

# Trump in Historical Perspective-From Nixon to Bannon-Breitbart and the Alt Right Fringe

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*Trump is not a new phenomenon. He is the latest, and most aggressive to date, repackaging of corporate-radical right attempts to reassert corporate hegemony and control over the global economy and US society. His antecedents are the policies and strategies of Nixon, Reagan and Gingrich's 'Contract for America' in the 1990s.*

Trump has of course added his 'new elements' to the mix. He's integrated the Tea Party elements left over from their purge by Republican Party elites after the 2012 national elections. He's unified some of the more aggressive elements of the finance capital elites from hedge funds, commercial real estate, private equity, securities speculators and their ilk—i.e. the Adelsons, Singers, Mercers, and Schwarzman's. He's captured, for the moment at least, important elements of the white industrial working class in the Midwest and South, co-opted union leaders from the building trades, and even neutralized top union leaders in some manufacturing industries with fake promises of a new manufacturing renaissance in the US. He's firmly united the gun lobby of the NRA and the religious right now with **the Breitbart propaganda machine** and the so-called 'Alt-Right' fringe.

Trump is a political and economic reaction to the crisis in the US economy in the 21st century, which the Obama administration could not effectively address after the 2008-09 crash. Trump shares this historical role with Nixon, who was a response to another decline in US corporate-economic political power in the early 1970s; with Reagan who was a response to the economic stagnation of the late 1970s; and with the 'Contract for America', a program associated with a takeover of Congress by the radical right in 1994, after the US housing and savings and loan crash and recession in 1989-1992. All these antecedents find their expression in the Trump movement and the policy and program positions that are now taking form under the Trump regime.

American economic and political elites are not reluctant to either change the rules of the game in their favor whenever warranted to ensure their hegemony, targeting not only foreign capitalist competitors when their influence grows too large but also potential domestic opposition by workers and unions, minorities, and even liberals who try to step out of their role as junior partners in rule.

This restructuring of rule has occurred not only in the early 1970s, early 1980s, mid 1990s, but now as well post Obama—i.e. a regime that failed to contain both foreign competition and domestic restlessness. US elites did it before in the 20th century as well, on an even grander scale in 1944-47 and before that again during the decade of the first world war.

What's noteworthy of the current, latest restructuring is its even greater nastiness and

aggressiveness compared to earlier similar efforts to restore control.

Trump's policies and strategies reflect new elements in the policy and politics mix. He's rearranged the corporate-right wing base—bringing in new forces and challenging others to go along or get out. New proposals and programs reflect that base change—i.e. in immigration, trade, appeals to white working class jobs, economic nationalism in general, etc. But Trump's fundamental policies and strategy share a clear continuity with past restructurings introduced before him by Nixon and Reagan in the early 1970s and 1980s, respectively.

## **NIXON-TRUMP**

Like his predecessors, Trump arose in response to major foreign capitalist and domestic popular challenges to the Neoliberal corporate agenda. Nixon may have come to office on the wave of splits and disarray in the Democratic party over Vietnam in 1968, but he was clearly financed and promoted by big corporate elements convinced that a more aggressive response to global economic challenges by Europe and domestic protest movements were required. European capitalists in the late 1960s were becoming increasingly competitive with American, both in Europe and in the US. The dollar was over-valued and US exports were losing ground. And middle east elites were nationalizing their oil fields. Domestically, American workers and unions launched the second biggest strike wave in US history in 1969-71, winning contract settlements 20%-25% increases in wages and benefits. Mass social movements led by environmentalists, women, and minorities were expanding. Social legislation like job safety and health laws were being passed.

Nixon's response to these foreign and domestic challenges was to counterattack foreign competitors by launching his 'New Economic Program' (NEP) in 1971 and to stop and rollback union gains. Not unlike Trump today, the primary focus of NEP was to improve the competitiveness of US corporations in world markets.

- To this effect the US dollar was devalued as the US intentionally imploded the post-1945 Bretton Woods international monetary system. Trump wants to force foreign competitors to raise the value of their currencies, in effect achieving a dollar devaluation simply by another means. The means may be different, but the goal is the same.
- Nixon imposed a 10% import tax, not unlike Trump's proposed 20% border tax today.
- Nixon proposed subsidies and tax cuts for US auto companies and other manufacturers; Trump has been promising Ford, Carrier Corp., Boeing and others the same, in exchange for token statements they'll reduce (not stop or reverse) offshoring of jobs.
- Nixon introduced a 7% investment tax credit for businesses without verification that he claimed would stimulate business spending in the US; Trump is going beyond, adding multi-trillion dollar tax cuts for business and investors, while saying more tax cuts for businesses and investors is needed to create jobs, even though historically there's no empirical evidence whatsoever for the claim.
- Nixon froze union wages and then rolled back their 1969-71 20% contract gains to 5.5%; Trump attacks unions by encourage state level 'right to work' business legislation that will outlaw workers requiring to join unions or pay dues.
- Nixon accelerated defense spending while refusing to spend money on social programs by 'impounding' the funds authorized by Congress; Trump has just announced an historic record 9% increase in defense spending, while proposing to gut

spending on education, health, and social programs by the same 9% amount.

- Nixon's economic policies screwed up the US economy, leading to the worst inflation and worst recession since the great depression; So too will Trump's.

Similarities between Nixon and Trump abound in the political realm as well.

- Nixon fought and railed against the media; so now too is Trump. The only difference was one used a telephone and the other his iphone.

- Nixon declared he had a mandate, and the 'silent majority' of middle America was behind him; Trump claims his 'forgotten man' of middle America put him in office.

- Nixon bragged construction worker 'hard hats' backed him, as he encouraged construction companies to form their anti-union Construction Industry Roundtable' group; Trump welcomes construction union leaders to the White House while he supports reducing 'prevailing wage' for construction work.

- Nixon continually promoted 'law and order' and attempted to repress social movements and protests by means of the Cointelpro program FBI-CIA spying on citizens, while developing plans for rollout in his second term to intensify repression of protestors and social movements; Trump tweets police can do no wrong (whom he loves second only to his generals) and calls for new investigations of protestors, mandatory jail sentences for protestors and flagburners, and encourages governors to propose repressive legislation to limit exercise of First Amendment rights of free assembly.

- Trump's also calling for an investigation of election voting fraud, which will serve as cover to propose even more State level limits on voters rights.

- Nixon undertook a major shift in US foreign policy, establishing relations with Communist China—a move designed to split the Soviet Union (Russia) further from China; Trump is just flipping Nixon's strategy around, trying to establish better relations with Russia as a preliminary to intensifying attacks on China.

- Anticipating defeat in Southeast Asia, Nixon declared victory and walked away from Vietnam; Trump will do the same in Syria, Iraq and the Middle East.

- The now infamous 'Powell Memorandum' was written on Nixon's watch, (within days of Nixon's August 1971 NEP announcement)—a plan for corporate America to launch an aggressive economic and social offensive to rollback unions and progressive movements and to restore corporate hegemony over US society; an equivalent Trump 'Bannon Memorandum' strategic plan for the same will no doubt eventually be made public after the fact as well.

- Nixon was a crook; so will be Trump branded, but not until they release his taxes and identify payments (emoluments) received by his global businesses from foreign governments and security services. But this won't happen until corporate America gets its historic tax cuts, deregulation, and new bilateral free trade agreements from Trump.

## **REAGAN-TRUMP**

The parallels in economic policy and political strategy are too many and too similar to consider merely coincidental. Nixon is Trump's policy and strategy mentor.

Similar comparisons can be made between Trump and Reagan, given a different twist here, a change in emphasis there.

- Reagan introduced a major increase in defense spending, including a 600 ship navy, more missiles and nuclear warheads, and a military front in space called 'star wars'; Trump loves generals and promises them his record 9% increase in war spending as

well, paid for by equal cuts in social programs.

- Reagan introduced a \$700 billion plus tax cut for business and investors in 1981, and an even more generous investment tax credit and accelerated depreciation allowances (tax cuts); Trump promises to cut business tax rates by half, end all taxes on their offshore profits, end all inheritance taxes, keep investor offshore tax loopholes, etc.—more than \$6 trillion worth— while eliminating wage earners' tax credits.
- Reagan cut social spending by tens of billions; Trump has proposed even more tens of billions.
- Reagan promised to balance the US budget but gave us accelerating annual budget deficits, fueled by record defense spending and the tax cuts for business of more than \$700 billion (on a GDP of \$4 trillion), the largest cuts in US history up to that time; Trump's budget deficit from \$6 trillion in business tax cuts and war spending escalation will make Reagan's pale in comparison.
- Reagan's trade policy to reverse deteriorating US trade with Japan and Europe, was to directly attack Japan and Europe ( 1985 Plaza Accord and Louvre Accord trade agreements), forcing Japan-Europe to over-stimulate their economies and inflate their prices to give US companies an export cost competitive advantage; Trump's policy simply changes the target countries to Mexico, Germany and China. Each will have its very own 'Accord' deal with Trump-US.
- The first free trade NAFTA deal with Canada was signed on Reagan's watch; Trump only wants to 'rearrange the deck chairs' on the free trade 'Titanic' and replace multilateral free trade with bilateral deals he negotiates and can claim personal credit for.
- Reagan encouraged speculators to gut workers' pension plans and he shifted the burden of social security taxation onto workers to create a 'social security trust fund' surplus the government could then steal; Trump promises not to propose cutting social security, but refuses to say if the Republicans in Congress attach cuts to other legislation he'll veto it.
- Reagan deregulated banks, airlines, utilities, trucking and other businesses, which led to financial crises in the late 1980s and the 1990-91 recession; Trump has championed repeal of the even token 2010 Dodd-Frank bank regulation act, and has deregulated by executive order even more than Reagan or Nixon.
- Stock market, junk bond market, and housing markets crashed in the wake of Reagan's financial deregulation initiatives; the so-called 'Trump Trade' since the election have escalated stock and junk bond valuations to bubble heights.
- Reagan bragged of his working class Republican supporters, and busted unions like the Air Traffic Controllers, while encouraging legal attacks on union and worker rights; Trump has his 'forgotten man', and courts union leaders in the White House while encouraging states to push 'right to work' laws that prohibited requiring workers to join unions or pay dues.
- Reagan replaced his chair of the Federal Reserve Bank, Paul Volcker, when he wouldn't go along with Reagan-James Baker (Treasury Secretary) plans on reducing interest rates; Trump will replace current chair, Janet Yellen, when her term as chair expires next year.

Then there are the emerging political parallels between Reagan and Trump as well:

- Even before the 1980 national election was even held, Reagan's future staff members met secretly with foreign government of Iran to request they not release the 300 American hostages there before the 1980 election; Trump staff (i.e. General Flynn),

apparently after the election, met with Russian representatives to discuss relations before confirmed by Congress. Reagan's boys got off; Flynn didn't. Events are similar, though outcomes different.

- Reagan attacked the liberal media. Much less aggressively perhaps than Trump today, but nevertheless the once liberal-progressive Public Broadcasting Company was chastised, under threat by the government of budget cuts or outright privatization. It responded by inviting fewer left of center guest opinions to the show. So too thereafter did mainstream television Sunday talk shows ('Meet the Press', etc.); Trump's attack on the media is more aggressive, aiming not to tame the media but de-legitimize it. He has proposed to privatize the Public Broadcasting Corporation.
- Reagan staff directly violated Congressional laws by arranging drug money seizures from Latin America by the CIA to pay for Iranian arms bought for the US by Israel, that were then distributed to the 'contras' in Nicaragua to launch a civil war against their duly elected left government. Nixon had his 'Watergate', Reagan his 'Irangate'. Next 'gate' will be Trump's.
- Reagan's offensive against the environment was notorious, including appointments of cabinet members who declared publicly their intent to dismantle the department and gutting the EPA budget; Trump's appointments and budget slashing now follow the same path.
- If Nixon's policy was court China-challenge Russia, Reagan's was court Russia-isolate China; Trump's policy is to return to a Nixonian court Russia-confront China.

The corporate-radical right alliance continued after Reagan, re-emerging once again in the 1994 so-called 'Contract With America', as Clinton's Democrats lost 54 seats in the US House of Representatives to the Republican right after backtracking on notable Democrat campaign promises made in the 1992 elections. The landslide was a harbinger of things to come in a later Obama administration in 2010.

The Contract for America proposed a program that shares similar policies with the Trump administration. It was basically a plagiarism of a Reagan 1985 speech. But it provided program continuity through the 1990s, re-emerging in a more aggressive grass roots form in the Teaparty movement in 2008.

### **TRUMP's 'Breitbartification' of NIXON-REAGAN**

Trump is more than just Nixon-Reagan on steroids. Trump is taking the content and the tone of the conservative-radical right to a more aggressive level. The aggressiveness and new elements added to the radical right conservative perspective in the case of Trump are the consequence of adding a Breitbart-Steve Bannon strategic (and even tactical) overlay to the basic Nixon-Reagan programmatic foundation.

The influence of Bannon on Trump strategy, programs, policy and even tactics cannot be underestimated. This is the new key element, missing with Nixon, Reagan, and the Contract with America. The Breitbart strategy is to introduce a major dose of 'economic nationalism', heretofore missing in the radical right. This is designed to expand the radical right's appeal to the traditional working class—a key step on the road to establishing a true Fascist grass roots populist movement in the future.

The appearance of opposition to free trade, protectionism, reshoring of jobs, cuts in foreign aid, direct publicity attacks on Mexico, China, Germany and even Australia are all expressions of Trump's new element of economic nationalism.

Another element of Bannonomism is to identify as 'the enemy' the neoliberal institutions—the media and mainstream press, the elites two parties, and even the Judiciary whenever it stands up to Trump policies.

Added to the 'enemy' is the 'danger within', which is the foreigner, the immigrant, both inside and outside the country. The immigrant is the potential 'new jew' in the Trump regime. This too comes from Breitbart-Bannon.

Another strategic element brought by Bannon to the Trump table is the expanded hiring and tightening of ties to various police organizations nationwide and the glorification of the police while denigrating anyone who stands up to them. No more investigations of police brutality by the federal government under Trump.

Still another Breitbart strategic element is to attack the character of democracy itself, raising issues of fraud in voting, and undermining popular understanding of what constitutes the right to assembly and free speech. That is all a prelude to legitimizing further state level limitations and restrictions on voting rights, already gaining momentum before Trump.

Even the military is not exempt from the Bannon-Breitbart strategy: high level military and defense establishment figures who haven't wholeheartedly come over to the Trump regime are replaced with non-conformist and opportunist generals from the military establishment.

**Bannon-Breitbart** is the conduit to the various grass roots right wing radical elements, that will be organized and mobilized if necessary, should the old elites, media and their supporters choose to challenge Trump directly with impeachment or other 'nuclear' options.

Nixon and Reagan both restructured the political and economic US capitalist system. But they did so within the rules of the game within that system. Trump differs by attacking the rules of the game, and the established elites and their institutions, while offering those same elites the opportunity for great economic personal gain if they go along. Some are, and some still aren't. The 'showdown' is yet to come, and not until 2018 at the earliest.

Trump should be viewed as a continuation of the corporate-radical right alliance that has been growing in the US since the 1970s. The difference today is that that alliance is firmly entrenched at all levels and in all institutions now, unlike in the past, and inside as well as outside the government.

And the opposition to it today is far weaker than in the 1970s, 80s, or 90s: the Democratic Party has virtually collapsed outside Washington DC as it continues myopically on its neoliberal path with its recent selection of Perez as national chair by the Clinton-Obama-Big Donor wing (i.e. the former Democratic leadership Conference faction that captured the party back in 1992) still firmly in control of that party; the unions are but a shadow of their past selves and split, with some actually supporting Trump; the so-called liberal press has been thoroughly corporatized and shows it has no idea how to confront the challenge, feeding the Trump movement instead of weakening it; grass root minority, ethnic, and progressive movements are fragmented and isolated from each other like never before, locked into their mutually isolated identity politics protests; and what was once the 'far left' of socialists have virtually disappeared organizationally, condemning the growing millions of youth who express a favorable view of socialism to have to learn the lessons of political organizing from scratch all over again.

But they will learn. Trump and friends will teach them.

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