

After the election of Trump: The realignment of US politics

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18 November 2016

In the week and a half since Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election, leading Democrats have moved with extraordinary speed to embrace the president-elect. The same individuals who before November 8 were denouncing Trump as an existential threat to the country and the world are now pledging to work and collaborate with him.

What has happened in the ten days since the election? First, there were the conciliatory statements from President Barack Obama and Trump's rival in the election, Hillary Clinton. Obama declared the day after the vote that his "number one priority" was to ensure that Trump was "successful." This was followed by an apology from the *New York Times*, the leading national newspaper in the US and a fervent promoter of the Clinton campaign, for its coverage of the election.

Nominally "left" Democrats, including Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, jumped in to say that they would "work with" Trump on basic elements of his agenda, as have top trade union executives like AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka and UAW President Dennis Williams. This week, Vice-President Joseph Biden put in his praise after a meeting with Vice-President elect Mike Pence, saying that the office would be in "good hands" from "Day One" of the new administration.

Throughout this process, the ultra-right agenda of the incoming administration—epitomized in Trump's selection of Stephen Bannon, a racist and fascist, as chief strategist—has been ignored or downplayed. So too has the fact that Trump likely lost the popular vote by as many as two million, treated by Democrats and the media as an inconvenient fact in the effort to assure the stability of the new government.

Aside from the spinelessness that has long characterized the Democratic Party, a definite political

logic is at work. While the election campaign gave expression to bitter factional conflicts within the ruling class, its outcome has paved the way for a reorientation of class policy—in a ferociously nationalist direction.

Most revealing is the response of congressional Democrats to the new power in Washington. This turn is spearheaded by Senate Democrats, who elected a new leader Wednesday, Charles Schumer, to replace the retiring Harry Reid of Nevada.

As a senator from New York state, Schumer is a fervent defender of Wall Street interests. But he is also identified with a more aggressive anti-China stance in economic and trade policy. Year after year, he has co-sponsored legislation with Republican war hawk Lindsey Graham of South Carolina demanding that the US government force China to revalue its currency upwards with the threat of punitive tariffs on Chinese imports.

The most vehement advocate of such a policy is President-elect Trump, who has declared he will issue an executive order branding China a currency manipulator, and impose tariffs of up to 45 percent to force Beijing to revalue. Trump and Schumer have known each other for decades, and Trump has contributed to Schumer's House and Senate campaigns.

The *New York Times*, which largely supports the pro-Trump campaign by the Democrats, headlined its Thursday lead, "Senate Democrats' Surprising Strategy: Trying to Align With Trump." The article reported that congressional Democrats "are constructing an agenda to align with many proposals of President-elect Donald J. Trump that put him at odds with his own party."

Given Trump's lack of ties to the Republican congressional leadership, the Democrats hope to win

him to their side on certain issues if they embrace his trade war program, on which they largely agree. The *Times* report continues: “Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, elected Wednesday as the new Democratic minority leader, has spoken with Mr. Trump several times, and Democrats in coming weeks plan to announce populist economic and ethics initiatives they think Mr. Trump might like.”

The effort to present the Democrats’ alliance with Trump as a “populist” turn to the “white working class” is a fraud. The nationalist agenda is aimed at aggressively asserting the interests of American corporations in relation to their rivals. The corollary of this policy is ever more violent military intervention all over the world.

Sanders’ now elevated role in the Democratic Party (he was appointed to the Senate leadership this week) is particularly significant. Sanders based much of his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination on opposition to trade agreements. The other addition to the Senate leadership is West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin, a rabid protectionist who has discussed switching to the Republican Party.

The claim by Democrats that they will “work with” Trump on certain issues while opposing him on others is a political fiction. A nationalist economic policy will inevitably be accompanied by the aggressive use of military force abroad. This was signaled Thursday night by the announcement that Trump will be appointing retired general Michael Flynn, an arch warmonger, as his national security advisor.

Moreover, to the extent that the ruling class attempts to stimulate economic growth through nationalist measures, this will be based on an intensification of the exploitation of the working class within the United States. The turn to Trump signals that the ruling elite is preparing to use more authoritarian methods of rule and police-state violence to deal with the growth of social opposition.

While the election of Trump marks a significant shift in the political methods of the ruling class, his policies are in line with a general trajectory going back decades.

There is no constituency in the American ruling elite or its two political parties for a genuine struggle against the ultra-right, authoritarian, militaristic regime that is taking shape in Washington. The incoming Trump administration is one of enormous crisis—elected with

the votes of less than a quarter of the population, without a popular mandate for the ferociously reactionary policies it will unleash.

The struggle against Trump cannot be waged through any faction of the discredited Democratic Party or any of the institutions of the capitalist state. It requires the independent political mobilization of the working class through the building of its own party, based on a socialist and internationalist program.



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