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The Republicans plumb the depths

Joseph Kishore and David North

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As one follows the Republican National Convention, one cannot avoid the conclusion that some fundamental political boundary is being crossed.

There is little reason to idealize the political history of the United States. The conventions of the two capitalist parties—attended by several thousand delegates representing a cross section of corrupt politicians and operatives in the pay of Big Business—have usually been sordid affairs. Over the past half-century they have resulted in the nominations of people such as Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and the two Bushes. And yet this Republican Party convention in Cleveland, which has just officially chosen Donald Trump as its candidate for president, represents something new, ugly and sick.

Even as socialists, who have carefully followed, analyzed and explained the protracted crisis of American democracy, it is difficult to suppress a feeling of disgust, akin to nausea, as one watches the proceedings. One cannot help but ask oneself, “Has it really come to this?” The convention is a display of the grotesque and the absurd, in which all that is seedy, stupid, backward, cruel and reactionary in American politics and culture is on display.

An air of demoralized paranoia dominates the convention. Under the slogan “Make America Great Again,” the speakers describe a country in irreversible breakdown, beset by enemies inside

and out. In the speeches, filled with appeals to the military and the police, one senses, beneath all the braggadocio, a ruling class extremely nervous about its future.

Donald Trump emerged from a silhouetted stage on Monday night to introduce his wife, who was about to read her plagiarized tribute to her hero. Unfortunately, there is not to be found among the ranks of present-day journalists the equal of an H.L. Mencken, who certainly would have drawn attention to the absurd irony of hysterical evangelical delegates choosing as their prophet a thrice-wed man who publicly extols the size of his private parts and has entertained the New York tabloids with descriptions of his most memorable sexual encounters.

Another great American satirist, Sinclair Lewis, the author of *Elmer Gantry* and *It Can't Happen Here*, would probably have seen in the excitement of the delegates proof that the United States is a country where puritanical hysteria commingles with a fascination for the pornographic, and where pious moral virtue never stops the pursuit of the almighty dollar.

There is very little that is original in the person of Trump, except, perhaps, that his limitless self-obsession and narcissism have allowed him to become a vessel into which the greed and criminality of the American ruling class can be poured. In his personal history, he stands out only for his ability to combine the phenomenon of the crooked CEO with the celebrity culture of American television.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has pointed out before, Trump's particular fascistic personality was forged not in the beer halls of Munich and the trenches of World War I, but in the real estate market of New York City. With his casinos, his fictional universities and his endless stream of failed businesses, this personification of corporate fraud could hardly be a more fitting symbol for the state of American capitalism.

That Trump emerges from a broader political degradation is evident in the convention, the events that surround it and the line-up of speakers, each more reactionary than the last. On Monday, there was Rudolph Giuliani, the former mayor of New York, who, in his screaming for vengeance and blood, appeared to be doing his best impression of Benito Mussolini. Giuliani came after Milwaukee Sheriff David Clarke, who recently declared that the country was in the midst of a civil war, pitting defenders of law and order against revolutionary Marxist forces, Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, which he lumped together with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

The Republican Party Platform was passed quickly on Monday. Officially dedicated to the military and the police, it outlines a program for eliminating every legal, financial and government restraint on the accumulation of wealth by the capitalist class. It calls for repealing the 16th amendment, which established the federal income tax; lowering the corporate tax rate; eliminating government regulations; cutting Medicaid and transitioning Medicare into a program for subsidizing the purchase of private insurance; cutting Social Security; replacing remaining welfare programs with "the dynamic compassion of work requirements" and abolishing the Environmental Protection Agency. The platform also adopts Trump's proposal to build a wall on the US-Mexico border.

It enshrines a form of clerical authoritarianism, with government based on religious principles. Aside from the ubiquitous references to God, the platform would ban abortion under all conditions, protect corporations and other entities that discriminate on the basis of religious prejudice, and overturn court rulings legalizing gay marriage.

The most significant element of the Republican Party platform, however, is what it says about foreign policy—asserting that the United States must subordinate the entire world to the interests of American corporations. “We cannot allow foreign governments to limit American access to their markets while stealing our designs, patents, brands, know-how, and technology,” it proclaims. “We cannot allow China to continue its currency manipulation, exclusion of US products from government purchases, and subsidization of Chinese companies to thwart American imports.”

In the Middle East, it calls for forcing out Assad in Syria, going to war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, repudiating the Obama administration’s deal with Iran, expanding the war in Iraq and unconditionally supporting Israel. The platform backs the arming of Ukraine against Russia and pledges to “meet the return of Russian belligerence with the same resolve that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.”

Summing up the drive of American imperialism to dominate the entire globe, the platform asserts that the United States must “retake its natural position as leader of the free world” by “rebuilding the US military into the strongest on earth, with vast superiority over any other nation or group of nations in the world.”

This is a program for a Fortress America, armed to the teeth. It is an agenda that cannot be realized without the implementation of a police state, the reduction of the working class to absolute poverty, and the launching of world war.

With the Democratic Party convention coming up next week, we will have the opportunity to analyze the other side of the US political system. However, it must be said that the characteristics revealed in the Republican convention and the persona of Trump are an expression of the decay of not just one party, let alone one individual, but of the political and social system as a whole. What is to some extent concealed in the Democratic Party is revealed more fully in the Republican Party. The nomination of Trump is a nodal point in the terminal crisis of American capitalism.