

Trump chairman Paul Manafort resigns amidst campaign shift to the right

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20 August 2016

Donald Trump's campaign chairman Paul Manafort resigned Thursday, amid mounting signs that the Republican presidential candidate is refocusing his political efforts to combine the campaign for the November 8 election with preparations for launching a fascistic political movement in the post-election period.

Manafort was pushed aside Wednesday when Trump named Stephen Bannon, head of the ultra-right Breitbart News, as campaign CEO, while elevating one of his advisers, pollster Kellyanne Conway, to the position of campaign manager.

Spokesmen for the Trump campaign initially claimed that Manafort was not being displaced, but in barely 24 hours he had submitted his resignation and Trump had accepted it. The shake-up puts the Trump campaign under its third leadership in three months.

Manafort, a longtime Republican Party operative going back to the 1970s, joined the campaign to assist its delegate-selection effort after Trump's initial primary victories. He became campaign chairman in May, shunting aside campaign manager Corey Lewandowski, who was fired a month later.

The ouster of Manafort came after several days of media attacks over his work on the political campaigns of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. The *New York Times* published the first report August 14, citing an alleged "black ledger" of under-the-table cash payments by Yanukovich, the pro-Russian president who was ousted in 2014 by a US-sponsored ultra-right coup.

Manafort had worked as an adviser to Yanukovich and his Party of Regions during his successful 2010 election campaign and then later during his administration in Kiev. He maintained contracts with well-heeled Ukrainian clients, including several billionaire oligarchs, until he joined the campaign of

the American billionaire Trump.

The drumbeat escalated with an Associated Press report that Manafort had hired two prominent Washington lobbying groups, one Democratic and one Republican, to give the Yanukovich government a more positive image in official circles in the United States. The funds were routed through a London foundation, set up by a Ukrainian billionaire, to evade US requirements that lobbyists for a foreign government register as agents of that government.

The Democratic lobbyists hired by Manafort on behalf of Yanukovich were from the Podesta Group, a firm set up with the participation of John Podesta, who is currently the chairman of Hillary Clinton's campaign, and still run by his brother Tony Podesta. But the US media has paid little attention to this connection, instead using the issue exclusively to pummel the Trump campaign chairman.

The Clinton campaign has used the Manafort resignation to intensify the Democratic Party attack on Trump from the right, portraying him as a virtual agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin. This is part of the Democratic Party's efforts to maintain the support of the military-intelligence apparatus and dominant sections of the ruling class on the basis that Clinton will be a more reliable "Commander in Chief" to lead the country into war.

Clinton's campaign manager Robbie Mook declared in a press statement released Friday, "Paul Manafort's resignation is a clear admission that the disturbing connections between Donald Trump's team and pro-Kremlin elements in Russia and Ukraine are untenable." Mook continued, "It's also time for Donald Trump to come clean on his own business dealings with Russian interests, given recent news reports about his web of deep financial connections to

business groups with Kremlin ties.”

While Trump released a brief written statement praising Manafort, his son Eric Trump gave an interview to Fox News in which he admitted, “My father didn’t want to be, you know, distracted by whatever Paul was dealing with.”

While the claims of shady dealings in Ukraine provided a pretext for removing Manafort, there is little doubt that he was on his way out anyway. Trump had repeatedly rebuffed Manafort’s urgings to run a conventional election campaign, refusing to spend money on either television advertising or campaign organization in the so-called battleground states, the dozen or so states that have been competitive between the Democrats and Republicans over the past half dozen presidential elections.

The selection of Stephen Bannon as campaign CEO, and, in effect, Manafort’s boss, was a declaration of war against such an approach. Bannon, a wealthy former Wall Street operative for Goldman Sachs, took control of Breitbart News after the death of its founder in 2012, and built it into a political center for ultra-right elements of the Republican Party.

He is publicly identified with the “alt-right,” those who espouse “white nationalism” and other fascistic views, opposing the Republican congressional leadership as too soft on immigration and foreign trade. Bannon invited Nigel Farage, leader of the far-right anti-immigrant United Kingdom Independence Party, for a visit to Washington where he introduced him to prominent Republicans.

Bannon has heavily promoted the Trump campaign and effectively forced out a Breitbart reporter, Michelle Fields, who was assaulted by Trump campaign manager Lewandowski earlier this year.

The same day Trump named Bannon to head his campaign, there were reports that he had been meeting as well with Roger Ailes, the former head of Fox News who was forced out last month over charges of sexual harassment against numerous former and current employees of the network. There have been published suggestions that Trump, Bannon and Ailes are preparing to launch a new right-wing movement, perhaps centered on a cable television network, after Trump’s expected defeat in the November 8 election.

The first political product of the new regime was the Trump campaign’s first general election television

commercial, a vitriolic attack on immigrants, aimed not at convincing any voters who might be “on the fence,” but rather at whipping up hatred and racism among Trump’s most fanatical supporters.

Meanwhile, a further connection between the Trump campaign and fascistic circles has come to light, with a report by McClatchy News Service on anti-Semitic comments by Joseph Schmitz, a former Pentagon official, who is one of Trump’s five-man team of foreign policy advisers.

Three former Pentagon officials have filed complaints charging they were harassed and even fired from their jobs at the instigation of Schmitz because of their Jewish heritage during the period he was inspector general of the Pentagon from 2002 to 2005. According to one of the complaints, Schmitz “allegedly lectured [the complainant] on the details of concentration camps and how the ovens were too small to kill 6 million Jews.”

Schmitz, who left the Pentagon to become general counsel of the parent company of the mercenary supplier Blackwater, is the son of the late Republican Congressman John Schmitz, a notorious anti-Communist aligned with the John Birch Society.



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