

The crisis in the Republican Party and the fracturing of the American two-party system

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The eruption of open warfare between the Republican Party establishment and the Trump administration marks a new stage in the political crisis within the United States.

The conflict within the Republican Party came to a head on Tuesday with the speech from the floor of the Senate by Jeff Flake, who announced that he would not seek reelection and denounced Trump's actions as "dangerous to a democracy" and a threat to "the efficacy of American leadership around the globe." Flake's speech followed a series of statements attacking Trump by leading Republicans, including senators John McCain (chairman of the Armed Services Committee) and Bob Corker (chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee) and former President George W. Bush.

Leading Democrats lined up to praise Flake, a right-wing fiscal hawk and advocate of austerity. Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer called Flake "one of the finest human beings I've met in politics," adding that he "will be missed."

The outbreak of political warfare within the Republican Party is the latest episode in a conflict within the American state that raged throughout the Trump election campaign and has intensified over the ten months of his administration. Central to this struggle are differences over foreign policy, with Trump's Republican opponents denouncing his brand of "America First" ultra-nationalism as destructive of US global dominance, particularly in regard to relations with Washington's traditional allies and the political/military offensive against Russia and China.

From the beginning of his election campaign, Trump's strategy was to exploit social and economic discontent and widespread disgust with the Democratic Party to foster the growth of a far-right, fascistic and extra-parliamentary movement. His elevation soon after the election of Steven Bannon, editor of *Breitbart News*, to become his chief strategist signaled the continuation of

this policy in the White House. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, "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."

The fascistic politics of Trump and Bannon had, and continue to have, substantial support within the corporate and financial elite. The Trump administration's agenda of social counterrevolution, tax cuts for the rich and increased military spending have, moreover, broad support on Wall Street and in the Pentagon.

At the same time, significant sections of the ruling class are concerned about the implications of the election of Trump for the strategic interests of American imperialism abroad and for the social and political stability of the United States at home.

After Trump solidarized himself with fascist groups that rampaged through Charlottesville, Virginia in August, Bannon, who had come into conflict with White House Chief of Staff and former Marine General John Kelly, was removed as chief strategist and resumed his position at *Breitbart*.

The departure of Bannon, however, had more the character of a release from the constraints of the White House than a demotion. Since formally leaving the administration, Bannon has pursued a political strategy of attacking the top leadership of the Republican Party and supporting primary challengers to Republican incumbents, Flake among them, who are not in line with the Trump administration's agenda of extreme nationalism and anti-immigrant racism.

The political conflicts within the United States mirror global processes. In country after country, far-right movements have exploited the political vacuum created by the rightward lurch of the social democratic and labor parties, which long ago repudiated any concern for the issues facing the working class.

On Tuesday, the fascistic Alternative for Germany made its debut in the German parliament following elections in September in which it won 94 seats, benefiting from the electoral collapse of the Social Democratic Party.

The far-right Freedom Party is set to enter the Austrian government following elections last month in which it increased its vote by nearly 7 percentage points, coming in second, ahead of the Social Democrats. The party of a billionaire right-wing populist won last week's parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic, which saw the collapse of the social democrats.

In Britain, the anti-immigrant UK Independence Party emerged as the leading political force in last year's Brexit referendum. In France, National Front leader Marine Le Pen won 34 percent of the vote in presidential elections earlier this year, making it to the run-off election won by Emmanuel Macron. In Japan, the right-wing militarist Shinzo Abe won reelection as prime minister by a substantial margin.

In the United States, Trump, in alliance with Bannon, is pursuing a similar strategy, with the aim of either taking over the Republican Party or instigating a fracture that would break up the two-party system.

Paralleling international developments, Trump exploited the reactionary and militarist character of the Obama administration, the Democratic Party and the Clinton campaign. Clinton ran as the candidate of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, in alliance with privileged sections of the upper-middle class based on identity politics. She evinced open contempt for the grievances of workers devastated by mass layoffs and the destruction of wages and pensions, promoting the slanderous claim that Trump owed his electoral success to racism within the "white working class."

In the aftermath of Trump's election, the Democrats have shifted further to the right, including a move last week to remove supporters of Bernie Sanders from the Democratic National Committee. They have systematically covered up the far-reaching significance of the election of Trump and the appointment of figures like Bannon.

The central focus of the Democrats since Trump's election has been an increasingly frenzied campaign over Russian intervention in the US elections. This has been aimed both at fighting out conflicts within the ruling class over foreign policy and, ever more openly, justifying Internet censorship and the destruction of free speech.

The central orientation of the Democrats is on winning the support of the military and the intelligence agencies,

which are emerging as the arbiters of American politics. The Democratic Party's orientation was spelled out in a column by the *New York Times'* Thomas Friedman published yesterday, in which Friedman once again called for the intervention of the military against Trump.

Appealing to Defense Secretary James Mattis, best known for commanding US forces in the destruction of Fallujah in 2004, to take "action," Friedman wrote: "I am not talking about a coup... Trump needs know that it is now *your way* or the highway—not his." In other words, the military must take control, coup or otherwise.

The fracturing of the political system is an expression of an intractable crisis of American capitalism. In the conflicts within the ruling class, there is no progressive or democratic side. Trump's open Republican critics include a war criminal and advocate of torture (George W. Bush), a fanatic war hawk (McCain), a close ally of Wall Street and the military (Corker) and a far-right advocate of cuts in social spending (Flake).

Nothing progressive can come from a resolution of the crisis from above through some form of palace coup. Any such settlement will only shift the entire political system further to the right and escalate the assault on the working class and the drive to world war.

A political crisis on the scale engulfing Washington is a hallmark of a pre-revolutionary situation. Social explosions are on the horizon. The critical task for the working class is to advance its own, independent solution to the crisis and not allow itself to be dragged behind any faction of the ruling elite. The fight of the working class against Trump and the entire ruling class raises the urgent necessity for a mass political movement opposed to the Democrats and Republicans and directed to the overthrow of the capitalist system.



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