

Trump: The ugly reality of American politics

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Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's call for a ban on Muslims entering the United States, either as immigrants or visitors, has ignited a political firestorm. Trump's open appeal to the most reactionary, racist and fascist sentiments has created a political crisis for the American ruling elite.

His crude rhetoric shatters the official pretense that America is the defender of "freedom" and "democracy," which has been used by Democratic and Republican administrations alike to justify imperialist wars and interventions throughout the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa. Trump rips off this democratic mask. He stands openly for the violent suppression of anyone who might dare to oppose the demands of corporate America, either abroad or at home.

This accounts for the volley of denunciations of Trump from a wide array of spokesmen for the US political establishment. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said Trump's proposal "disqualifies him from serving as president." Earnest called his rhetoric "harmful to the country," saying it made it harder to "work in partnership" with American Muslim leaders to identify potential threats.

The official spokesman for the Pentagon, Peter Cook, who normally refuses to comment on domestic political matters, declared, "Anything that tries to bolster the ISIL narrative that the United States is somehow at war with Islam is contrary to our values and contrary to our national security."

House Speaker Paul Ryan, the top congressional Republican, told reporters, "Freedom of religion is a fundamental constitutional principle. It's a founding principle of this country." At the same time, he declared that if Trump were the Republican nominee for president, he would support him.

The American media issued a series of denunciations of Trump in editorials, cartoons and columns published Wednesday, many of which compared Trump to Hitler

or Mussolini. CNN posted a column by its national security editor, Peter Bergen, posing the question, "Is Trump a fascist?"

The *Detroit Free Press*, the largest newspaper in southeast Michigan, home to more than 100,000 Muslim-Americans, published a front-page editorial under the banner headline "We Stand Together." The statement denounced Trump's views as "nothing more than rank bigotry and racism, a reach back to the darkest chapters of America's history."

The official statements of shock over Trump's fascist views, together with hand-wringing claims that "this is not who we are," are as cynical as they are dishonest. The ruling class does not like the reactionary, brutal and anti-democratic essence of its policies to be so bluntly stated.

The billionaire's ranting is not in contradiction to the actual practice of American imperialism, but a direct expression of it. Trump's statements dovetail entirely with the policies that produced Abu Ghraib, Fallujah, CIA secret prisons and Guantanamo Bay.

The American ruling class *is* what it *does*, not what it proclaims in holiday speeches celebrating the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, or, as in Obama's remarks Wednesday, the 150th anniversary of the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery. The time is long gone when the American government fought a war to free the slaves. It now wages wars to enslave the world to Wall Street.

For 30 years, the United States has waged one war after another to maintain its domination of the Middle East and Central Asia, the location of the largest oil and gas reserves on the planet. These wars have not only brutalized the soldiers who took part in them, they have further brutalized the commanders in the military-intelligence apparatus and their political and media frontmen.

Along with rampant militarism, a parallel process has seen the criminalization of the financial aristocracy as a

whole, with great fortunes increasingly made from the type of financial swindling that produced the 2008 Wall Street crash. With the growth of social inequality to staggering levels, the ruling elite requires ever greater levels of violence against the most oppressed sections of the working class.

This society has become so brutalized that, according to one report published last week, 200,000 Americans have been murdered in the last 15 years alone. The United States is a country at war, not just with the Middle East, but with itself.

Trump's rise has a definite political logic. He represents the intersection of the media and the emergence of this criminal element within the bourgeoisie. His personal fortune is the product of real estate speculation in Manhattan and Atlantic City casinos, followed by his crossover into media celebrity as the host of a series of programs in which he was portrayed as the avatar of the successful capitalist boss—ruthless and decisive.

The rise of such a figure to a leading position in the Republican presidential campaign demonstrates that a fascist tendency is emerging within the official US two-party political structure. It is notable that while half the Republican presidential field condemned Trump's proposed ban on Muslims, half did not, and several openly solidarized themselves with the billionaire.

Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, now leading in the polls in Iowa, where votes will be counted in caucuses less than eight weeks away, declared, "I like Donald Trump." He went on to say, "I commend Donald Trump for standing up and focusing America's attention on the need to secure our borders."

Overnight polls showed that among likely Republican caucus and primary voters, 65 percent favored Trump's ban on Muslims. This alone demonstrates how Trump's candidacy has been used to shift the US official political spectrum even further to the right.

The Democratic Party shares responsibility for the emergence of Trump, since, like the Republicans, it has pursued policies of imperialist war abroad and attacks on the jobs, living standards and democratic rights of the working class at home. Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton is a leading advocate of escalating the US military intervention in the Syrian civil war, demanding in a TV interview Sunday "a much more

robust air campaign against ISIS targets, against the oil infrastructure, against their leadership," as well as an increase in the number of US Special Forces.

As for her chief rival for the nomination, the so-called "socialist" Bernie Sanders, he seeks to avoid any discussion of foreign policy because he is a longstanding supporter of imperialist war in the Middle East. There is an instructive contrast between Sanders and Trump. The billionaire, openly contemptuous of the existing political setup, is threatening to run outside the two-party system and take his supporters with him, pointing to polls showing that 68 percent of his supporters would back him as an independent.

Sanders is busy embedding himself ever more deeply in the Democratic Party. He diligently pursues his designated role in the campaign: appealing to workers and young people outraged by the growth of social inequality and directing them back within the confines of this party of Wall Street and American imperialism.

That Trump can credibly threaten to run his own campaign, which would be a personalist movement financed by his multibillion-dollar fortune, says a great deal about the dangers facing working people. Whatever the immediate outcome of the 2016 campaign, which is still in its early stages, there are powerful objective forces, above all the expanding war drive of US imperialism, not only in the Middle East, but against China and Russia, which feed the type of ultra-reactionary, racist and chauvinist politics articulated by Trump.

The emergence of a proto-fascist trend in America underscores the necessity for the development of an independent political movement of the working class to oppose imperialist war on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

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