

APPENDIX

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What Happened to America?

A review of the rise of fascism to power in the United States

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WHEN THE REPUBLICAN Party staged its *coup d'état* at the end of 2000, it was the culmination of a protracted process that stretched back more than a generation. The election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980 opened the door to the unchecked and relatively unimpeded growth of fascism in the United States. Through political organizations such as the Council of Conservative Citizens, intellectual “think-tanks” like the American Enterprise Institute, and religious and cultural formations like the Christian Coalition — all tied by a thousand gossamer strands to the Republican Party — a “respectable,” media-friendly fascism came to occupy key positions in all aspects of capitalist society. The attacks on organized labor, democratic rights and cultural diversity (i.e., “political correctness”) were all part of what rightwing politician and commentator Pat Buchanan called the “culture war.”

The main battleground of this “war” was found in the media. While many on the political left viewed with amusement such ridiculous scenes as former Vice President Dan Quayle taking pot shots at television characters, they ignored the underlying social message being sent: that which did not conform to the rightwing conception of “normal” is to be purged from society. Over time, the ridiculous was transformed into the sinister, as these same elements focused on the creation of a rightward shift in the main organs of the capitalist media. The exponential growth of culturally backward “shock jocks” and far-right pundits on radio and television gave this movement a platform.

In 1994, this campaign took on new dimensions when Newt Gingrich led the Republican Party to control of both houses of Congress. However, the new “Class of 1994,” as they were called, was not the same old conservative element that had held on to the reins of the Party for the previous century. These new Republican Congressmen were imbued with the program of the “culture war,” hatred for liberalism and progressive social reform (to say nothing of antisocialism and anticommunism), loathing of “special interests” (i.e., labor, women, African Americans, etc.), and contempt for the traditional restraints capitalist democracy puts on its representatives. Armed with a definite political program, the “Contract with America,” this political current carried out its agenda of repression, cloaking it in attacks on its chief rival, the Democratic Party. The provisions of the “Contract” itself met only with limited success, dependent on support from the White House or other Democratic collaborators. Concretely, the

new, Republican-controlled Congress sought to enact a second rightward shift, this time in the main organs of capitalist politics, by waging war against the then-President, Bill Clinton.

The 1995-1996 shutdown of the federal government was the opening salvo in this new political war of attrition. The Republicans gambled on the notion that, if Clinton and the Democrats were squeezed, they would crack. Thus, the Republican Congress carefully studied every step taken by Clinton, especially in his second term, for weaknesses. One perceived motion out of order, and Gingrich would mobilize the resources at his disposal as Speaker of the House of Representatives to launch an attack. His great opportunity came when the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke in the rightwing press. Millions of dollars, thousands of work-hours, months and months of denunciations and attacks, all aimed at pressing for articles of impeachment. Again, much of the left saw it all as an amusement or a diversion; the voices warning of dire consequences if the Republicans succeeded were rare. “Move on,” was a common refrain.

Speaking in terms of the impeachment drive in and of itself, it was an abysmal failure. While the House, firmly under the control of the Republican Party, was able to pass articles of impeachment, the Senate could not even muster a majority vote — to say nothing of the necessary two-thirds majority for conviction — on any one of the articles. However, the new Republican cadre saw that the Democratic victory was Pyrrhic. Gingrich lost the battle, but won the war. Even though Clinton would be allowed to serve out the remainder of his term, he and his party (to say nothing of political discourse in the years to come) would never be the same.

It should be mentioned at this point that the Republican Party was not the only one to undergo a fundamental shift to the right. In fact, it was not even the first. After the defeat of a succession of old liberal candidates in the 1980s, there began to emerge in the Democratic Party a new formation: the Democratic Leadership Council. The DLC was composed of “centrist” elements in the party — “reformed” Dixiecrats, Republican defectors, “Reagan Democrats,” etc. The goal of the DLC was to remodel the Democratic Party so they could fill the center-right vacuum left by the emerging shift in the balance of power within the Republican Party. The DLC offered a Faustian deal to the Democratic machine: let us dictate the agenda and we will get you the White House. Ever the opportunists, the Democratic leadership fell over itself to climb aboard. The liberal base of the party was cut loose of its moorings, while also given a stern warning: follow our lead or we will bury you. The result was the electoral victory of Bill Clinton and, *de facto*, the establishment of DLC hegemony over the Democratic Party.

WHEREAS THE 1992 election saw the emergence of the DLC (the “neo-liberals”) as the pre-eminent force in the Democratic Party, the 2000 election saw the emergence of the “neo-conservatives” as the leadership of the Republican Party. The election saw neo-liberal Vice President Al Gore take on neo-conservative George W. Bush, with local Democratic politicians acting as political police to keep the adrift liberals from straying too far — i.e., in the direction of the Green Party’s Ralph Nader. It was no slip of the tongue when Bush declared during the debates that the difference between himself and Gore was one “of opinion, not principle.” Indeed, when one placed the programs of the Gore and Bush campaigns side-by-side, they strained to find any fundamental difference between them — even on issues that, only a generation before, defined the contours of each party’s policies. Then there was Gore’s running mate, Joseph Lieberman, the anointed candidate of the DLC.

Bush’s statement that the differences were only matters of “opinion” was, looking back, an intentional contrivance designed for mass consumption. Or, more accurately, it was contrivance

for the Republicans and fear for the Democrats. The oxymoronic philosophy of “compassionate conservatism,” codified in the 2000 platform of the Republican Party, was meant to break through the stagnation in public opinion stemming from their defeat in the impeachment drive. For the neo-liberal Democratic leadership, “compassionate conservatism” seemingly threatened their tenuous hold on the “moderate” vote. Thus, the DLC, now controlling the Democratic National Committee, pushed the party’s platform further to the right, challenging Bush’s “compassionate conservatism” with its own.

However, it would be incorrect to see this symmetry in the two parties’ platforms as anything other than conjunctural. They paralleled each other at a specific moment in history — the parallel itself a product of history. It represented confirmation that the relatively modest goals set by those who organized and fostered the fascist elements in the Republican Party (a section of the capitalist class that had grown tired of democratic forms), aimed at narrowing the base of democratic governance in the U.S., had been achieved.

They saw that the work of both parties over the decades had effectively locked out alternative “third parties” — especially workers’ political parties — from any meaningful role in the political process. They saw the numbers of voters drop because of a concerted campaign to evoke revulsion in the minds of working people at what passed for “politics.” Massive cuts in social services, welfare, wages and benefits meant that workers were more concerned with waging the “battle for survival” than the “battle for democracy.” Co-optation of the “official” leaderships of labor organizations, such as seating the president of the United Auto Workers on the Board of Directors of DaimlerChrysler, meant that the steady erosion of gains won by unions in the 1930s and 1940s now became a flood. The various women’s rights, civil rights and democratic struggles were daisy-chained back to the Democratic Party (and, thus, to the DLC) by way of well-funded “grassroots” organizations and “pressure groups” — usually headed by a prominent, media-savvy, or media-selected, spokesperson (e.g., Jesse Jackson).

With all of the arrangements cited above in place, it was time to strike. With working people either atomized and searching for ways to survive, or bound politically to the Democratic Party leadership, and with the effective ban on allowing workers’ political parties to challenge them seriously, the Republicans had only to bring the election numbers close enough to make a relatively bloodless coup. In effect, the Republicans now set into motion a “revolution in permanence” of its own — a “counterrevolution in permanence,” to be more precise.

For this, they relied to a certain degree on the emerging popularity of Nader’s Green Party campaign — to either siphon off Democratic votes or to keep potentially independent challengers divided and in check. However, using the Green campaign was a calculated risk, as could be seen from the sudden drop in the projected percentage of the vote Nader was expected to receive (a drop that continued through Election Day). The Democratic Party faithful, nevertheless, use the fact that Nader received a sizeable amount of votes to hold him solely responsible for the events of the last period — in spite of the fact that the margin between Bush and Gore was so small that even a relatively minor candidate could also be seen as a culprit.

But, to hold Nader’s campaign responsible for the failure of the Democrats, the rise of the fascist wing of the Republican Party to power, and the wholesale destruction of American democracy (limited though it was), is little more than the raising of a bogeyman meant to shift attention away from the decades-long process, carried out by both parties, to systematically remove working people from the political process. It is like blaming the death of an AIDS victim solely on the pneumonia he or she had in the last days of their life.

IT IS PERHAPS valuable at this point to step away from this particular moment in history and look more closely at the genesis and development of the situation in the United States today. Repeatedly, this author has referred to the Republican Party either as a coalition of fascists and neo-conservatives, or simply as a fascist party. Now is as good an opportunity as any to answer the question: What is fascism?

There are, of course, many definitions of fascism. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, for example, defines fascism as “a system of government marked by centralization of authority under a dictator, stringent socioeconomic controls, suppression of the opposition through terror and censorship, and typically a policy of belligerent nationalism and racism.” While, in and of itself, this definition is a fair description of what a fascist state looks and acts like, it is by no means accurate enough. To one degree or another, many capitalist “democracies” around the world fit this description. That, perhaps, is a point to be explored later; but not today. Suffice to say, this definition is inadequate for understanding what fascism is (and is not).

Various elements in the left (“official Communists,” anarchists, syndicalists, etc.), as well, have developed theories on what fascism is. However, most of these definitions are variants on the one quoted above — albeit with this or that singular nuance or addition. Some even take notice of the definition offered by Italian fascist, Benito Mussolini: “Fascism should rightly be called corporatism, as it is a merger of state and corporate power.” While one aspect of fascism is such an open and blatant integration, which expresses itself in the extension of the totalitarianism one sees in the very existence of capitalism (private property) into all aspects of society, the merger of “state and corporate power” has been, in fact, a defining characteristic of capitalism throughout the 20th century. The very concepts of “state monopoly capitalism,” “imperialism” and nationalization involve, to one degree or another, such a merger as expressed by Mussolini.

What is lacking from these definitions is an understanding of the dynamics of fascism: how it developed, what forces — primarily class forces — were at work, and what material conditions allowed for its ascension. In this respect, it may perhaps be important to review the definition offered by the Russian Marxist, Leon Trotsky. What makes Trotsky’s definition of fascism stand out is that it attempts to analyze these dynamics and place them in their proper context. In his article, “Bonapartism, Fascism and War” (the last article he wrote before being assassinated by a Stalinist agent), Trotsky lays out a definition of fascism that, in its specificity and formulaic narrowness, provides a fair guide by which we can judge whether or not fascism is at work. He writes:

“Insofar as the proletariat proves incapable at a given stage of conquering power, imperialism begins regulating economic life with its own methods; the political mechanism is the fascist party, which becomes the state power. The productive forces are in irreconcilable contradiction not only with private property but also with national boundaries. Imperialism is the very expression of this contradiction. Imperialist capitalism seeks to solve this contradiction through an extension of boundaries, seizure of new territories, and so on. The totalitarian state, subjecting all aspects of economic, political, and cultural life to finance capital, is the instrument for creating a supranationalist state, an Imperialist empire, ruling over continents, ruling over the whole world.

“All these traits of fascism we have analyzed each one by itself and all of them in their totality to the extent that they became manifest or came to the forefront.

“Both theoretical analysis and the rich historical experience of the last quarter of a century have demonstrated with equal force that fascism is each time the final link of a specific political cycle composed of the following: the gravest crisis of capitalist society; the growth of the radicalization of the working class; the growth of sympathy toward the working class and a yearning for change on the part of the rural and urban petty

bourgeoisie; the extreme confusion of the big bourgeoisie; its cowardly and treacherous maneuvers aimed at avoiding the revolutionary climax; the exhaustion of the proletariat; growing confusion and indifference; the aggravation of the social crisis; the despair of the petty bourgeoisie, its yearning for change; the collective neurosis of the petty bourgeoisie, its readiness to believe in miracles, its readiness for violent measures; the growth of hostility towards the proletariat which has deceived its expectations. These are the premises for a swift formation of a fascist party and its victory.” (L.D. Trotsky, “Bonapartism, Fascism and War,” *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, Pathfinder [New York], 1977 — <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1930-ger/400820.htm>)

The first and third paragraphs of this article are the ones that concern us the most. The latter outlines the general pattern of events that lead to a fascist takeover; the former paragraph describes the development of a fascist regime after assuming power. Let us concern ourselves for the moment with the latter paragraph, and compare the criteria listed in it to what we have seen unfold in the last four decades in the United States.

THE PERIOD OF the 1960s and 1970s saw great mass movements in the United States challenge almost every facet of the capitalist system’s order. The Civil Rights struggles in the early and middle years of the 1960s were the first indications that people were not willing to continue to accept the old order — they were unwilling to continue living in the old way. One can certainly mark Martin Luther King’s 1963 speech to the March on Washington, commonly known as the “I Have a Dream” speech, as an historical marker that points to the opening of this period. It was at approximately the same time that the movement against the war in Vietnam was beginning to develop on campuses across the country.

Within five years, not only had these movement grown into massive political movements against the established order, they were joined by movements among communities historically oppressed under class society. The women’s movement, for example, had actually started in the wake of the end of the Second World War, when many women who were being forced out of the industrial jobs they had held for the duration of the conflict fought back. This working women’s movement continued through the 1960s, sparking the development of organizations and movements that, in the early 1970s, led to the formation of groups such as the Coalition of Labor Union Women. Similar class dynamics can also be seen in the early pre-movement for lesbians and gay men. Organizations such as the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis often were regarded as the “official” pre-movement, while working-class gays and lesbians were left to build their own groups (or, as happened sometime, work within the “official” organizations). These small formations exploded into the open after the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, leading to the formation of groups like the Gay Liberation Front, Red Butterfly and the Lavender and Red Union — all of which had a strong working-class element.

The power of these movements was punctuated by a series of mass rebellions from Watts and Detroit to Newark, Boston and Oakland. These spontaneous rebellions represented, at the time, the sharpest expression of working-class outrage and anger at capitalism. They targeted the policies and tactics of the bodies that compose the core of the capitalist state — the police, the “justice” system and the military. What events like Watts, Detroit and Newark showed was there was, at that time, a significant section of the working class that was unwilling to live under the old conditions. What it also taught was that, without a general political direction, such rebellions are more susceptible to implosion and control.

These events, taken in their totality, can be seen as reflecting not only “the gravest crisis of capitalist society,” but also “the growth of the radicalization of the working class.” In many respects, these movements also contained within them “the growth of sympathy toward the

working class and a yearning for change on the part of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie.” Many of the early leaders of these “New Social Movements,” as they were falsely called, hailed from all classes within capitalist society, but primarily from the petty bourgeoisie. The so-called “Black Bourgeoisie,” or “talented tenth,” was instrumental in the development of Civil Rights struggles, along with the “official leaderships” of the trade unions, student leaders, priests and other clergy, etc. The early women’s and gay rights movements had strong working-class leaders, but, by the end of the 1960s, they either had been replaced by, or had begun to make space for, leaders from other classes.

THE TRANSITION FROM the late 1960s to the early 1970s saw the development of a more coherent radicalization of the working class, as well as the destabilization of the American capitalist state. At the end of the 1960s, several movements within the working class in general, and organized labor in particular, sought to add a decidedly “proletarian” edge to the previously class-amorphous movements. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers (commonly known as “the League”) was perhaps the best developed of these class-based formations. Growing out of the strong traditions of radical unionism that built the United Auto Workers and the CIO union federation in the 1930s, the League organized caucuses of Black workers that fought against both racism and capitalism. In Detroit, the center of the League, this also led to collaboration with forces around political organizations like the Black Panther Party, as well as joint work with some sectors of the so-called “New Left.”

In the early 1970s, working class militancy reached a critical point. Mass, militant struggles by industrial workers and government employees had put several sections of the ruling capitalist class on guard. The strike by postal workers across the U.S. is a good example of the militancy that gripped the country in the early 1970s. Then-president, Richard Nixon, was forced to order 30,000 troops to try and break that strike. In the same year as the postal strike, tens of thousands of autoworkers walked the picket line against General Motors — then the single-largest employer in America. From all angles, the working class was on the march against capitalist exploitation.

It is within and between these moments that we find “the extreme confusion of the big bourgeoisie” and “its cowardly and treacherous maneuvers aimed at avoiding the revolutionary climax.” Elements of the “extreme confusion” are found in the two major police strikes of the early 1970s: New York, in 1971, and Baltimore, in 1974. The police, one of the “armed bodies of men” that make up the capitalist state, had resorted to measures commonly associated with the working class. Such a situation — admittedly, though, not entirely unique in history — certainly evoked a measure of “extreme confusion” among those forces within the capitalist class that saw the state as their exclusive property and the police as their most necessary defenders. However, the capitalists did not wait for this confusion to set in before exploring the kind of “cowardly and treacherous maneuvers” needed to stave off open workers’ rebellion. Instead, they opted for a “carrot and stick” approach to social control.

The “carrot” was a series of laws that sought to alleviate tensions in the oppressed communities — Affirmative Action, Head Start, school lunches, etc. The capitalists’ goal in instituting these programs was to try to remove some of the most basic demands for equality from the programs of the different movements of the working class. Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity, for example, sought to solve by capitalist means the gross social inequality between privileged whites and people of color, and between men and women, by creating special channels that, in theory, allowed for more access to existing institutions —

higher education, housing, jobs, etc. For the capitalists, instituting these programs was a calculated risk. On the one hand, the admittance of women and people of color into the leading circles of capitalist government, academia and culture presented an objective challenge. On the other hand, with the right “education,” these capitalists thought, these newly trained government officials, professors and media consultants could find ways to shape society in a way that allows social discontent to be “released,” like a steam valve, yet still contained. It is not that these programs, in and of themselves, are harmful. It is their administration by capitalism that has made them instruments of social control.

The “stick” was a systematic program of disruption and violence against any organization within which could be found a current opposed to the existing capitalist system. (Mind you, this does not necessarily mean a current opposed to capitalism itself, merely a movement opposed to the form that it took in the U.S. at the time.) In many ways, the structures for this program had been in place since the McCarthyite period of the 1950s. Yet it was its incarnation in the 1960s that gave the program its universal and infamous name — COINTELPRO. For those not familiar, COINTELPRO was the “Counter-Intelligence Program” run by the FBI, in conjunction with local and state police agencies. Its goal was to gather information on the various Civil Rights, antiwar, labor, democratic and radical movements in the U.S. and to find ways to disrupt their work. COINTELPRO agents spied on every organization considered “too left” in the U.S. Not even “respectable” liberals were spared from this campaign of maneuvers aimed at stifling opposition. Moreover, it is in this light that we can better understand the “dirty tricks” and “rat f*cking” carried out by agents of the Republican Party in the late 1960s and early 1970s, exposed in the wake of the Watergate scandal. If we wish to delve further into speculation and “conspiracy,” we can also perhaps say that there is a real possibility that the assassinations of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are in some way connected to this campaign of “cowardly and treacherous maneuvers.”

This was the “aggravation of the social crisis.”

BY THE END of 1976, the revolutionary wave that had swept across the country for the previous decade had ebbed dramatically. Many of the radicals who participated in or led the mass, grassroots struggles of the previous period, at one point or another, had retreated to the camp of the Democratic Party in the hope that candidates that are more “progressive” could be pushed to the fore. For their efforts, these “radicals” got Jimmy Carter. How did a mass movement for social, political and economic change end so anti-climactically? In the final analysis, this author can only conclude that we saw a complete failure of political leadership. Now, what does this mean? In short, the absence of a unified revolutionary, democratic and socialist movement, capable of winning the majority of exploited and oppressed people to the view of the need to take power into their own hands and build a new society, led to the beginnings of what only can be described as “the despair of the petty bourgeoisie, its yearning for change.”

The 1980s was characterized mostly by the rise of a new rightwing movement, both inside the halls of power and outside on the streets. The 1980 presidential election saw the victory of Ronald Reagan, a washed-up B-movie actor, anticommunist witchhunter and former governor of California. His rise to power was predicated on a manipulation of the fears and concerns of the so-called “middle class” — primarily the new crop of petty-bourgeois professionals, the “yuppies” (“young urban professionals”), who emerged from the 1960s generation. Reagan’s domestic policy centered on tapping into fears and frustration over social policies meant to

alleviate the social tensions between communities from oppressed backgrounds and grossly exploited on one side, and the most privileged layers of the working class (the labor aristocracy) and “yuppies” on the other side.

Playing on this fear — this “collective neurosis of the petty bourgeoisie” and labor aristocracy (referred to collectively as the so-called “middle class”) — allowed for the creation of what can only be described as a social pressure-cooker. This societal cauldron yielded all sorts of political “jackalopes.” The development of “Reagan Democrats” was perhaps the extreme expression of this trend. A “Reagan Democrat” was traditionally a “moderate Democrat” from the labor aristocracy or non-”yuppie” layers of the petty bourgeoisie (individual and family farmers, small shopkeepers, lower and middle managers, etc.) who would vote Democratic locally and/or statewide, but voted Republican for president. These elements provided a core that could be motivated into action by exacerbating concerns over “crime,” anger over “welfare queens” or fears about “foreign competition.”

This social pressure-cooker also brought about the rise of new, extralegal organizations that were designed to attack the institutions and expressions of the social gains won in the period from the 1930s to the 1970s. This was the time when organizations like Operation Rescue and the Lambs of God began their campaign of clinic bombings and assassinations, when groups like Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council were campaigning against the democratic rights of women and the LGBT community, when organizations like the Council of Conservative Citizens and the National Association for the Advancement of White People were challenging the gains of the civil rights movement, when intellectual “think-tanks” like the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation disputed the idea that the Enlightenment concepts of liberty and democracy were what motivated the First American Revolution, and when bodies like the Federalist Society and the Center for Individual Rights opened up an offensive on all these elements in the state and federal court systems.

What tied all these diverse trends together was the rise of the Protestant “Christian Fundamentalist” movement, the most successful expression of which is the infamous Christian Coalition. The CC provided a unified and coherent political ideology, under the cover of “rediscovering the Word of God.” However, the program advocated by the CC and its leaders, like Ralph Reed, was anything but “Christian.” A casual review of the political aspects of the CC’s program almost immediately reveals an agenda of subjugating and keeping atomized exploited and oppressed people, with obvious material salvation for their “middle-class” and bourgeois followers. In short, it was a fascist brown shirt with a minister’s collar — a form of clerical-fascism akin to Francisco Franco’s Falangists of Spain, but not devoted to any one of the established religious sects. The Christian Coalition was able to tap into the “collective neurosis” that had arisen over the existing social antagonisms, and to elevate it into a “readiness to believe in miracles” ... and “violent measures,” if necessary.

For the “yuppie” elements of the petty bourgeoisie, there was another added dimension. Many of them had been close observers and/or participants in the struggles of the 1960s. They had witnessed the mass discontent and radicalism of that period, the near collapse of the old order, the failure to achieve revolutionary change, and the retreat back to the status quo. Many of those who had joined the various “New Left” and broader socialist movements of the 1960s believed that revolution was to come ... somehow. When it never materialized, their zeal turned into disillusion, demoralization and anger. They came to resent the working class, the exploited and oppressed. They felt betrayed, which fed into “the growth of hostility towards the proletariat,” which had “deceived its expectations.”

THE SUDDEN COLLAPSE of the Soviet Union and its sister states at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s threw the development of fascism in America into a crisis of its own. Anticommunism had been used hitherto as a political focal point for the emerging fascist movement. Only a few sectors of this new movement had begun to challenge openly the theoretical foundations of the bourgeois-democratic Enlightenment. Thus, the shift of sections of the ruling class in the direction of fascism was spiked, and the capitalist class was torn in two, between those looking at fascism as the only course and those who saw the potential for staving off crisis through renewed accumulation of capital. In a sense, it would be fair to say that “official Communism” was able to render one last service to the world’s working class by committing suicide, thus splitting the world’s bourgeoisie (including the Americans) and making sections of them think twice about the program of the neo-conservative, fascist Right.

However, the opening of the 1990s did not result in a kind of “people’s front” system of government like the one we saw in France, Spain or the United States in the 1930s. Instead, the shift to the right continued, this time under political movements that had once been under the leadership of liberals and Social Democrats. Here is where neo-liberalism as a political ideology is given its legitimacy. For a capitalist class that had closely approached a “fascist consensus,” but was saved by the collapse of the USSR and the Central European “people’s democracies,” the politics of neo-liberalism and “Third Way” Social Democracy were palatable forms of public policy. They were willing to accept it all, including the prolongation of social policies like “multiculturalism” and “political correctness,” as long as they did not tie the hands of Big Capital during the new period of growth and accumulation.

The steady rise in wealth among the ruling classes of the Great Power states (the “Group of Seven,” or G-7: the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan), accompanied by the new revolutionizing of production and distribution (the “Digital Revolution”), allowed many elements of the capitalist class to confidently step back from the abyss and once again place a measure of reliance on the forms of capitalist “democracy” to maintain social order. Even with the rise of even more violent and extreme fascist movements in the 1990s (e.g., the militia movement in the U.S., or the xenophobic anti-immigrant movements of North America and Europe), capitalism saw no real threat coming from the working class that would require such elements, and sought to keep them in check — though they had no interest in completely removing them from the picture.

As the 1990s drew to a close, the capitalists of the Great Powers were just beginning to see that the “bubble” they all rode to ever-dizzying heights of wealth and opulence was about to burst. In a theoretical sense, many of them knew the rising profits and sources of wealth and accumulation could not hold out forever. However, the capitalists were drunk with success, and were not prepared for the “morning after” when it came at the end of March 2000. It was at this moment that those capitalists who had been pushed aside at the beginning of the decade began to organize and prepare. They were perhaps the most aware of what was to come, because many of them were what could only be called the “old capitalists” — that is, they were the owners and directors of that section of industrial and finance capitalism that had existed throughout most, if not all, of the 20th century.

Politically speaking, these capitalists had been prepared since the mid-1990s. Through Gingrich and his dominant faction in the Republican Party, they were able to make that party’s machinery much more efficient and flexible, able to move quickly when the situation changed. It is not for nothing that Gingrich kept a portrait of the Russian Marxist Vladimir Lenin on his wall.

It was not that Gingrich admired Lenin; rather, what Lenin represented to Gingrich, and his Republican co-thinkers, was the power that a centralized, relatively homogeneous political party could wield. This is why he attempted to impose, and partially succeeded in imposing, a kind of “democratic centralism” (in reality, though, a bureaucratic centralism of the Stalin type) on the Republican Party. The Republican Party was transformed from a general “umbrella” party for conservatives to a factional party, generally representing one political trend.

It is in this context that we can better understand the fight between John McCain and George W. Bush during the Republican primaries. These two represented the internecine conflict between the old conservatives, who preferred to keep the Republicans as a relatively more open conservative party, and the neo-conservatives, who wanted the party to accept the more homogeneous formula. In such a primary fight, the party machinery plays a central role. With the party machinery either built or rebuilt by people associated, to one degree or another, with the neo-conservatives, it was clear who their choice was and no amount of appealing to the base would necessarily stop it.

FOLLOWING THE END of the primaries, and especially the end of the Republican National Convention, the capitalists who fostered this development of fascism in the Republican Party now set out to cobble together their own coalition of forces outside the political structure. They began by pulling together a faction within the capitalist class. More or less, this was easy for them. Using the ties created through business relationships and the expansion of credit, they pulled in capitalists from nearly every sector of the economy, and bound their economic future hand and foot to the political fortunes of the Republican Party.

Through their relations with large defense contractors, they also began to cultivate a relationship with key sections of the military apparatus. Many in the officer corps had been frustrated by the turn in the 1990s away from large-scale military build-up to smaller “peacekeeping” and police operations. These capitalists now made their own Faustian offer: stand behind us and we will give you new weapons, wars to fight and a secure future after retirement. (Well, two out of three anyway.) This alliance of capitalist CEOs, military officers and fascist politicians became crucial in the aftermath of the 2000 election, when the military came to the brink of rebellion over questionable absentee ballots.

From here on, the history is generally well known. The night of the election saw powerful forces at work to make sure the election went their way. The sign that something was amiss became evident after many polling services declared that Al Gore had won the vote in Florida. Almost immediately, the Bush campaign staff sent a flurry of phone calls and e-mails to the media and the state government in Tallahassee. When the major media networks began to reverse their earlier statement and the statements of the polling services that were working in Florida, and placed the state in the “Too Close to Call” column, it was becoming clear that this election — and, even though it was not perhaps immediately or consciously recognizable at the time, this country — would turn out horribly different.

Perhaps a telling sign of things to come was the staged riot at the Miami-Dade County Courthouse in late November 2000. At the time, this riot was presented in the media as a spontaneous outpouring of anger and frustration over the process of manually counting the ballots in that country. It was not until much later, after Bush had been installed as the chief executive, that we learned the rioters were in fact paid operatives and staff members of the Republican Party machine. This extralegal riot succeeded in permanently shutting down the process of counting the ballots, and thus nullifying the votes of tens of thousands of votes in that

county. Combined with numerous instances of police intimidation and harassment of voters in Florida, Michigan, Virginia and other states, and the systematic purge of African American voters from the rolls in Florida (and, it is rumored, other states), the scene of a bloodless *coup d'état* takes shape.

The “one-time-only,” narrow decision by the Supreme Court of the United States to install Bush in the White House codified this coup, and attempted to lend it an air of Constitutional legitimacy. The American people were being dragged into fascism kicking and screaming. It was obvious that the majority of the people in this country did not favor the agenda being imposed upon them from above. However, they were left without any viable alternative in terms of political direction and organizational expression. This was finally confirmed when the Democratic members of the Senate, acting under pressure from the DLC (and, behind them, the same capitalists that also bankrolled the Republicans), ignored the pleas of their own African American members in the House of Representatives and signed off on the Florida vote.

This final betrayal by the Democratic members of Congress, reflecting the political position of the leading circles of the party, finally exposed broad sections of the population to the fact that there was no section or wing of the capitalist class willing to defend even the limited democracy that existed before 2000. With the path clear, except for a nascent and not yet fully organized political movement for democratic rights that posed no serious threat, — or, as in the case of Jesse Jackson, had surrendered the fight out of fear of losing his privileges — the new Bush regime now began to implement those elements of its agenda that it could get away with at the time. Most of these were centered on a fundamental shift in the economic distribution of wealth and financial base of the state. In the past, the American capitalist state functioned based on graduated taxes, with those who make more paying more proportionally, and that aggregate amount of money being distributed among the various programs. Now, under the Bush regime, a new message was sent to the people, mainly working people: the rich can take care of their own needs out of their own pocket; if you want services like sanitation collection, protection from crime, unemployment insurance, etc., expect to pay for it all yourselves. This was the principle guiding the restructure of the tax system.

Shifting the economic base was but only one aspect of the Bush regime’s agenda. With the onset of the economic recession, these capitalists knew the only way they could continue to keep their profit margins from stagnating and eventually declining was to squeeze the working class, to bleed it dry by extracting more surplus value from their labor, by shifting the public burden (that is, the burden of financing the state) on to workers’ shoulders and by making any kind of opposition to such rampant exploitation impossible. Thus, the economic measures alone were not enough; the democratic rights of the American people, as outlined in the Constitution, Bill of Rights and federal law, had to be overturned, abridged or otherwise nullified. Taking care of the federal enforcement provisions of democratic rights was the easy part. The Supreme Court of the United States was more than willing to take the role of “Supreme Legislator,” and repeal those sections of the law that allowed for the enforcement of basic democracy. However, it would take a cataclysmic event — relatively unprecedented in American history — to generate mass support for overturning the Constitutional provisions guaranteeing democracy.

That event came on the morning of September 11, 2001.

“THESE ARE THE premises for a swift formation of a fascist party and its victory,” Trotsky writes in his last line of the above quoted passage. This of course raises an immediate question: How swift is “swift?” Certainly, the process we discuss here spans close to 40 years of historical

development. Is 40 years a “swift” period of time? From the perspective of the individual human being, 40 years can seem like a lifetime (or more than a lifetime, as in the case of this author). However, from the perspective of historical development — the “long view” of history — 40 years is nearly a blink of the eye. Relativity of the Einstein variety is not reserved solely for the realm of physics. The relationship between the laws of motion and relativity have as much place in understanding the movement of history and society as they do in the movement of atoms or celestial bodies.

Viewing the rise of fascism in the United States from the standpoint of the long view of history allows us to understand better the meaning behind Trotsky’s comment in the first paragraph, quoted above: “Insofar as the proletariat proves incapable at a given stage of conquering power, imperialism begins regulating economic life with its own methods.” The government campaigns of the last four decades of the 20th century for “empowerment” — beginning during the so-called “War on Poverty,” and accelerating through the 1970s and 1980s to the period of “welfare reform,” represented, to one degree or another, an attempt at social regulation of the poorest and most oppressed sectors of society. These campaigns, which even deceived many ostensible “socialists,” were, in the final analysis, attempts by the capitalists to regulate and regiment society from above, “with its own methods.”

With social regimentation in place, with the economic burden sufficiently shifted to stave off ruin for those sections of the capitalist class that sponsored the rise of the Bush regime, the American ruling class was confronted now with another, seemingly insurmountable problem. For the last decade, world capitalism had integrated itself to an unprecedented degree. Primarily nationally based modes of production had given way to a worldwide system of production, distribution and exchange — commonly referred to as “globalization.” At the same time, though, globalization had also drawn and bound together workers around the world, and they now were beginning to act in a coordinated way on an international scale. The contradiction between the world market and national boundaries was reaching a breaking point. This contradiction was accentuated by the fact that many of those elements of the American capitalist class that had sponsored the takeover by the Republican Party had been on the short end of many of the deals and agreements that came out of globalization. Something had to give.

The first manifestations of how the new regime at the head of the United States was going to resolve this contradiction became apparent in the first months after Bush took power. The withdrawal from the Kyoto Accords was only the first sign that, for the new regime, when confronted with the choice between the nationalist appetites of American capitalism and the world market, “America first” — or, more to the point, on America’s terms “first.” Over the next year, the United States would also pull out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty with Russia (signaling a desire for rearmament) and the treaty governing the International Criminal Court (a key accord mandated in the United Nations Charter). “Unilateralism” became the buzzword to describe the new ideology governing America.

Trotsky, who had already once declared his opinion that he believed the U.S. would at some point seek to “organize the world,” and perhaps sensing things to come, summed up the “unilateralism” of a fascist state this way: “The totalitarian state, subjecting all aspects of economic, political, and cultural life to finance capital, is the instrument for creating a supranationalist state, an Imperialist empire, ruling over continents, ruling over the whole world.”

Can we say with full confidence that the United States is an “Imperialist empire,” as he puts it? Based on the events since Sept. 11, 2001, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, one could

certainly conclude that, if anything, this country is taking the first steps on that road — a road that ends inevitably at the outbreak of a Third World War. However, there is much more that must happen for this protracted fascism we see in the United States to achieve its empire and a new “Pax Americana” — a new “American Century.” Many more wars, including wars with rival imperialist powers like France and Germany (or their proxies), will have to be waged to clarify the situation. However, one thing is certain: barring an uprising and democratic revolution, the road to an Imperialist empire is clear and open. Not even a relatively peaceful change at the head of the regime, or the state, can alter its path in any meaningful — to say nothing of fundamental — way.

SOMEONE ONCE SAID that the Iron Heel of fascism has always aimed for America, but usually fell in Europe. Today we deal with a mind and body attached to that Iron Heel that is older and wiser, which has learned from its mistakes — and its enemies — and has been able to craft a finely-tuned agenda and program that has successfully broken 225 years of democratic tradition. The revolutionary ideals of “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” have been discarded in favor of willful ignorance, malign neglect and institutional misery. The principles of the Enlightenment now sit shrouded in a sea of hateful vengeance. Peace and prosperity are sacrificed on the altar of brigandage and social barbarism. The curtain has fallen, and all that remains are the deep echoes of hard-worn soles on crumbling roads.

And this is America.

This is America.