

Clinton Highlights Trump's Ultra-Right Ties to Curry Favor with Establishment Republicans

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In a widely-publicized speech delivered Wednesday at a community college in Reno, Nevada, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton sought to exploit the increasingly fascist tenor of the Donald Trump campaign to make an appeal for support from conservatives and Republicans.

Clinton used the speech, her only major public appearance in the second half of August, to shift her campaign further to the right, openly appealing for the support of more traditional right-wingers on the grounds that Trump was beyond the pale politically.

"This is not conservatism as we have known it, this is not Republicanism as we have known it," she declared, adding that the November election was "a moment of reckoning for every Republican dismayed that the Party of Lincoln has become the Party of Trump."

To refer to the modern Republican Party as the "Party of Lincoln" is a political travesty, as is the attempt to present the Trump phenomenon as something totally alien to the political establishment in general and the Republican Party in particular.

Beginning with the 1964 presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon's "southern strategy," the political and geographic base of the party was transformed, as diehard Southern racists who left the Democratic Party during the civil rights struggles were integrated into the Republican Party.

Clinton presented the Republican Party leadership as anti-racist—pointing favorably to presidential candidates Bob Dole and John McCain as well as former President George W. Bush. But as she well knows, the Republican Party has engaged in a devil's bargain with the remnants of white supremacy over many decades. Among the plotters involved in the "vast right-wing conspiracy" about which Clinton warned at the time of the impeachment campaign against her then-president husband were unreconstructed segregationists in Arkansas and other Southern states.

It was Ronald Reagan, still invoked today as the chief Republican deity, who began his 1980 presidential campaign with a rally in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the rural town where three young civil rights workers were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in 1964. Before an all-white audience, he pledged to defend "state's rights," the banner under which the segregationists had fought their losing battle.

Clinton pointed to the Republican candidate's recent appointment of Stephen Bannon, the chief executive of the ultra-right Breitbart News, as his campaign CEO. This, she argued, showed that the Republican Party was being taken over by the alt-right, racist and white

supremacist elements, previously on the fringes of the party, but now being “brought into the mainstream” by Trump.

Clinton cited a number of Trump’s most outrageous statements and positions, from his call to ban Muslims from entering the United States to his vilification of a federal judge because his parents were born in Mexico. She declared, “These are racist ideas. Race-baiting ideas. Anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-women.”

Trump has provided ample ammunition for such an attack. The day before Clinton’s speech, he appeared at a campaign rally in Mississippi with ultra-right British politician Nigel Farage. The former head of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), Farage spearheaded the successful “Leave” campaign in the recent referendum on continued British membership in the European Union, mounting a racist campaign against immigrant workers.

The new Trump campaign chief, Stephen Bannon, is everything Clinton says and more: a neo-fascist (a word Clinton was careful to avoid), who seeks to transform the Republican Party along the lines of the National Front in France, the Alternative for Germany, the Freedom Party in Austria and Farage’s UKIP.

Based on Clinton’s speech, however, one could only conclude that Trump’s appeal is based simply on racism and the significant support he has attracted, including among lower income and working class voters, reflects a broad popular constituency for racist views. Clinton did not, and could not for definite political reasons, acknowledge that there is an objective social basis for a response to Trump’s right-wing populism—namely, the desperate social crisis facing broad sections of the American population due to the right-wing policies of the Democrats no less than the Republicans. Trump is exploiting the absence within the political system of any expression of the interests and needs of ordinary people.

He is able to get a hearing because millions of people are being driven into economic insecurity and poverty while the rich and the super-rich continue to amass obscene levels of wealth. He is able with some success to divert mass discontent along reactionary nationalist and racist channels precisely because what passes for the “left” in American politics, anchored by the Democratic Party, has moved ever further to the right, culminating in the Obama administration, which has presided over endless war and an unprecedented redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top of the economic ladder.

There was no hint in Clinton’s speech of the attacks on economic inequality that she occasionally indulged in when she was facing the primary challenge of Bernie Sanders. On the contrary, she denounced Trump’s recent pretensions of sympathy for the appalling conditions of poverty and unemployment among African Americans in many US cities by declaring, “He doesn’t see the success of black leaders in every field, the vibrancy of the black-owned businesses, or the strength of the black church.”

The other major component of Clinton’s campaign is racial and identity politics, which are used to divide the working class and secure the support of privileged social layers—including a thin layer of upper-middle class blacks, Hispanics and women—for American imperialism.

Trump was spawned by the rise of a parasitic financial aristocracy whose fortunes are based on speculation rather than the development of industry. This process has been accompanied by a vast growth in the political influence of the military-intelligence apparatus in the course of 25 years of nearly continuous US wars.

Clinton does not care to discuss these processes because she herself is demonstratively vying for the favor of Wall Street and the national security state, presenting herself as the most reliable “commander-in-chief” for US imperialism, while deriding Trump as unstable, if not outright disloyal.

That explains the seemingly bizarre detour in Clinton’s speech, as she went from mentioning Trump’s appearance with Nigel Farage to declaring that “the grand godfather of this global brand of extreme nationalism is Russian President Vladimir Putin.”

She continued, “Trump himself heaps praise on Putin and embraces pro-Russian policies. He talks casually of abandoning our NATO allies, recognizing Russia’s annexation of Crimea, giving the Kremlin a free hand in Eastern Europe. American presidents from Truman, to Reagan, to Bush and Clinton, to Obama have rejected the kind of approach Trump is taking on Russia.”

Clinton’s right-wing election campaign—based on praise for Obama’s “legacy,” a refusal to even acknowledge the existence of a social crisis, and warmongering denunciations of Russia—demonstrates that support for the Democrats and claims that they can be pressured to the left do not halt the growth of extreme right forces such as Trump. On the contrary, they fuel the spread of such tendencies.

The precondition for a serious struggle against war, inequality and attacks on democratic rights is a complete break with the Democratic Party and bourgeois politics as a whole, and the development of an independent political movement of the working class.

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