

Why Have the Republicans Gone Off the Deep End? Is it All Because of Trump?

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The Republican Party has gone wacko! The evidence is overwhelming: Some of their members call the January 6th attack on the Capitol a tourist visit. They tolerate Marjorie Taylor Greene's QAnon, anti-Semitism, space lasers etc. They are trying to re-run the 2020 election after it has been settled for 6 months. They are violating Federal law with re-audits etc. They are trying to suppress the voting rights of Black people and other people of color. Their grasp on reality is looser than the flat earthers.

But why is this? The media says that Congress people are afraid of Trump and the "Trump Base". They are afraid to lose primaries to Trumpier candidates in the 2022 election. They say he has a magic hold on Republicans — with 53% of Republican voters thinking that Trump won the election. They imply that it is not primarily the ruling class, but a section of the population that is driving the Republicans to the Right and away from democracy.

The media explanation is false or at the very least incomplete. In the Senate, two thirds of Republicans are not even up for re-election in 2022, including Mitch McConnell.

In fact, the current political crisis and irrationalism reflects deeper causes. The Republican Party is divided between the large multi-national, billionaire wing and the smaller corporate capitalists. These smaller capitalists have suffered economically compared to the billionaires for years, but especially since COVID. The billionaires gained \$1.3 trillion in new wealth between March 2020 and March 2021.

Most of the smaller capitalists, especially those forced to shut down during COVID have missed out. A disproportionate share of government aid has gone to the billionaire capitalists. The social and economic crisis of capitalism has radicalized sections of the middle class. It has also driven sections of smaller corporate capital in a more desperate right wing direction.

Many of the smaller capitalists supported Trump's America First protectionism. They didn't want to pay taxes to defend "American Global Leadership" (American Empire) that they saw as favoring the billionaires. They opposed the COVID shutdowns. In some ways, this division goes back to the isolationism of the 30s, as explained in Doug Henwood's article in *Jacobin*.

The larger capitalists are divided. Most of them tend to be more ruling class conscious. They understand that to compete with China, they need to rebuild the infrastructure in the U.S. They are willing to sacrifice some profit in the short term to make the U.S. competitive in the long run. Biden has explicitly motivated his main proposals, the American Rescue Plan, the American Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan on this basis.

Smaller capitalists have less of a secure profit margin which would allow them to think in the long term. They want immediate payoffs in terms of lower taxes and less regulation.

Another important factor for the small corporate capitalists is this: They tend to pay more taxes than the billionaire capitalists. They realize that raising the corporate tax rate is likely to hit them much harder than their bigger competitors. Jeff Bezos has declared he is willing to pay higher taxes to support Biden's infrastructure plan. This is mighty generous of Bezos since Amazon had paid almost NO federal income tax in the last 3 years!

The largest capitalists tended to support Clinton in 2016 and Biden in 2020. The smaller corporate capitalists tended to support Trump. They did not necessarily support all of Trump's program. They often found him crude and incompetent. However, they especially liked his business tax cuts and deregulation.

There is a battle for the soul of the Republican Party going on. Historically, the Republicans have been the preferred party of the biggest businesses. However from the Tea Party on, the smaller capitalists have made a play for power within it. They saw Trump as their standard bearer, even with reservations. This is the real source of the radicalization of the Republican Party, not some hypnosis by Trump.

Does this mean that the smaller corporate capitalists support all of the radicalism and irrationality on display in the Republican Party? No — but they are willing to tolerate it for now. In general, they do not support overthrowing the basic institutions of American capitalism. They did not fully back the attack on the Capitol on January 6th. They still want to influence the government in a more conservative direction, not overthrow it. This is a crucial difference between the millionaires and middle class right wing revolutionaries who attacked the Capitol.

However, the millionaires are quite willing to use the "Trump Base" to shift politics to the Right. They will use the foot soldiers of QAnon etc. for their own purposes. As such, their representatives are loath to denounce the conspiracy theories, and post-election audits. They are quite willing to win elections by shrinking the electorate. They are not so much afraid of the Trump base as they see it as useful right now.

As with previous periods, they are not ready to hand power to the middle class right wing radicals but they are willing to use them for now. Just as capitalists in Germany kept the Nazis in reserve during the 20s, the smaller corporate capitalists are willing to tolerate the right-wing revolutionaries and even give them some support.

As always there is overlap but also a distinction between the small corporate capitalists, such as the "pillow guy" Mike Lindell, and the mostly petit bourgeois Trump base. Many workers have been pulled into voting for Trump. However, his most consistent base is the middle class: both the

traditional petit bourgeoisie (shop keepers etc.) and its new layers (independent professionals, franchise owners, cops, managers etc.).

This is especially true of the extreme Right part of this base. The “Insurgent Supremacists” (so named by Matthew Lyons and Three Way Fight) are those who actually want to overthrow the government and institute a more right wing one that they feel will represent small property holders. Most of the known Capitol attackers were middle class.

The small scale corporate capitalists are currently allied with the Trump Base in their attempt to take control of the Republican Party from the billionaires. At this point, they seem to be winning. Whether they will continue to win is up in the air.

The billionaire oriented Republicans are extremely concerned by this development. They decry their opponents’ flirting with insurrection. They stress that the institutions of bourgeois democracy need to be respected. They believe that capitalist rule is best secured by stable norms and procedures that can win the trust of the vast majority. They accuse the small capitalist wing of being unpatriotic. Of course they present their position as in the interests of the whole population and American “democracy.” In fact they are concerned about capitalist stability.

The traditional Republicans remain resolutely conservative. Even though their politics on specific issues may be closer to their small corporate capitalist opponents than to the Democrats, they believe that institutional stability is more important than particular policies. For example, many of them also oppose raising the corporate tax rate. However, since they represent the more stable capitalists, they are less desperate to increase their immediate profit. They don’t see the need to even flirt with throwing out the whole system for immediate gain.

This puts these traditional Republicans in a dilemma. They don’t want to abandon their party to the small corporate capitalists. Yet they don’t want to give support to the small corporate capitalists by staying in a party they no longer fully control.

The future is unclear, but one likely outcome is traditional Republicans joining the Democrats either officially or de facto. Some may become independents who actually back the Democrats. The Lincoln Project and the other various anti-Trump Republican formations backed Biden in the 2020 election. This is very likely to create a conservative pull on the Democratic Party. It may become the preferred vehicle of the billionaires.

It seems unlikely that traditional Republicans will be able to create a viable third party. A large part of the potential base of such a party is with the Trump/ small corporate capitalist wing. There seems to be little appeal to the mass of Republican voters for the established wing of the Republican Party as long as there is a Trumpist alternative.

The real policy division in the ruling class is over a move away from neo-liberalism to a more government directed economy. Biden et al. see that the only way to compete with China is with more government intervention. They believe that the U.S. can’t leave the rebuilding of infrastructure to chance. Since private capital will not rebuild the roads, bridges, broad band etc. on its own, the government must. This strategy has nothing to do with socialism. It will give billions of dollars in contracts to private corporations. It is a strategy for the victory of American capitalism over its rivals. It is aimed at longer term capital competition and accumulation. Capital competitiveness as always will involve the reduction of labor’s share of the national income — no matter Biden’s pro-labor rhetoric.

Biden’s strategy is not a complete repudiation of neo-liberalism. Its plans are based on government

money going to private corporations to perform work the government could do directly. It only wants to slightly raise corporate tax rates. It will not aim to return to the tax structure of the early 1970s or even to 2016 levels. As time goes on, it will likely reinforce and even increase existing austerity.

The right wing opposition to this is based on the immediate increased costs to small capitalist corporations. It is based on opposition to the regulation needed to carry it out. It is based on extreme short-termism. In mobilizing opposition to this plan, the small corporate capitalists and conservative billionaires raise the spectre of SOCIALISM. For them, socialism means government intervention in the economy — even if that is for capitalist purposes!

How should the Left relate to this conflict? We should oppose both sides! We need to realize that each policy reflects the interests and strategies of different wings of the ruling class, not working class interests. Biden's plan could for example lead to increased conflict with China — even the possibility of war. We should critically assess any particular plans put forward and only support those that actually help ordinary people. Even this limited support should be critical. We should constantly push for more support to workers and the poor and a real path to environmental sanity. We have no interest in aiding the billionaires against the millionaires or vice versa. Instead, we should use this split in the ruling class to win people to a socialist strategy.

Obviously, we need to actively oppose any attack on voting rights. Instead, we should demand extension of voting rights to all immigrants, prisoners and felons. We should also confront the insurgent supremacists whenever and wherever they appear.

This conflict presents several lessons for us:

1) The ruling-class parties remain ruling class parties. The Trump wing is not attempting to take the Republicans away from capitalists in general. Instead one wing of capital is fighting another for control.

2) The Tea Party strategy is not a useful one for the Left to follow in relation to the Democrats. The TP was an insurgency backed by one wing of capital. It fell off when it shifted the Republicans rightward. It was not an outside takeover of the Republicans. Those who call for a socialist take over of the Democrats do not understand that the Democrats remain a resolutely capitalist party.

3) In fact the conflict within the Republicans is likely to strengthen the corporate domination over the Democrats as ex-Republicans join or at least support the Democrats. The pressure to win over the traditional Republican swing voters will intensify.

4) The current rabidity of the Republicans is the result of ruling class divisions, not the depravity of Hillary Clinton's "basket of deplorables." The party system is dominated by the ruling class. The U.S. is undemocratic in several structural ways. These reinforce the normal capitalist domination of politics in all bourgeois democracies.

5) The "Trump Base" is dominated by the middle class. It is internally divided. Only a section of it is hopelessly reactionary and an even smaller section are revolutionary rightists. Large sections of this base especially workers can be won away by resolute Left politics — but not by tepid liberalism.

An effective strategy requires an accurate analysis of US politics. We should not be seduced by the media's mystification and confusion about the source of the current Republican irrationality. Only with an accurate analysis can we chart our way forward — a way based on resolute working class independence from both wings of capitalism.

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