

The US elections and the criminalization of American politics

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With the US primary campaigns drawing to a close, the two parties of the US ruling elite, Democrats and Republicans, are preparing to nominate candidates who may be subject to criminal indictment between now and the general election.

The Republicans have as their presumptive nominee Donald Trump, a man who made his billions through various scams and insider dealings. US newspapers have been filled this week with details of the fraudulent methods he employed to enhance his fortune. Court documents in the lawsuit joined by numerous former students at Trump University allege that the supposed training in real estate provided by the school was a fiction.

It was a fraud on two levels. At an enormous price, up to \$35,000 for the “Gold Elite” program, students were told little more than “buy low” and “sell high.” As many as 5,000 students paid a total of \$40 million for the worthless instructions, most of which could be obtained, according to press accounts, through a simple Internet search.

As for the claim that Trump would be personally involved in sharing his supposed real estate expertise, with instructors who “are handpicked by me,” the documents show that Trump played no role in the “education” program except allowing his name and face to be used to promote the venture, and then cashing the checks—his cut of loot was at least \$5 million.

New York state attorney general Eric Schneiderman, appearing on two television interview programs Thursday morning, said, “We have laws against running an illegal, unlicensed university. This never was a university. The fraud started with the name of the organization.” He added, “It was really a fraud from beginning to end.”

While Trump U. accounts for only a small fraction of the real estate mogul’s personal wealth, the methods used were representative of his “business model” as a whole, and for that matter, of his presidential campaign, which has been focused largely on appealing to increasingly desperate sections of workers and the lower middle class, offering Trump’s billionaire persona as the solution to deepening economic afflictions.

There is something extraordinary in the fact that one of the principal parties of the ruling class is preparing to choose an individual like Trump as its presidential candidate. Despite the initial hypocritical criticisms of his vulgar and racist pronouncements, nearly all Republican Party leaders have now reconciled themselves with Trump, culminating in Thursday’s statement by House Speaker Paul Ryan that he will support his candidacy.

This can only be explained in relation to broader social tendencies that have produced an immense degradation of American politics. Trump personifies the descent of corporate America into ever more brazen methods of speculation, swindling and outright theft, which culminated in the economic crash of 2008. Over the past 40 years, the operations of the American ruling class have taken on an ever more parasitic character, with a mass of financial operations covering over a long-term industrial decline.

On the Democratic Party side, Hillary Clinton is currently under investigation for conducting all her government communications while Secretary of State on a private email server, an arrangement clearly intended to keep her correspondence under her control, regardless of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. Later this summer she is expected to be interviewed by the FBI, which could lead to criminal

charges over the mishandling of classified materials or perjury.

Clinton represents a more polished version of the same social processes that have created Trump. Bill and Hillary Clinton have accumulated a personal fortune topping \$150 million by serving as speechmakers to corporate audiences, backed by their “fundraising” work at the Clinton Foundation, which connects corporate donors and charitable organizations in return for lucrative fees.

The foundation has become the center of a web of international influence-peddling that keeps the Clintons in front of their real constituency, the world’s billionaires, making them fabulously wealthy in the process.

Clinton is also more directly associated with the crimes of the state and the military-intelligence apparatus. The criminalization of the American financial aristocracy has found its reflection in foreign policy—in the casting aside of all legality and the adoption of torture, assassination and “preemptive war” as the principal means for asserting the interests of the ruling class abroad.

It is significant that as the viability of her candidacy is being called into question as a result of the continued successes of her rival, Bernie Sanders, Clinton decided to focus a major speech in San Diego California on a critique of Trump’s foreign policy views. Clinton made her pitch to the military, based on the argument that she, and not Trump (or Sanders, or some other candidate) would be the most effective “commander-in-chief” of US imperialism.

Clinton focused her speech on the decision by President Obama and his top military and foreign policy advisers, including Clinton herself, to authorize the Navy Seal Team 6 raid that killed Osama bin Laden. She made no reference to the foreign policy debacle with which she is most closely identified, the US-NATO bombing of Libya, although it “accomplished” the same end. Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was murdered in his home town of Sirte by US-backed rebels, an event that Clinton celebrated at the time with the infamous wisecrack, “We came, we saw, he died,” touching off gales of laughter among her clique of traveling aides.

Trump and Clinton are both products of the same process: the criminalization of the American ruling

elite, as the methods of the mafia have come to predominate in both the operations of Wall Street and the practice of imperialist “statecraft.”



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