

The US midterm elections and the ongoing threat of fascism

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Pundits on both sides of the political aisle are hailing the results of the US midterm elections as a “victory for democracy” and return to “normalcy.” They cite the debacle for Trump-endorsed election deniers, which allowed the Democrats to retain control of the Senate and either limit the Republicans to a miniscule majority in the House, where key races are still undecided, or retain a narrow Democratic majority. This proves, they claim, that the attempted fascist overthrow of the government on January 6, 2021, was a fluke event that will not be repeated.

Over the past several days, two *New York Times* columnists, David Brooks, a Republican, and Thomas Friedman, a Democrat, have advanced this line in separate op-ed pieces.

In “The Fever Is Breaking,” Brooks writes: “The single most important result of this election was the triumph of the normies. Establishmentarian, practical leaders who are not always screaming angrily at you did phenomenally well, on right and left...”

He continues: “On abortion and many other issues, the median voter rule still applies. If you can get toward the spot where moderate voters reside, you will win elections.”

In “America Dodged an Arrow,” Friedman writes: “Tuesday’s election really was the most important test since the Civil War of whether the engine of our constitutional system—our ability to peacefully and legitimately transfer power—remains intact. And it looks to have come through—a little dinged up, but OK.”

Making an amalgam between the Republican fascist right and the so-called “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party, Friedman asserts that “enough Americans still fall into this independent or centrist camp and do not want to keep dwelling on the grievances, lies and fantasies of Donald Trump... They also don’t want to be shackled by the woke enforcers of the far left...”

Friedman goes on to pay homage to neoconservative Republican warmongers who came out against Trump and joined Democrats on the House January 6 Committee, writing: “We owe a huge debt for keeping the center alive to Republican Representatives Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger and Democratic Representative Elaine Luria.”

Both Friedman and Brooks single out for praise former CIA

agent and war hawk Abigail Spanberger, who defeated a Trump-endorsed candidate to retain her House seat in central Virginia.

Aside from its pro-war and reactionary political line, this is an utterly delusional, self-serving and dangerous misreading of the election and the political situation in the US.

The very fact that nearly a week after Election Day, control over the House of Representatives remains undecided and both legislative chambers are virtually split down the middle speaks to a highly unstable and volatile situation.

The vote showed that there is no mass popular constituency for the fascistic politics of Trump, but recriminations within the Republican Party, which overwhelmingly supported the attempted coup and backed Trump-endorsed candidates in Tuesday’s election, are accompanied by praise for Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

The latter—who has viciously attacked immigrants, blocked any COVID-19 mitigation measures, set up a special police force to arrest former convicts who try to vote, shielded far-right and anti-Semitic groups in Florida and championed the banning of “woke” literature—is another fascist. DeSantis, however, has positioned himself as an alternative 2024 presidential candidate by distancing himself from Trump’s “stolen election” lie.

President Biden signaled the Democratic response to the elections last Wednesday, when he called for bipartisan unity with his “Republican colleagues” to prosecute the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and impose the full burden of the intensifying economic crisis on the working class. When asked what he intended to change going forward, given exit polls showing massive opposition to his seeking a second term as president and anger over raging inflation and falling real wages, he replied, “Nothing,” and proceeded to tout the “accomplishments” of his administration.

Two months ago, Biden gave a nationally televised speech in which he warned that the Republican Party was “dominated, driven, and intimidated by Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans, and that is a threat to this country.” Now he claims that the election was a popular repudiation of “extremism” of both the left and the right, and signals an end to all investigations of the January 6 coup and its organizers in the name of “moving forward.”

History has repeatedly refuted attempts to complacently brush off the danger of fascism on the basis of electoral setbacks to fascist parties and leaders. In November 1932, the Nazi party's vote fell from 37 percent to 34 percent in the national parliamentary election, a decline of 2 million votes. More than a few German newspapers wrote off Hitler as "yesterday's man." Less than three months later, Hitler was chancellor, and two months after that all of the bourgeois parties in the Reichstag voted for the Enabling Act that gave Hitler dictatorial powers.

The United States today is not Germany in 1932–33. Above all, there is no mass fascist movement in America. But that by no means diminishes the danger posed by the growth of fascism, which has significant institutional support within the police, military and intelligence apparatuses.

Trump's fate remains uncertain. All indications are that he intends to fight any attempt to dethrone him from within the GOP. But one thing is certain: the Republicans and the Democrats will lurch further to the right in the aftermath of the elections.

Since the rise of real estate speculator and gangster Donald Trump to the head of the Republican Party, the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained the bankruptcy of the "bad man" theory of history, which absurdly "explains" the turn by ruling classes to authoritarian forms of rule on the basis of the predilections and subjective intentions of individuals. It treats the corrupt and sclerotic corporate-controlled American two-party system as a paragon of democracy, somehow infiltrated by the alien Trump. And it isolates the national development from its international context—the intensification of economic and social crisis, the rise of the class struggle and the descent of ruling classes into global war for control of resources, profits and sources of cheap labor.

The turn by the ruling class to dictatorship and fascism is an international process. One need only cite the Meloni government in Italy, the rise of the AfD in Germany, Le Pen in France, Modi in India, Marcos in the Philippines. It is no accident that this coincides with the growth of working class struggles internationally, which are seeking to break free of the stranglehold of the bureaucratic and corporatist trade union apparatuses.

The basic movement of the working class is to the left. This is confirmed in the powerful support for the campaign of Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist, for president of the United Auto Workers union in the US. Running on a program of abolishing the union bureaucracy and putting power in the hands of the rank and file, Lehman's campaign has revealed the enormous determination to fight of workers in the US and around the world and their desire for international unity.

Speaking in December 2016 to an audience of workers and youth in London on the significance of Trump's election victory, WSWI International Editorial Board Chairman David

North said:

In 1914, the ruling elites responded to the contradictions of capitalism through war. In 1917, the working class responded to these contradictions through revolution in Russia... We are entering into another period of that character, but on a far greater scale. Our epoch is not simply an epoch of social revolution, but of world socialist revolution. Can anyone believe that political upheavals in America will not generate through the world colossal explosions?...

As in the United States, we see a growth of immense popular dissatisfaction. The answer to these issues can only be through the building of a political leadership in the working class based on the fundamental conceptions of revolutionary Marxism as they were developed by Lenin and, above all, by Trotsky. We believe that the emergence of the working class is inevitable. It is going to see through the Trumps, the promoters of nationalism here in Britain, the LePens in France. The fraud and bankruptcy of these programs will be very rapidly exposed.

The entire reactionary agenda of the Biden administration and the Democratic Party both at home and abroad, which they hope can be implemented in an alliance with the Republicans, will only strengthen the extreme right. It is the organization and expansion of the emerging movement of the working class, and the development of this movement into a conscious fight for socialism, that will defeat fascism and the danger of world war.



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