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Trump's victory: A dangerous turning point in American politics

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The emergence of Donald Trump as the presumptive Republican presidential nominee marks a dangerous watershed for US and world politics. The selection of a fascistic demagogue as the candidate of one of the two major capitalist parties is indisputable proof of the advanced stage of the putrefaction of American democracy. The impending nomination of Trump means that a substantial section of the American ruling class has concluded that the defense of its interests requires massive political repression within the United States and war against competitors and enemies beyond its borders.

The Trump nomination is not an episodic or accidental event. It is rooted in the protracted crisis of American capitalism and the related breakdown of its historic bourgeois-democratic framework. Trump's victory is the culmination of a process that has developed over decades. It can be dated back as far as the Watergate crisis of 1972-74, which involved the attempt of the Nixon administration to criminally subvert the Constitution. Other significant milestones in the process include the Iran-Contra crisis of 1986, arising from the Reagan administration's criminal violation of laws passed by Congress, and the installation of George W. Bush as president through the theft of the 2000 election.

Donald Trump has been vomited up by a political system that has been utterly corrupted through its complete subordination to a corporate-financial oligarchy, whose methods of rule are acquiring an ever more openly criminal character.

The Trump campaign represents an effort by sections of the American ruling elite to preempt the development of mass social discontent in a left-wing direction, by offering the media-manufactured persona of a billionaire businessman and celebrity who promises to single-handedly reverse decades of economic decline. Trump cynically appeals to those suffering economically, scapegoats immigrants and other minorities, and promotes extreme nationalism in economic and foreign policy. All in all, this noxious political program is of a distinctly fascistic character.

It is true that the Republican Party establishment did not welcome his campaign, and has been unsettled by his success. However, the conflicts generated by his candidacy do not change the fact that Trump is a quintessential representative of the American corporate-financial oligarchy. This particular fascistic gangster did not emerge, á la Hitler, from low class flop houses and stinking beer halls. Trump is a long-standing member of New York's financial elite, who made his billions in the city's corrupt real estate industry.

Trump's rise is an expression of the diseased character of American political culture and the suppression of social contradictions through the mechanism of a two-party system controlled by corporate interests. The participation of both the Democratic and Republican parties in the assault on working class living standards has generated support for a candidate claiming to come from outside the political system.

Eight years ago, Barack Obama was elected to the presidency in large measure because of popular expectations of significant changes in policy from the deeply discredited Bush administration. Just the opposite happened. Obama came to office in the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse and acted to prop up the banks and restore the wealth of the super-rich, with disastrous consequences for the working class. With utter cynicism, the Democratic president packaged his most reactionary measures as progressive reforms. Slashing wages for newly hired auto workers was called "saving" the auto industry; a program to enrich the insurance companies and drug monopolies and slash health care costs for employers became "health care reform," later rebranded "Obamacare."

Hillary Clinton is running as the continuator of the "successes" of the Obama administration. Far from representing an alternative to Trump, she personifies the same process of political corruption and reaction, but within the framework of the Democratic Party rather than the Republican. While Trump blusters about increasing the strength of the US military and brooking no foreign opposition to the dictates of Washington, Clinton already has the blood of tens of thousands on her hands. Characteristically, her first response to Trump's clinching the nomination was to attack him as too erratic to be commander-in-chief, presenting herself to the military-intelligence apparatus as the more reliable choice.

The Democratic Party has covered up its decades-long shift to the right through the cynical rhetoric of identity politics, focused entirely on issues of race, gender and sexual orientation. This not only ignored the immense and growing levels of economic and social distress among the broad mass of the population—white, black, Hispanic and immigrant—it encouraged contempt among more privileged sections of the middle class for the working class, particularly

white workers. This is what allows Trump to posture as an advocate of white workers, although he is a billionaire separated from them by an unbridgeable social gulf.

Among large sections of workers and young people, there is a growing desire for an alternative to capitalism, a fact that is demonstrated in the support for the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders, broadly identified as a socialist. But under the leadership of Sanders, millions of youth and working people are being channeled back within the Democratic Party, and ultimately delivered to Hillary Clinton. This is a political dead-end.

Immense dangers lie ahead. The extreme crisis of bourgeois democracy will not resolve itself. Even if Trump does not win in November, the stage will be set for an even more threatening figure. And whether Trump is at its head or not, the government that assumes power in January will be the most reactionary, violent and authoritarian in American history.

The necessary political conclusions must be drawn. The development of a genuinely socialist movement is of life and death significance. The working class must come forward as an independent political force, challenging the two capitalist-controlled parties and their right-wing candidates. This is the significance of the campaign launched by the Socialist Equality Party and our candidates, Jerry White for president and Niles Niemuth for vice president. We call on all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to support and help build this campaign.