

Bannon attacks Bush and McCain, highlighting crisis within Republican Party

Eric London
23 October 2017

When former Trump Senior Adviser and current Breitbart News editor Steven Bannon told delegates at the California Republican Party convention that “there has not been a more destructive presidency than George [W.] Bush’s,” he was greeted with loud applause. The very mention of Bush, the party’s previous president, and of 30-year Senator John McCain provoked boos from the audience.

Bannon’s attacks on Bush and McCain follow public statements they made against Trump in recent days, although neither used the current president’s name. Speaking in New York on Thursday, Bush took aim at Trump, saying, “We’ve seen nationalism distorted into nativism” and “our discourse degraded by casual cruelty.” Last Monday, McCain attacked Trump’s “half-baked, spurious nationalism.”

Leaving aside the highly hypocritical character of such condemnations from the perpetrators and apologists of the Iraq War and other imperialist slaughters, the fight between Bannon and his allies and the Republican establishment is developing into an internal fight that could destroy or radically alter the 163-year-old capitalist party.

Bannon is fanning and exploiting the escalating divisions to carry out his long-term goal of either transforming the Republican Party into an explicitly fascist party or splitting sufficient politicians and donors from the Republicans to establish a new far-right party of his own.

This perspective animates Bannon’s effort to recruit challengers in the 2018 Republican primaries, which take place in the spring and summer. He recently pledged to “wage civil war” on Republican leadership, singling out enemies like Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Arizona Senator Jeff Flake, and others. At the California Republican convention, he said he was

trying to build “a grassroots army” to “revolt against Republican establishment.” He seeks to ensure the primaries take place amid a political climate of reaction, jingoism, and anti-immigrant hysteria.

But his current tactic is also aimed at appealing to lower-ranking Republican officials and their financial backers to join him in opposing Republican leadership. Referencing Trump’s 2016 victory, Bannon told the California Republican Party that Trump’s 2016 campaign was based on a coalition approach: “This is why it had to be the Republican establishment, it had to be limited-government conservatives, it had to be libertarians, it had to be populists, it had to be economic nationalists, it had to be evangelical Christians.”

The aim of this maneuver, offering of the olive branch to sections of the Republican establishment, is two-fold. Bannon hopes to build a political bridge between the far right and the Republican Party’s wealthy donors. And he hopes to drive a wedge between the so-called establishment section of the party and its financial and fundamentalist backers. In this way, he can either isolate and purge the pro-McConnell and neo-conservative elements or win sufficient support to justify formally breaking with the Republicans to found a third party.

Bannon has been traveling across the country in recent weeks, raising money for Breitbart and for efforts to fund primary challengers to a number of Republican senators. He has boasted on Breitbart that he is winning support from a number of wealthy Republican donors, including Dan Eberhart, John Childs, Susan Gore, Eric Crown, and Sheldon Adelson. On Wednesday, he met with a group of establishment Republican donors in New York to “pitch his 2018 midterm strategy against Republican incumbents,”

according to Breitbart.

Bannon says he will back mainstream Republican candidates in states without Republican incumbents, but that he will challenge six of the seven sitting Senate Republicans who are up for reelection in 2018.

The coalition Bannon is constructing will be based on mercenaries, war criminals, speculators, evangelical preachers, and out-and-out fascists.

He is urging Erik Prince—former Blackwater CEO and brother of Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos—to run against Senator John Barrasso in Wyoming. He is also supporting challengers in Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Nebraska, and Mississippi, where some of the candidates Bannon supports have closer ties to the Republican establishment. In Alabama, Bannon backed the evangelical zealot Roy Moore, who defeated the establishment candidate Lester Strange in September’s Republican primary run-off.

Bannon also met with former-Republican Congressman and current Breitbart correspondent Tom Tancredo last month and the two discussed Tancredo running for governor of Colorado in 2018. Tancredo is ferociously anti-immigrant and has called for the establishment of brownshirt-style neighborhood militias to fight immigration and Islamism.

In other words, Bannon’s coalition would weave together the most reactionary threads of American politics, drawing veterans of the criminal wars in the Middle East, the Southern evangelical churches, and the anti-immigrant militia.

The Republican leadership has thus far attempted to downplay the threats from Bannon-backed primary challengers, calling the schism an “interparty skirmish” that will harm the Republicans’ chances in 2018.

Bannon’s strategy is drawing increasing attention in the bourgeois press. On Saturday, the *Washington Post* wrote, “Friends say Bannon is invigorated with a singular focus. He is trying to build the equivalent of his own political party, one that aims to explode the Republican establishment and what he and his allies dismiss as the ‘McConnell industrial complex,’ all while shrouding it in the cloak of advancing Trump’s agenda.”

The journalist Joshua Green notes in his book *Devil’s Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency* that Bannon told him, “Five, 10 years from now” the Republican Party will be

a “different party. You’re going to have a worker’s party.” Bannon, like Hitler, adopts the term “worker’s party” to provide a populist veneer for his fascist agenda.

The growing influence of fascistic elements within the American political establishment is not the product of the maneuverings of one individual, and a lackluster one at that. Bannon is a former naval officer and Wall Street executive whose intellectual activity consists of reading pulp military hagiographies and the ramblings of 20th century fascist mystics. The fact that he has tapped into the financial resources of a growing faction of the American oligarchy and threatens to take over one of its two major parties is an expression of the rot of the capitalist system.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact