

Political lessons from the sham US government shutdown

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The vote Monday by Senate Democrats to end the three-day government shutdown based on a deal that includes no protections for 800,000 young immigrants covered by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has left millions in anger and disgust.

Senate Democratic Minority Leader Charles Schumer took the Senate floor to blame Trump for his “obstinacy,” announcing in a somber tone, “Through these complicated and lengthy negotiations, Democrats have always sought to be reasonable, to act in good faith and get something real done.”

Democratic Senator Richard Durbin attempted to sugarcoat Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s meaningless pledge to hold a vote on DACA extension in the Senate before the program is set to expire on March 5, thanking McConnell profusely for allowing the vote to take place. The deal “sets the stage for us to work together,” he groveled.

The government shutdown is the latest episode in the Democrats’ sham opposition to Trump. It was not the product of an impasse between the Democratic and Republican parties, it was a charade from the start, orchestrated to provide the Democrats with an oppositional veneer while the parties work out differences over imperialist geostrategy. The shutdown was held over the weekend so as to have a minimal impact, and the stock market reached record highs Monday. The real decision-makers understood the shutdown was for public consumption only.

On Friday afternoon, a week after Trump called third world countries “shitholes,” Schumer met Trump at the White House to discuss the budget negotiations. Schumer called it an “excellent preliminary meeting.” Schumer has visited Trump’s office many times before, though usually to beg for money. Many in Trump’s White House are former contributors to Schumer’s

Senate campaigns, including Trump (\$9,000), Trump’s children Eric, Donald Jr., and Ivanka (\$6,800 between them), and Jared Kushner (\$4,000). Trump gave \$125,000 to the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee of New York, whose primary responsibility since 1998 has been electing Schumer.

Schumer’s behavior is consistent with his political character. He is the epitome of the political poser. Marx describes this type of unprincipled politician in his portrayal of Lord Palmerston, the 19th century British liberal prime minister, who, Marx wrote, knows “how to appear as the aggressor when he connives, and as the defender where he betrays... how to find himself, at the opportune moment, on the side of the stronger against the weak, and how to utter brave words in the act of running away.” And Palmerston was a political giant compared to the forgettable Schumer.

The spineless character of the Democrats’ handling of the situation facing hundreds of thousands of anxious immigrant youth stands in stark contrast with the party’s efforts to prosecute the geopolitical interests of the military and intelligence agencies. On questions of urgent importance for the broad masses of the population, the Democratic Party whimpers like the cowardly lion in Oz. But when it comes to enforcing a more belligerent anti-Russian foreign policy, the party, backed by the military, the intelligence agencies and the most powerful corporations, roars like a mighty beast.

Just yesterday, hours after Senate Democrats agreed to the Republicans’ continuing resolution, news broke of several developments that show the full-court Democratic effort to label Trump a conspirator in “Russian election interference,” including the fact that Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller questioned Trump Attorney General Jeff Sessions and former FBI

Director James Comey about the Trump campaign's ties to Russia. The *Washington Post* reported that Mueller also plans on questioning Trump himself in the coming weeks, and Democrats called on Facebook and Twitter to investigate "Russian trolls" online.

Over the course of Trump's first year in office, the Democrats have waged a ruthless fight against him on his alleged ties to Russia, dedicating an immense amount of political capital and financial resources toward spurring anti-Russia hysteria.

In contrast, the Democrats have explicitly avoided opposing Trump's reactionary policies.

In December 2017, when Democrat Al Green put forward a motion to take up articles of impeachment based on Trump's pro-Nazi comments and his attacks on immigrants, Democrats voted against the measure 126 to 58 in the House.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Minority Whip Steny Hoyer issued a joint statement demanding that House Democrats reject the introduction of articles of impeachment based on Trump's right-wing policies: "Right now, Congressional committees continue to be deeply engaged in investigations into the President's actions both before and after his inauguration. The special counsel's investigation is moving forward as well, and those inquiries should be allowed to continue. Now is not the time to consider articles of impeachment."

At the beginning of Trump's presidency, Democrats pledged to work with Trump after Obama said Trump, the Republicans and the Democrats are "on the same team." Democrats voted to approve the nomination of John Kelly to head the Department of Homeland Security. Kelly is now Trump's chief of staff and the architect of his most vicious anti-immigrant measures.

Thanks to votes by Democratic nominees to the Supreme Court, a revised version of Trump's anti-immigrant travel ban is now in place. Democrats have pledged to increase the size of the deportation force, voted to give billions of dollars of increased funding to the military, and supported the extension of FISA warrantless wiretapping powers. The Democrats did not lift a finger to block Trump's massive tax cut for the wealthy because the Democrats and their corporate backers supported it.

There is tremendous opposition to Trump's right-wing policies in the US population. Ninety percent of

Americans support a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients, and Trump's approval rating hovers around 33 percent. Anger over the growth of social inequality, police killings, poisoned water, cuts to social programs and deplorable working and living conditions is building in the working class.

The Democrats are hostile to the growth of social opposition and seek to subordinate it to their own reactionary interests. For this reason, the Democratic Party has attempted to blame the growth of social opposition on "meddling" by Russia and Russian "social media bots." The Democratic Party's report to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations urges the government to "hold social media companies accountable" because "social media platforms are a key conduit of disinformation that undermines democracies." The report calls on corporations to censor the Internet "to prevent, detect, and delete such accounts... that are primarily used to promote false news stories."

The Democratic Party is a representative of the financial aristocracy, the military, the intelligence agencies and the immigration authorities. A political party cannot both serve these reactionary forces and protect the democratic rights or living standards of the working class. All efforts to pressure this party will prove disastrous.



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