California Governor Gavin Newsom's rightward march: Legitimizing fascism with Stephen K. Bannon and Charlie Kirk

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13 March 2025

California Governor Gavin Newsom has taken yet another sharp turn to the right, this time by inviting the fascists Steve Bannon and Charlie Kirk onto his new podcast for a chummy dialogue.

Both interviews took place in the wake of Newsom's public capitulation to Donald Trump during the former president's recent visit to Los Angeles in January as well as the governor's pilgrimage to the White House last month. By inviting and largely agreeing with two of the top allies of would-be dictator Trump, Newsom and the Democratic Party are actively integrating and normalizing the most reactionary forces in American politics.

Bannon, a former Goldman Sachs banker turned far-right propagandist, has spent years fomenting nationalist, racist and authoritarian politics. As the former chief strategist for Trump, Bannon was instrumental in crafting the xenophobic "America First" agenda, promoting draconian immigration policies and emboldening white supremacists across the country. His media platform, *War Room*, serves as a megaphone for election deniers, conspiracy theorists and open fascists. Even after being convicted and briefly jailed for contempt of Congress, Bannon remains a leading architect of the anti-democratic maneuvers to carry out Trump's fascist policies by any means necessary.

As the WSWS has long warned, Bannon's brand of "populism" is nothing more than a front for fascism, aimed at channeling legitimate working-class grievances into a reactionary nationalist project. His admiration for historical fascists, his calls for a "deconstruction of the administrative state," and his relentless attacks on democratic institutions demonstrate his true ambitions: the establishment of an authoritarian regime that serves the interests of the financial aristocracy.

Both Kirk and Bannon have played significant roles in shaping the far-right movement in the United States, contributing to the political climate that led to the attempted January 6 coup. By embracing these figures, Newsom is not merely engaging in debate; he is actively normalizing and legitimizing the forces that sought to overthrow democratic rule.

During his entire podcasts with both Bannon and Kirk, Newsom never once mentioned fascism, authoritarianism, dictatorship, democracy, immigrant rights, or birthright citizenship, nor did he raise Bannon's Hitler salute at CPAC last month. By failing to even acknowledge these issues, Newsom allowed the fascists to control the narrative, lending legitimacy to their far-right talking points without challenge.

In his Tuesday interview with Bannon, rather than challenging his record, Newsom welcomed him with open arms, thanking him for the conversation and seeking "common ground" on economic populism. Bannon, for his part, gleefully proclaimed that the podcast was an opportunity to "deprogram" Newsom from being a so-called globalist and transform him into a "populist nationalist." Instead of rejecting this overt appeal to antisemitism, Newsom laughed and played along, stating, "I appreciate that. I'm going down your rabbit hole right here."

This is not the language of resistance to a fascist assault on democratic rights. This is capitulation. At no point did Newsom directly confront Bannon's outright lies, including his false claims that the 2020 election was stolen and that Trump is the victim of a vast government conspiracy. Instead, Newsom offered lukewarm objections before pivoting back to praise for his guest's "economic insights."

Bannon is not the first fascist that Newsom has legitimized with a podcast invitation. His very first episode featured Kirk, another key figure in the far-right movement, whom Newsom showered with praise: "I think people need to understand your success, your influence, what you've been up to, and the fact that you're on these college campus stores," Newsom told Kirk.

Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA, is a close associate of President Trump and his son Donald Jr. In addition to the Trumps, he has cultivated alliances with figures like Bannon and Tucker Carlson, advocating for a more aggressive, Christian-nationalist approach within the Republican Party.

The connection between Kirk and Bannon is more than ideological; both men were directly involved in the efforts that led to the January 6, 2021 attempted coup. Bannon actively worked to overturn the 2020 election results, using his *War Room* podcast to promote the "Stop the Steal" movement. On January 5, 2021, Bannon ominously declared that "all hell is going to break loose tomorrow," demonstrating clear foreknowledge of the violent coup attempt. He coordinated with militia leaders and liaisons for Trump at the Willard Hotel "command center," strategizing ways to disrupt the certification of the election.

Kirk, for his part, funneled financial, logistical and ideological support to the coup. His organization promoted "Stop the Steal"

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and helped arrange transportation for Trump supporters to attend the rally that culminated in the storming of the Capitol.

Newsom said nothing about this, spending the entire podcast with Kirk fawning over him and his "success" and repeatedly pleading for Kirk's "advice."

Kirk advised Newsom to join Republicans in their fascist campaign against transgender people, "Get better ideas, governor... you're talking to me, of all people. So you, right, should come out and be like, 'You know what? The young man who is about to win the state championship in the long jump in female sports, that shouldn't happen.' You as, the governor, should step out and say, 'No.'"

Newsom readily agreed with Kirk stating that transgender girls and women participating in female leagues was "deeply unfair."

"I think it's an issue of fairness, I completely agree with you on that. It is an issue of fairness—it's deeply unfair," Newsom said, adding, "I am not wrestling with the fairness issue. I totally agree with you."

Pleading for more "advice," later on in the program Kirk demanded Newsom "go to war within his own party" and declare "we are not going to do this illegal immigration thing, which includes like, are you going to work with ICE?"

In response Newsom bragged repeatedly to Kirk, "We do work with ICE. … We have been, uh, I in fact directly, we actually put out the data, I was, I actually reached out to the administration saying, 'Are you not aware that California coordinates and cooperates with all CDCR (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation) releases, over 10,000…"

He added, "We coordinate with ICE on the deportation, we've done that over 10,000 times since I've been governor, we're not denying access, we're not denying coordination…"

By beginning his podcast series with Kirk and now hosting Bannon, Newsom has come full circle in providing a platform for some of the most dangerous reactionaries in American politics.

Newsom's decision to engage in this friendly dialogue with Bannon and Kirk is not an isolated event but part of a broader trend within the Democratic Party. As the WSWS has extensively documented, the Democrats have moved steadily to the right, embracing war policies that serve the financial elite while attempting to outflank the Republicans with their own brand of nationalism and militarism. Biden's economic policies, which include aggressive tariffs and a protectionist trade strategy, mirror many of the policies Bannon has long championed.

Newsom's rhetoric during the podcast underscores this convergence. At one point, he praised elements of Bannon's economic philosophy, even acknowledging that his own tax policy in California aligns with some of Bannon's goals. He also lamented that populists like Bannon are not getting enough airtime on mainstream networks, reinforcing the false narrative that the right wing is being "silenced" rather than given a massive platform by the corporate media.

In promoting Bannon and Kirk, Newsom is deliberately normalizing fascists and their ideology, which only emboldens reactionaries and shifts the entire political spectrum further to the right. Rather than exposing Bannon and Kirk's reactionary agenda, Newsom provided them with a state-sanctioned platform to spew their propaganda, which he, himself, agrees with.

This is not merely an example of Democratic weakness—it is an active embrace of the ultra-right. Workers and young people looking for an alternative to the growing threat of authoritarianism cannot place their faith in the Democratic Party, which has shown time and again that it would rather accommodate fascists than mobilize a genuine fight against them. Newsom's friendly conversations with Trump's coup allies is a clear signal that the Democratic Party's opposition to Trump and his movement is nothing more than political theater.

The only viable path forward in the fight against fascism is an independent, socialist movement of the working class. The crisis facing the United States—growing inequality, declining living standards, endless wars and the erosion of democratic rights—cannot be solved within the framework of capitalism. The Democratic Party's willingness to consort with the far right only underscores the necessity of building a mass movement that directly challenges the political and economic system that produces figures like Trump and Bannon.

Gavin Newsom's decision to platform fascists is an indictment of the Democratic Party's complicity in the rightward drift of American politics. The working class must reject this charade and take up the fight for a socialist future, one in which the far right is not accommodated, but crushed through the power of a mobilized and organized working class.

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