

On the rise of Trumpism - What Will a Trump Regime Look Like?

Sunday 1 January 2017 (Date first published: 31 December 2016).

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A feature of the recent election campaign was the deep divisions in both the Democratic and Republican parties. This was on top of the stalemate in Congress between the twin parties of capitalism. In addition, the nation is polarized about race, the economy and many other issues.

Also, it should be noted that there is and was no mass working class party that could have championed an alternative.

Donald Trump emerged and then was elected as the strongman who would take over and set things right, although exactly how he will do this has been left open on many issues.

The background for this disarray in ruling class politics was the Great Recession, with its bailouts of the financial institutions and the auto industry, while the mass of workers were hit by high unemployment, foreclosures on their homes, wage cuts, etc. In the slow recovery that followed the next eight years, profits rose while working class living standards didn't. Ninety-five percent of households have not seen their incomes regain 2007 levels. Wealth and income inequality has grown.

This eight-year period coincided with the years of the Obama administration. During this time, the administration did little to counter this reality. In fact, when the Republicans regained control of the House of Representatives in 2010, and moved hard to the right, the Democrats were pulled to the right in their wake, just not as far, and agreed to big budget cuts to social programs.

The Democratic and Republican establishments paid little heed to the growing despair and anger in the whole working class, Black, white, Latino, Asian and so forth. Many in the middle class feared being pushed down into the working class, or were already there. The two candidates who ran as anti-establishment, Bernie Sanders in the Democrats and Donald Trump in the Republicans, tapped into this anger.

The demagogic Trump promised with few actual proposals to bring good paying jobs back, blaming other countries, especially China and Mexico, for the fact that U.S. based corporations outsourced labor-intensive aspects of their production to countries where wages were very low. He vowed to use tariffs to counter this. He coupled this nationalist stance with racist scapegoating of Blacks, Latinos and immigrants for the loss of white working class jobs.

The Republican Party's primary election campaign and debates saw Donald Trump smash his

establishment Republican opponents with unparalleled denigration and insults. His main argument, repeated over and over, was that a strongman should take charge of government and change everything, and he was that man, as opposed to his “loser” rivals. He was the “law and order” candidate who would use his power if elected to remake government.

In so doing, Trump has captured the Republican Party, which is now beholden to him. Most Republicans in Congress, with a few old establishment has-beens bleating in the wings, are so far to the right that Trump fits right in. Moreover, whatever disagreements they have with Trump are over-ridden by their knowledge they will rise or fall with Trump.

Among the Democrats the primaries quickly boiled down to two candidates, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. Clinton was the choice of the Democratic establishment, and ran as such. Sanders ran as the opponent of the one percent, and prosed steps to give working people some relief, and styled himself as a democratic socialist. His proposals included raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour, replacing Obama care based on reliance on the insurance companies with national health insurance for all, free tuition at state colleges and universities, and other proposals.

To the surprise of the Democratic establishment, his campaign caught on with workers and youth, including Black youth. For most young people under 25, their political formation occurred in these years since the Great Recession. Sanders held large and enthusiastic rallies as opposed to Clinton’s modest events. The establishment rallied around Clinton to discredit Sanders, as documents released by Wikileaks showed. Clinton also was helped by the traditional base of Democrats among older Blacks. Sanders lost, and then campaigned for Clinton. The Achilles heel of the Sanders campaign and after was that he supported the Democratic Party, and sought to reform it as opposed to building a new (social democratic) party against this bulwark of the ruling capitalist class.

In the campaign following the party conventions, both Clinton and Trump had majority negative ratings among the population. Trump ran as the anti-establishment candidate against the establishment Clinton. In the end, although Clinton won the popular vote, Trump won the Electoral College, and emerged after his victory as the strongman who would remake the government in his image.

Trump’s base was among open racist elements in the white middle and working classes. They rallied around his racist attacks on Mexicans and Latino immigrants, his threats to deal with Black Lives Matter and the Black communities in general with even greater police occupation and repression, his proposals to ban Muslims from entering the country and to create a watch list of all Muslims living in the country, including citizens, and his dog whistles of anti-Semitism.

His attacks against women on the basis of their appearance, and then his defense of his open bragging about his sexual assaults, were also embraced.

Every attack along these lines at his rallies, which became large, were greeted with loud cheers and chants, as were his fomenting of violence against any protesters present. His attacks on Clinton were greeted by loud chants of “Jail Her! Jail her!”

It is important to note that the open racists among whites of all classes are a minority, but a significant one, and a majority of whites in the former slavocracy (Confederacy). This is rooted in the whole history of the United States from the times of slavery up to the present structural and institutionalized racism Black Lives Matter has shone a spotlight on.

Since the 1970s, the Republicans have been seen as a white people’s party, in the main.

Not all or most who voted for trump are open racists. Many naively hope that Trump will strong-arm

the system to bring back good jobs. But they were willing to put aside Trump's overt racism, misogyny and bullying in voting for him. As whites they also feared, even if unconsciously, being driven down into the status of colored peoples.

Trump can rely not only the fact that Republicans control both houses of Congress, but also two-thirds of the states' legislatures. The latter are already carrying out some of his proposals, and are engaged in attacks on unions, voting rights, women's rights, etc. and will only be emboldened by Trump's election.

He also inherits many aspects of the strong state from past administrations of both Democrats and Republicans. The vast NSA computer spying on all Americans and much of the world now is in his hands, as are the CIA, FBI and all kinds of other similar agencies like NCIS, made famous by the TV program of that name. For over a half century, war has been the prerogative of Presidents. He will be the Commander in Chief of the most formidable military the world has ever seen.

What Will a Trump Regime Look Like?

His choices for his cabinet and other posts give a glimpse. But how these choices were made is also important.

From his court in Trump Tower in New York City, he brought in a large number of people over weeks for private interviews with him, ostensibly to consider a wide range of candidates and opinions. This became a daily media circus of speculation of his intentions. He even brought in figures from the Republican establishment like Mitt Romney, who had refused to endorse him in the election. Although he has called climate change a Chinese hoax, he brought in Democrat Al Gore, who has positioned himself as a proponent of the need to stop global warming.

Many in the corporate media fell for all this to opine that perhaps Trump was changing. But the reality is that all who consulted with Trump were groveling before him like supplicants to a king or pope, and capitulating to him as loyal subjects. The result was to further exalt him as the autocrat in charge, as the maker and breaker of these supplicants. We must keep in mind that this display rendered the anointed as having been chosen at Trump's whim, and are entirely beholden to him.

That said, it is revealing to look at his choices. Many have noted that his proposed cabinet is largely composed of billionaires and multi-millionaires, who together own well over \$9.5 billion. Key posts are to be filled by generals, bankers, fossil fuel moguls, authoritarians and racists.

One choice was made before the election, that of the new Vice President, Mike Pence. He comes from the extreme white Christian evangelicals, who for the first time have one of their own in the White House, even if he goes home to a different abode at night. As a congressman he opposed federal funding for HIV treatment unless the government also funded programs against same-sex relationships, and opposed allowing gays in the military. He says, "I long for the day that Roe vs. Wade [which legalized abortion] is sent to the trash heap of history." As Indiana governor he signed one of most restrictive anti-abortion laws in the U.S. He is also anti-immigrant, supports Christian schools against public schools, denies climate change, and so on.

Here are short sketches on some of Trump's other choices, and much more could be said:

Trump's pick for Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, a racist from Alabama, will be Trump's domestic "law and order" enforcer. Like Trump, he backs the police against Black Lives Matter, supports the War on Drugs and mass incarceration, and will get tough on immigrants. He may use his office to

crack down on dissidents.

Sessions will be complimented by Homeland Security pick, retired General John Kelly. He will help Trump carry out mass deportations, and along with Trump charges that immigrants bring in drugs and terrorists.

Steve Bannon will be Trump's key advisor. He is known as the former owner of Breitbart News, which he himself claimed was a voice for the "alt-right" – a euphemism for white supremacists. But not as well known is his advocacy of an authoritarian Presidency.

His national security advisor will be retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn. He attacks Islam as a religion, says "fear of Muslims" is "rational," claims Iran is the greatest threat to the U.S., says Sharia law is gaining in the U.S., etc.

Trump's Secretary of Defense [War] is slated to be retired General "Mad Dog" James Mattis, who was a central commander in the U.S. wars against Afghanistan and Iraq which destroyed both countries. He famously "joked" that it was "fun" to kill Afghans who resisted the U.S. invasion.

For head of the Treasury and Commerce departments, Trump has picked Steven Mnuchin and Wilbur Ross, both billionaire hedge fund managers who vastly profited from mortgage foreclosures in the Great Recession.

As Secretary of State Trump proposes the CEO of Exxon, Rex Tillerson, a climate change denier (coyly), whose international expertise is limited to Exxon's vast holdings around the world, which he will use this position to further.

There are a series of nominations to head agencies these choices seek to weaken or destroy. These include:

Ryan Zinke for Interior Secretary, responsible for managing the nation's public lands and waters. He is a former navy SEAL commander, and as Montana congressman proposed gutting protections of public lands and waters.

Rick Perry, for Energy Secretary. He has proposed abolishing the department (as well as the Environmental Protection Agency). He is a former Texas governor with close ties to the fossil fuel giants. A climate change denier.

For Secretary of Labor, Andrew Puzder, the head of a big fast food chain, is against labor unions, is against any minimum wage and industry regulations and is known for his attacks on the Labor Department (which he will head) for being too pro-worker. There is nothing "labor" about him.

Scott Pruitt for the Environmental Protection Agency, a close ally of the fossil fuel moguls. He rejects the established science of climate change and built his career fighting environmental regulations. Trump says that the EPA for "too long" has "spent taxpayer dollars on an out-of-control anti-energy agenda that has destroyed millions of jobs," and that Pruitt "will reverse this trend."

Ben Carson for Housing Department. This millionaire is a neurosurgeon who knows nothing about housing. He is against programs to help homeowners, especially those with low incomes. In general, he thinks the problems of those with low incomes are their own fault.

Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary. She is opposed to public schools and supports privatization schemes, supports private Christian schools, and pushed this agenda in Michigan. She is also from a family of billionaires, and her brother Erik Prince was one of the founders of the notorious

Blackwater USA mercenary army hired by the U.S. military to carry out dirty tactics and murders in Iraq.

Tom Rice, representative from Georgia, for head of Health and Human Services. He waged a crusade against Obamacare (saying it was socialized medicine), and will help in overthrowing it and replacing it with something even worse.

These are some of the people Trump has surrounded himself with. What he will press for is what they stand for. How far he will get with this agenda will be determined by what opposition he gets.

What Trump will certainly do

First of all, he will be the “law and order” candidate. He will increase police power to keep a lid on the Black and Latino communities. There will be no more federal oversight (already weak) of police violence in these communities. There will be no rollback of the War on Drugs or mass incarceration, but an increase. The stocks of private prison companies jumped up at Trump’s election. There will be further militarization of the police.

He will increase already massive border control with Mexico, but not Canada. The massive deportations under Deporter in Chief Obama will be greatly stepped up.

Military spending will significantly increase. The U.S. arsenal of nuclear weapons, already being “modernized” by Obama at the cost of around one trillion dollars, will increase.

He will prevent under one formula or another most Muslims from immigrating to the U.S., including millions of desperate refugees from Washington’s wars against Arab countries.

Big tax cuts for the rich are certain. Regulations on the financial firms will be relaxed. Regulations on Big Oil, Coal and natural gas including on fracking will be abolished or made inconsequential (this is the real content of Trump’s climate change denial), as will regulations of other industries, including banks and other financial concerns. The stock market soared after the election in anticipation.

He and the Republican Congress will move to repeal Obamacare, but what they will replace it with is uncertain. He and the Republican politicians fear a backlash if too many face cutoffs of their health insurance or rapid increase in costs.

Trump will appoint a candidate for the Supreme Court who will vote to overturn Roe-versus-Wade, which made abortions legal, and who will back Trump if he encounters legal problems, as is likely. States will be encouraged to pass more restrictions on abortions.

What he will likely do

In addition to increased military spending, he projects major infrastructure projects. This prospect has also been a factor in the stock market rise.

But he presents contradictory proposals on how to fund this, and the Republican Congress has been reluctant to support spending for such.

The Environmental Protection Agency, in addition to supporting Trump’s Big Energy proposals

above, will cut back on other regulations on the environment, and likely make the Agency less relevant. Environmental protections for workers will likely suffer.

He will likely raise tariffs on imports, targeting China especially. Business with Russia is likely to improve. But he will follow a general protectionist and economically nationalist agenda.

Throughout his campaign he has attacked the corporate media constantly, as “scum” or worse. He will continue to do so in an attempt to domesticate the major media, which effort will have successes, and already has. He will hold few press conferences, and will continue to use tweets and other measures to go over reporters’ heads. He wants to change libel laws to make it easier to sue individuals and the press who “slander” public figures such as himself, something which is hard to do at present.

He will attack democratic rights in general, already in the works in Republican-controlled states. How this works out remains to be seen, but we can expect more restrictions on the right to assemble and protest, and more police violence at such protests.

On foreign policy much remains to be seen. The nominee for Secretary of State, Tillerson, is a friend of the conservative and authoritarian Russian President, Vladimir Putin. Trump’s campaign pledges to downgrade NATO may be forgotten — or not.

Trump’s pledges to wage a trade war on China was given a boost when he nominated Peter Navarro as his White House trade guru. Navarro is known for extreme views against trade with China, which imply “tearing up the rule book” concerning “the world’s most important bilateral economic relationship” in the words of the *Financial Times*. This can spill over into a deeper split between between China and the U.S. in all areas.

We do know that Trump’s appointment of David Freidman as ambassador to Israel rips away Washington’s fig leaf of the “two state solution.” Freidman has close ties to Israeli settlers in the West Bank, is opposed to any Palestinian state – even one whose borders and foreign policy are controlled by Israel, and has no armed forces – Washington’s proposal for a Palestinian “state.” He is for the annexation of the West Bank. Trump says he will move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, ratifying Israeli claims to all of the city.

Small wonder that Netanyahu looks forward to “working with” Trump, and has gone full steam ahead on new settlements.

What will be the nature of the new Trump regime?

Some on the liberal left and some socialists have noted Trump’s racism, misogyny, authoritarianism, demagogic claims to support workers, and anti-democratic stands to claim that he is a fascist.

This is quite wrong. Fascism represents a mass, organized, and armed movement ready to fight the workers’ movement (parties and trade unions) in the streets before taking power and to crush it with mass violence after taking power, and establish a totalitarian state to do this. The capitalist ruling class doesn’t resort to this extreme solution unless its rule has been threatened by the workers. There is no such threat in the U.S. at present, to say the least.

Fascism is a serious business, and to use the term unthinkingly makes light of it. Trotsky, when warning the German workers’ movement of the danger of rising Nazism, said that German fascism, based on a more developed economy, would make Italian fascism look like a tea party. American

fascism would do Hitlerism one better.

It is true that white nationalist groups, who have a fascist mentality, joined the Trump campaign. They openly brag that he has made their message more mainstream, and they have grown as a result. But they are still small, fragmented and are unable to unite behind one leader. Bannon's appointment is mainly significant in that he will be Trump's main advisor, but it is also a bone thrown to the "alt-right."

How then to characterize the Trump phenomenon? It is useful in this regard to recall Marx's analysis of the regime of Louis Bonaparte, who took power in an 1851 armed coup in France in a move that drew a curtain on the 1848 revolution, and established dictatorial rule that lasted two decades. Marx quotes Victor Hugo, who characterized Louis as Napoleon the Little. Indeed, in comparison to his famous uncle, Louis was a mediocrity, like Trump. Marx called Louis a "vapid nonentity."

How then did Louis come to power? It was in the context of the inability of the squabbling bourgeois parties to find enough agreement between them and among their internal factions to effectively rule. In addition, the workers' movement was in retreat, having suffered a major defeat. A power vacuum was created, which Louis jumped into, promising to be the strongman who could take charge and set things right.

Louis promised a massive program of public works to develop industry, like Trump. He was personally corrupt, like Trump, and there is no question that Trump will use his office to feather his and his children's nests, as well as those of his crony capitalists, like Louis did. Louis had the support of the police - almost all of the police associations (misabeled trade unions) in the U.S. endorsed Trump. Likewise with much of the armed forces officer caste.

Louis had close ties with the criminal underworld. Trump and his father were real estate sharks in New York, with close ties to organized crime, which was pretty much a necessity for relators in the city.

No historical analogy is perfect, and the U.S. in 2016-17 is not France of 1851. But there are obvious similarities to the rise of the mediocre Trump. He has not yet taken all power in his hands, with a façade of bourgeois democracy, like Louis had, and he may never. Right now he is more like the cunning maneuverer Louis was before his coup. I would characterize Trump today as a would-be Louis Bonaparte.

But one way the situation in the U.S. today is far different from that of 1851 France, which makes an authoritarian Trump presidency - which we will get - much more dangerous than Louis Bonaparte's rule, is the sheer power of the U.S. in the world, and the economic, police and political power of the U.S. capitalist class compared to that of those bygone days in France. The danger will be even worse if Trump consolidates Bonapartist-like rule around his person.

What can stop him from realizing his ambition? Louis rose a wave of economic upturn for a period after the discovery of large new gold deposits in California and Australia. He began to lose support when this period of prosperity waned, and he was overthrown when Germany defeated his armies in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, which led to the Paris Commune.

It appears Trump will inherit an economy experiencing modest growth. In any case, he will have a "honeymoon" period where he will be given the benefit of the doubt that he can eventually improve workers' lives. But given the experience of the Great Recession and the last eight years, and the situation of the world economy, it is likely that there will be another crisis during Trump's administration. Workers who voted for him can feel betrayed as a result, which will undercut his

support.

Will sections of the ruling class, becoming exasperated with his likely reckless policies, move against him at some point?

The organized working class is weak in size, strength, and leadership but will hopefully not rely on the Democrats but their own power to counter Trump's and the Republicans' continued attacks on the unions. It will not be easy for Trump to carry out his planned attacks on two large and mainly proletarian populations, African Americans and Latinos, who will likely fight back. Women, Native Americans, environmentalists, civil libertarians, and others will resist. It is these forces we must look to.

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