

Trump's appointment of Stephen Bannon: A new stage in the crisis of American democracy

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15 November 2016

The announcement by President-elect Donald Trump that he is appointing Breitbart News head Stephen Bannon as his “chief strategist,” and the absence of any significant opposition from the Democratic Party, has vast political significance. A man with direct ties to fascist, racist and white supremacist organizations will be the right-hand man of the president, with immense power to determine government policy.

Trump's rise to power signals a drastic political realignment within the American ruling class. The outcome last Tuesday was the product, in the words of Obama, of an “intramural scrimmage” within the ruling class. Out of this conflict, a new extreme right and fundamentally anti-democratic political orientation has been determined.

Trump decided he could go ahead with the appointment of Bannon because he knows that the Democratic Party has no interest in defending the most basic democratic rights. The groveling response to his election from leading Democrats—from Obama and Hillary Clinton to Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren—has led him to conclude that he can go ever further in the construction of an ultra-right government of extreme political reaction.

The level of indifference, complacency and collaboration from within the Democratic Party was exemplified in Obama's press conference on Monday, the first since Trump's election.

Obama refused to comment when asked about the appointment of Bannon, saying that it was “up to him [Trump] to assemble a team” and that it was “important for us to let him make his decisions.” Obama went on to praise his “cordial discussion” with the president-elect and said that the American people must “reconcile themselves” to a Trump presidency. His own task, Obama added, was to be “as helpful as I can to him in going forward and building on the progress we made.”

The response of the Democrats to the election of Trump is even more remarkable given the circumstances of the election itself. For the second time in sixteen years, an election in the United States has not been determined by the

popular vote, but the Electoral College. This outcome, which before the theft of the election in 2000 had not occurred for 112 years, has evoked no objection from the Democrats.

At his press conference, Obama said nothing about the fact that Trump lost the popular vote by as many as two million votes, or that the two most economically significant states in the country voted against him by wide margins. He did not note that after all votes are counted, Trump will have likely received fewer votes than Mitt Romney did in 2012, when he lost to Obama. He did not suggest that because of this, the incoming president does not have a popular mandate to carry out the right-wing measures he is planning.

In recent days, Trump has begun to outline the political trajectory of his administration. In an interview on “60 minutes” Sunday, he pledged to round up and detain “two million, it could even be three million” immigrants. The Supreme Court will be stacked with extreme-right, “pro-life” judges who would overturn the right to abortion and Trump left open the possibility of launching a criminal investigation into his former opponent in the elections, Democrat Hillary Clinton.

None of this provokes an ounce of protest from the Democratic Party. All that the Democrats are now concerned about is ensuring an “orderly transition of power.” But a transition to where?

While Trump represents something new in American politics, he is not entirely a break from the past. With his election, the ruling class is accelerating the implementation of an extremely anti-democratic orientation that has been underway for more than a quarter century.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the ideologists of the American ruling class proclaimed the “end of history.” Capitalism had triumphed, which would bring with it, so it was claimed, a period of peace and the expansion of liberal democracy. What in fact emerged was twenty-five years of unending war, deepening economic crisis, historically unprecedented levels of social inequality and the destruction of the most basic forms of democratic rule.

In December 2000, in advance of the Supreme Court decision in *Bush v. Gore* that halted the recount of votes in Florida and handed the election to George W. Bush, the WSWS wrote that the outcome would reveal “how far the American ruling class is prepared to go in breaking with traditional bourgeois-democratic and constitutional norms.” The Democratic Party’s refusal to stop what amounted to a political coup—the theft of an election—demonstrated that there was no significant constituency within the ruling class for the defense of democratic rights.

Everything that has happened since has proved this fact. Less than a year after coming to power, the Bush administration seized on the attacks of September 11, 2001 to launch a “war on terror”—in fact, a political justification for endless war abroad and the destruction of democratic rights within the United States.

Since his election in 2008, Obama has escalated the attack on democratic forms of rule. In policy doctrines and executive actions, the Obama White House asserted the presidential power to assassinate US citizens without charge. The torturers and war criminals of the Bush administration went unpunished, while the power of the military-intelligence-police apparatus has grown enormously.

Much of what was going on, in part behind the scenes, under Obama will take on a much more direct form under Trump. A form of American authoritarianism is emerging—which will be directed at the increasingly violent suppression of working-class struggle.

With the election of Trump, the ruling class is sharpening the knives and preparing to use them. At the same time, Trump’s economic nationalism, far from marking a retreat from militarist violence, is the antechamber to World War III. Facing a protracted global crisis, the American ruling class will seek to maintain its position of world domination through ever more naked aggression.

Efforts are underway to minimize the significance of what has happened. The corrupt American media is adapting itself to the new ultra-right regime. The *New York Times*, after campaigning for Clinton throughout the election, has issued a groveling apology for its coverage. Its columnists, who previously berated anyone who did not back the Democratic Party campaign, now counsel that it is necessary to “give Trump time” to see what he will do.

All such soporific phrases are exercises in cowardice and deceit.

The fundamental lesson that must be drawn is that opposition to political reaction, war and inequality cannot be waged within, through, or in alliance with, any faction of the Democratic Party. While Trump represents an alliance of Wall Street with fascistic forces, the Democratic Party is a political alliance of Wall Street and privileged, complacent

and selfish sections of the upper middle class.

The Democrats are far more fearful about the consequences of stirring up opposition in the working class than they are about any tactical differences with Trump. They are aware of the enormous level of popular opposition that exists, directed at both political parties, and are desperate to prevent any avenue for this opposition to find political expression. Not a single significant Democratic Party official has openly declared their solidarity with the protests over Trump’s election or expressed sympathy for the demonstrators, let alone joined them.

While Trump’s electoral victory marks a major shift to the right by the American ruling class, millions of workers and youth are moving in a different political direction. Trump was able to exploit social anger due to the political bankruptcy of the Democratic Party, under conditions of a general collapse of voter turnout and deep hostility to the entire political establishment. However, the vast majority of those who voted for Trump did not vote for an extreme-right regime, and as the character of his administration becomes clear, social and political opposition will grow.

The Socialist Equality Party and its candidates, Jerry White and Niles Niemuth, participated in the 2016 election to lay the political foundations for a socialist movement of the working class. The fundamental purpose of our campaign was to build a leadership in the working class to prepare for the struggles to come, regardless of whether Trump or Clinton was in the White House.

The election of Trump underscores the urgent necessity of this task. Opposition to the Trump administration and the policies that it will pursue must be developed and organized throughout the country. All workers and youth looking for a way to fight must draw the necessary conclusions from the 2016 elections and join and build the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



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