

Republicans and Democrats prepare bipartisan agenda of social cuts and war

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With only two weeks until Election Day, November 6, early voting has already begun in many states to select 435 members of the House of Representatives, 35 state governors and 36 US senators, as well as thousands of members of state legislatures.

The Democrats and Republicans are raising and spending a record amount, more than \$5 billion, to carry out mudslinging attacks on each other and promote the illusion that voters have a real choice between these two equally right-wing parties controlled by the corporations and the wealthy.

The election campaign has unfolded under conditions of deepening alienation of the population from both big-business parties. Party leaders and media pundits express the hope that the turnout at the polls in the midterm election could rise to the level of 50 percent of those eligible to vote.

Put the other way round, at least half the population will vote for neither party, under conditions where Trump, the Democratic Party, and the Republican Party are all “under water”—far more disapprove than approve, according to the polls—and Congress as an institution has an approval rating of barely ten percent.

No amount of attack ads and media propaganda can alter the reality that both parties uphold the profit system, defend the interests of the super-rich, and regard the working people, the vast majority of the population, with a combination of fear and contempt.

The Republican Party, led by President Trump, is campaigning on a program of undisguised racism directed at immigrants, rejection of even the mildest domestic reform proposal as “socialism,” and militaristic bluster. Trump chose campaign rallies last week as occasions to make a series of belligerent threats: to send troops to the US-Mexico border, to tear up the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia, to step up trade war with China.

The Democratic Party has retreated steadily over the past two years before Trump’s ultra-right barrage, offering only token opposition to such measures as the persecution of immigrants, the \$1.5 trillion tax cut for the wealthy, and the installation of two far-right justices on the Supreme Court. They have embraced Trump’s policies of militarism and economic warfare, joining in the near-unanimous passage of a record \$716 billion military budget, and applauding his trade war measures against China and other countries.

The Democrats have even sought to outflank the Trump administration from the right, demanding an even more aggressive foreign policy in regards to Russia, using the Mueller investigation and bogus allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 election to justify censorship of the Internet and sweeping attacks on democratic rights. Spearheading this campaign is an influx of at least 30 candidates for congressional seats drawn from the ranks of the CIA, the Pentagon, the State Department and National Security Council.

Behind the strident denunciations and recriminations between the two capitalist parties, however, preparations are well under way for a new stage of bipartisan collaboration against the working class once the election is safely past.

Current polls suggest that the Democratic Party will emerge in control of the House of Representatives, which requires a net gain of 23 seats, while the Republican Party will retain control of the US Senate. When Congress reconvenes in January, Washington will likely return to “divided government,” with the two parties negotiating a bipartisan policy whose outlines are beginning to emerge.

Statements last week by Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell suggest the most important features of such a bipartisan regime.

McConnell responded October 16 to reports of a sharp increase in the federal budget deficit by demanding

significant cuts in social spending. He rejected suggestions that either the enormous tax cut for business and the wealthy, passed in December 2017, or the record military spending approved during the summer, were in any way responsible for the deficit. “It’s very disturbing, and it’s driven by the three big entitlement programs that are very popular: Medicare, Social Security and Medicaid,” McConnell said in an interview with Bloomberg.

President Trump, speaking at a campaign rally October 20, announced that he was tearing up the Intermediate Nuclear Force treaty with Russia, setting the stage for a new arms race, as part of an increasingly confrontational policy. Referring to intermediate-range missiles, which would allow the US to target Russia from bases in Europe, and to target China from Japan, South Korea and Australia, Trump said, “We’ll have to develop those weapons. We’re going to terminate the agreement and we’re going to pull out.”

These two comments suggest the outlines of the bipartisan policy that would be put into effect after the elections: Trump and the Republicans will carry out the more aggressive anti-Russian policy demanded by the Democrats; the Democrats will join forces in the enactment of a bipartisan onslaught against social benefits, to make working people and the retired pay the price of military escalation.

Until Election Day, of course, most Democrats have seized on McConnell’s comment on the need to cut entitlement programs as the occasion to issue demagogic statements presenting themselves as diehard defenders of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

But one prominent Democrat, Phil Bredesen, the former governor of Tennessee who is now seeking a Senate seat, declared, “I think there should be no pressure to do anything to reduce benefits from Social Security in any way whatsoever,” but called health care benefits (Medicare and Medicaid) “more complicated,” adding that it was necessary to “manage the cost of these programs.”

McConnell acknowledged in his statement last week that the popular opposition to cuts in the entitlement programs made them politically difficult. “There’s been a bipartisan reluctance to tackle entitlement changes because of the popularity of those programs,” he said.

The Senate Republican leader added that these programs could only be cut with the cooperation of the congressional Democrats, which might even be facilitated by the Democrats winning control of the House of

Representatives. “I think it’s pretty safe to say that entitlement changes, which is the real driver of the debt by any objective standard, may well be difficult if not impossible to achieve when you have unified government,” he told Bloomberg.

The two newspapers that serve as the main voices for the Democratic Party wing of the ruling class, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, signaled their support for this deal-in-the-making, each newspaper addressing one side in the impending trade-off.

The *Post* published an editorial October 18 expressing concern over the budget deficit and criticizing Trump for having opposed “entitlement reform” during the 2016 presidential campaign and embracing “fiscal populism” instead. “Structural causes of the federal government’s long-term debt problems, Social Security and Medicare, remained unaddressed, in keeping with Mr. Trump’s repudiation of the GOP’s previous support for reform of entitlements,” the newspaper complained. The editorial was aligned completely with the comments of McConnell, although it made no mention of the Senate leader.

The *Times* conveyed its views in an editorial headlined, “Candidates Who Can Help Take Back the House,” endorsing six Democratic candidates for Congress in the New York and New Jersey area, including two candidates from a military-intelligence background, part of the cohort of 30 “CIA Democrats” identified and profiled by the *World Socialist Web Site*. The editorial begins with an invocation of today’s “frightening moment” when, supposedly, “A foreign government methodically exploits divisions that President Trump deepens, stirring fear of immigrants and Muslims, resentment of women and hatred against African-Americans.”

In other words, the *Times* portrays the social divisions in America as the result of Russian interference, not as the product of the deepening social inequality produced by the workings of the capitalist system.



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