence operatives, with substantial combat experience and access to serious fighting forces, who are preparing to enter the political arena.

The building of a revolutionary socialist movement of the working class in the United States is an urgent political task. We call on the many supporters and readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to draw the necessary conclusions from the political situation and to get off the sidelines and join and fight to build the Socialist Equality Party.



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