

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدين بوم وېر زنده يک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهيم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهيم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/04/21/donald-trump-ruling-class-president/print/>

Donald Trump: Ruling Class President

By Paul Street
April 21, 2017



The Ruling Class Reserve Tag

One of the many irritating things about the dominant United States corporate media is the way it repeatedly discovers anew things that are not remotely novel. Take its recent discovery that

Donald Trump isn't really the swamp-draining populist working class champion he pretended to be on the campaign trail.

The evidence for this "news" is solid enough. His cabinet and top advisor circle has been chock full of ruling class swamp creatures like former Goldman Sachs President Gary Cohn (top economic adviser), longtime top Goldman Sachs partner and top executive Steve Mnuchin (Secretary of the Treasury), and billionaire investor Wilbur Ross (Secretary of Commerce). Trump has surrounded himself with super-opulent and planetarily invested financial gatekeepers – the very club he criticized Hillary Clinton for representing.

Trump meets regularly with top corporate and financial CEOs, who have been assured that he will govern in accord with their wishes. He receives applause from business elites for his agenda of significant large scale tax cuts and deregulation for wealthy individuals and for the giant, hyper-parasitic, and largely transnational corporations they milk for obscene profits

Trump's political strategist Steve Bannon is by numerous reports being pushed aside by Cohn and by Trump's hedge-fund financier son-in-law Jared Kushner – a longtime neoliberal Democrat – when it comes to holding the president's ear. Bannon has been reduced to bitterly cursing Kushner as a "globalist cuckservative."

Bannon's white-nationalist "populist" bluster was of great electoral use to Trump on his path to the White House. In the real world of world capitalist power, however, the Beast of Breitbart is a liability. His self-declared nationalism does not jibe with the deeply rooted Open Door policy preferences of an American corporate and financial ruling class that has long been deeply invested across national boundaries in the world capitalist system.

Trump, it turns out, is not the worker-friendly populist he posed as while running for president. He's not the great anti-establishment outsider determined to return "power to the people" he claimed to be in his Inauguration Address. His economic program amounts to neo-liberalism on steroids.

You don't say! Gee, who knew? Anyone who's paid serious attention to American electoral politics and policy over the course of history, that's who. Seventeen years ago, the then still left Christopher Hitchens usefully described the "essence of American politics" as "the manipulation of populism by elitism. That elite is most successful," Hitchens noted:

"which can claim the heartiest allegiance of the fickle crowd; can present itself as most 'in touch' with popular concerns; can anticipate the tides and pulses of public opinion; can, in short, be the least apparently 'elitist.' It is no great distance from Huey Long's robust cry of 'Every man a king' to the insipid 'inclusiveness' of [Bill Clinton's slogan] 'Putting People First,' but the smarter elite managers have learned in the interlude that solid, measurable pledges have to be distinguished by a reserve' tag that earmarks them for the bankrollers and backers."

Democracy Imprisoned by Capitalism

In a recent New York Times Magazine reflection on the chilling extent to which Trump's rise is consistent with dodgy, fascist-like tendencies in the long history of the American right, the prolific liberal historian Rick Perlstein notes that the irony of a "populist" president who has "placed so many bankers and billionaires in his cabinet, and has relentlessly pursued so many 1-percent-friendly policies" is "far from unique." The Orange-Tinted Beast is the latest version of what Perlstein calls "The often-cynical negotiation between populist electioneering and plutocratic governance on the right."

Perlstein is right to note the unoriginality of the phenomenon. But why does Perlstein seem to think the "cynical negotiation" is just a Republican phenomenon? It was no less evident in the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama than it was during the Reagan and Bush presidencies and under Trump today. That is no small part of how and why the ugly Republican right that Perlstein understandably fears gets its recurrent trips into national and state-level power.

And just how mysterious is the tension between "populist electioneering and plutocratic governance"? From Karl Marx's time and before to the present day, bourgeois "constitutional" states practicing a strictly limited and deceptive form of "democracy" have been torn by a fundamental contradiction. On one hand, victorious candidates have to win enough popular votes to prevail in elections. They can hardly do that by proclaiming their commitment to the rule of the wealthy capitalist Few. On the other hand, they cannot garner the resources to win elections and govern effectively without the backing and cooperation of the investor/capitalist class, whose control of money and the means of production is critical to political power and policymaking.

Thirty-three years ago, the left political scientist Charles Lindblom penned a convincing take on American power, likening the capitalist marketplace to a prison. Lindblom's analysis is aptly summarized in a recent critique of "deep state" discourse by Anthony DiMaggio:

"U.S. corporations exercised power over communities, much like Kings do over feudal serfs, by exercising ownership over the means of production in the U.S. economy. They command worker loyalty due to their ability to hire and fire Americans and provide basic benefits such as health care or 401k and pension benefits. But corporations also possess the power to destroy people's lives via capital flight. Simply by threatening to leave a community and move factories abroad in pursuit of higher profits and weaker environmental regulations, corporations hold citizens hostage...The marketplace is a prison, Lindblom warned, because these corporations ultimately control the levers of the U.S. economy, and control the life outcomes of American workers."

Beyond the ownership and investment/disinvestment levers, concentrated capital achieves policy, cultural, and societal outcomes it prefers in numerous other ways: the buying of candidates and election through campaign donations; the flooding of government with armies of well-heeled lobbyists; the drafting and dissemination of Big Business-friendly legislation; massive investment in public relations and propaganda to influence the beliefs and values of citizens, politicians, and other "opinion-shapers"; direct "revolving door" capture of key government positions; the offer of private sector positions to public officials who reasonably expect significantly increased compensation once they exit government; the "cognitive

[ideological] capture” (every bit as corrupting as bribery) of state officials, politicians, media personnel, educators, nonprofit managers, and other “influential;” the destruction and undermining of organizations (i.e., labor unions) that might offer some countervailing power to that of big business; the granting of jobs, corporate board memberships, internships, and other perks and payments to public officials’ family members; the control of education and publishing; the ownership, management, and monitoring of mass media (including “entertainment” as well as public affairs news and commentary).

The American philosopher John Dewey put things very well in 1931. He wrote that “politics is the shadow cast on society by big business” and rightly prophesized that U.S. politics would stay that way as long as power resided in “business for private profit through private control of banking, land, industry, reinforced by command of the press, press agents, and other means of publicity and propaganda.”

Ten years later, the U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis made the elementary Aristotelian observation that Americans “must make our choice. We may have democracy,” Brandeis wrote, “or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can’t have both.” That was an unwitting call for the abolition of capitalism, which is marked among other things by an inherent tendency towards the upward concentration of wealth and power.

Let the People Be Taught

The fundamental contradiction between bottom-up democratic pretense and top-down class-rule reality is nothing new in American history. The New England clergyman Jeremy Belknap captured the fundamental idea behind the U.S. Founders’ curious notion of what they liked to call “popular government.” “Let it stand as a principle,” Belknap wrote to an associate in the late 1780s, “that government originates from the people, but let the people be taught...that they are unable to govern themselves.”

Consistent with Belknap’s advice, the U.S. Constitution was structured precisely and quite brilliantly to encode and enforce the impossibility of the Founders’ ultimate nightmare: popular sovereignty. American history remains haunted by the darkly democidal enshrinement of the “first new nation’s” crippling charter. The document invokes “We the people” and “the general welfare” only to set up a government dedicated to the hegemony of the propertied Few.

A Common Masquerade

Dressing elite class and economic interests in popular garb has always been a core function of the U.S. electoral and party system in its various iterations. Its first assignment was to rally ordinary citizens as voters for different factions of the developing nation’s bourgeois class in its recurrent intra-capitalist policy struggles. Across much of the 19th century, some leading U.S. investors sought to advance their interests in the development of the domestic U.S. market and a manufacturing economy by pushing through an “American System” of government-subsidized internal improvements (transportation infrastructure above all), government central banks, and tariffs on imports. These capitalists tended to align with and fund the Whig Party and its anti-

slavery successor the Republican Party. More export-, agricultural-, and free trade-oriented investors aligned with the Democratic Party.

These not insignificant differences aside, all these bourgeois parties made feverish electoral appeals to mass constituencies in the name of “the common man” to win votes in a republic with comparatively wide (universal white male across most of the nation by the eve of the Civil War) suffrage. The competing parties needed to “masquerade as commoners” (in the words of the late and great U.S. historian Alfred F. Young) to elected politicians pledged to the “bankrollers and backers” preferred path of capitalist development. The Hitchensian game – the “manipulation of populism by elitism” – first came into own not during the time of Huey Long but a century before in the Andrew Jacksonian so-called “age of the common man.”

“No Way to Vote Against Goldman Sachs”....

Policy specifics and party alignments have since shifted more than once in accord with underlying political-economic and demographic factors. Still, the basic manipulative reality captured in Left political scientist Thomas Ferguson’s “investment theory of [U.S. two-] party competition” has continued throughout. During the 1930s and 1940s, Ferguson has shown, the labor-allied New Deal (Franklin Roosevelt) Democratic Party rose to power with critical support from highly capital intensive multinational corporations and internationally oriented investment banks who were less concerned about wage bills than the more nationally oriented, anti-union, and protectionist industrial firms that dominated the reigning (Teddy Roosevelt, William McKinley and Howard Taft) Republican Party at the turn of the 20th century.

The end of rapid growth and of the United States’ short-lived and near-absolute post-World War II global economic hegemony during the late 1960s produced inflation and growing fiscal and trade deficits, leading to sharply raised interest rates, a strengthened dollar, and an unprecedented flow of surplus capital from industry to finance. The resulting new finance capital explosion transformed the American party system, which stabilized around 1980 with high finance atop the “hegemonic bloc” of political (as well as economic) investors. With the arch-neoliberal Clinton presidency of the 1990s, big finance capital had clearly taken over the Democratic Party as well as the Republicans, along with most of the nation’s nonfinancial corporations.

There have been differences in the investor class profiles of the two dominant parties through this century. “Defense” (military) and oil and other Big Carbon firms have tended to tilt towards the Republicans. Silicon Valley and Hollywood lean Democratic. Beneath such differences, the 1% is united in neoliberal consensus across both parties around Wall Street-led globalization and a huge Pentagon System to expand and protect global finance capitalism. Both the Republicans and the Democrats are committed to the neoliberal world-capitalist and imperial order, with big finance calling the shots while unions, the working class, and the poor are relegated to the margins.

The two major parties have different historical, demographic, ethno-cultural, religious, and geographic profiles that matter. Still, they are united at the end of the day in their shared manipulations of carefully calibrated populist rhetoric and voter and partisan identity on behalf

of the bipartisan super-rich and their global empire. As the Left author Chris Hedges noted four years ago:

“Both sides of the political spectrum are manipulated by the same forces. If you’re some right-wing Christian zealot in Georgia, then it’s homosexuals and abortion and all these, you know, wedge issues that are used to whip you up emotionally. If you are a liberal in Manhattan, it’s – you know, they’ll be teaching creationism in your schools or whatever...Yet in fact it’s just a game, because whether it’s Bush or whether it’s Obama, Goldman Sachs always wins. There is no way to vote against the interests of Goldman Sachs.”

...or (Earlier) J.P. Morgan

The Machiavellian ruling class exploitation of what is today called “identity politics” is also less than novel in the American historical experience. Fierce class conflict fueled by intense class consciousness roiled the industrializing United States across the late 19th and early 20th centuries, creating the most violent labor history in the world during those years. But great working class and farmer rebellions against the emergent new corporate plutocracy never translated into national politics thanks to the prior existence of a constitutionally mandated winner-take-all two party and elections system that channeled ballots into one of two reigning capitalist parties – aptly described by Upton Sinclair in 1904 as “two wings of the same bird of prey” – and in accord with differences of race, ethnicity, religion, and region. State and national politics and “voting behavior” were structured around ethnocultural and related geographic (sectional) factors. It’s not for nothing that the Marxist American historian Alan Dawley once referred to the American ballot box as “the coffin of class consciousness.” With all due respect to Eugene Debs’ high water mark returns in 1912 (a mere 6% of the popular vote), there was little way to meaningfully vote against the interests of J.P. Morgan, Averill Harriman, and John Rockefeller.

No Free Pass

It’s become fashionable on both left and right in recent years to think of Wall Street’s untouchable power (along with that of Silicon Valley and the military industrial complex) as a reflection of the rule of the permanent “deep state.” In its more measured and workable (non-conspiratorial) usage, the term refers to the embedded corporate and financial profit and power sectors that co-exist and merge with entrenched government institutions prominently including but not restricted to the ever-mushrooming national security state (we should include the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Federal Reserve alongside the Pentagon, the CIA, and the FBI) to govern the nation behind the electoral and parliamentary “marionette theater” (Mike Lofgren) of the visible state and its pseudo-democratic election rituals.

But, with all due respect for the chilling expansion of the intertwined military, police, and surveillance states, it is hard not to sense behind the notion of the “deep state” the simple and less-than-secretive persistence of the class rule regime called capitalism. The harsh authoritarian reality of what Noam Chomsky has wryly called “really existing capitalist democracy or RECD, pronounced as ‘wrecked’” lives on today as long before. .

American capitalism has an equally evil Siamese twin called imperialism, progenitor of the giant “national security” and “foreign apparatus” that eats up the lion’s share of U.S. federal discretionary spending – at no small cost to social and environmental health even as it provides a rich revenue stream for the nation’s unelected dictatorship of money. “The costs of empire,” Chomsky wrote nearly half a century ago, “are in general distributed over the whole of society, while its profits revert to a few within.”

It is long past time for left thinkers to *stop giving the American capitalist ruling class a free pass on Donald Trump, hoping for the neoliberal deep state” to bring about his demise from the top down.* Yes, the elite financial campaign finance and speech royalty data suggest that Hillary Clinton was Wall Street’s preferred candidate last year. Still, Trump was never really an anti-establishment candidate beyond the deceptive rhetoric he cynically employed – consistent with the longstanding fake-populist “essence of American [and bourgeois] politics” – to win enough white working class and rural votes to prevail over dismal, dollar-drenched Hillary Clinton. And you don’t have to join the right-wing conspiracy mongers at Zero Hedge to agree with them that “Trump is where the elites want him” and “serves the establishment.”

Militarized Accumulation

A recent *teleSur English* reflection by the brilliant Marxian sociologist William I. Robinson notes that the transnational capitalist class (TCC) has turned to military investment as a solution to its drastic over-accumulation of capital in an increasingly unequal and poverty-ridden world. As Robinson notes:

“Here there is a convergence around the system’s political need for social control and its economic need to perpetuate accumulation. Unprecedented global inequalities can only be sustained by ever more repressive and ubiquitous systems of social control and repression. Yet quite apart from political considerations, the TCC has acquired a vested interest in war, conflict, and repression as a means of accumulation. CIT has revolutionized warfare and the modalities of state-organized militarized accumulation, including the military application of vast new technologies and the further fusion of private accumulation with state militarization....”

“...The so-called wars on drugs, terrorism, and immigrants; the construction of border walls, immigrant detention centers, and ever-growing prisons; the installation of mass surveillance systems, and the spread of private security guard and mercenary companies, have all become major sources of profit-making... The class interests of the TCC, geo-politics, and economics come together around militarized accumulation. The more the global economy comes to depend on militarization and conflict the greater the drive to war and the higher the stakes for humanity...after...Trump’s...victory, the stock price of Corrections Corporation of America...soared 40 percent, given Trump’s promise to deport millions...Raytheon and Lockheed Martin reports spikes each time there is a new flare up in the Middle East...Within an hour of the April 6th Tomahawk missile bombardment of Syria, Raytheon’s stock increased by \$1 billion. Hundreds of private firms from around the world have put in bids to construct Trump’s infamous...border wall.”

Trump, his team of politicized generals, and his call for a 10 percent increase in the already hyper-bloated Pentagon budget are a perfect match for the militarized accumulation strategy, with its “built-in war drive.”

Waiting for supposedly enlightened and decent elites atop the “deep state” to dump Trump is a fool’s game. As Robinson says, “Only a worldwide push back from below, and ultimately a program to redistribute wealth and power downward, can counter the upward spiral of international conflagration.”