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Hillary Clinton and the Installation of Authoritarian Right-Wing Regimes in the Americas

By Paul Street
January 6, 2017

Honduras 2009

What is it with Hillary Clinton and the installation of authoritarian right-wing regimes in the Americas? Seven and half years ago, she used her position as Barack Obama’s first Secretary of State to help the right-wing Honduran military and business class overthrow the democratically elected government of Honduras’s then president Manuel Zelaya. Mrs. Clinton did this because she was (and remains) a right-wing neoliberal who naturally opposed Zelaya’s shift to the populist left. She was irritated by his opposition to the United States-led so-called War on Drugs. She did not like his call for the United States’ large Honduran Air Force base to be turned into a civilian airport. She hated his movement toward alliance and cooperation with socialist Cuba and left-populist governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. She disdained Zelaya’s efforts to overcome the interrelated problems of Honduran poverty, Honduran inequality, and Honduras’s long neocolonial subordination to Washington.

With the at least tacit approval of Mrs. Clinton and her boss Obama, Zelaya was seized at gunpoint and exiled to Costa Rica in his pajamas. After this coup, sold on preposterously false legal and constitutional grounds for which Hillary provided political cover, the new military regime staged a rigged election that placed the clownish, racist, and right-wing landowner Porfirio “Pepe Lobo Sosa” in the Honduran presidency. Hillary hailed the farce as a “free, fair, and democratic election with a peaceful transition of power.” Never mind that the election

proceeded amidst interim coup president Roberto Micheletti's suspension of basic civil liberties and in a climate of brutal police-state intimidation. As Diana Johnstone noted in her book *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton*, "The governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela refused to recognize the result, but Washington was content...President Lobo described his regime as a 'government of national reconciliation.' Hillary Clinton praised it as a 'resumption of democratic and constitutional government.'"

The results were not pretty: murderous paramilitary repression of peasants, workers, trade unionists, feminists, and intellectuals; a deepening of mass poverty; assassinations of opposition candidates; expanded corruption and gang violence; "social cleansing" of poor children; a massive flight of unaccompanied minors to Mexico and the U.S. in 2014. The great "children's advocate" Hillary Clinton made sure to encourage the closing of U.S. borders to the thousands of children fleeing the vicious regime she helped impose on Honduras,

The United States 2016

Seven years after the Hillary-backed Honduran coup, Mrs. Clinton and the capitalist-imperial U.S. Deep State she has long served helped place the thin-skinned megalomaniac and right-wing quasi-fascist Donald Trump atop the executive branch of the world's most powerful state. As her former Yale Law classmate and former Bill Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich recently noted in a chilling *Truthdig* commentary that merits lengthy quotation:

"As tyrants take control of democracies, they typically:

- 1/ Exaggerate their mandate to govern – claiming, for example, that they won an election by alandslide even after losing the popular vote.
- 2/ Repeatedly claim massive voter fraud in the absence of any evidence, in order to restrict voting in subsequent elections.
- 3/ Call anyone who opposes them 'enemies.'
- 4/ Turn the public against journalists or media outlets that criticize them, calling them 'deceitful' and 'scum.'
- 5/ Hold few if any press conferences, preferring to communicate with the public directly through mass rallies and unfiltered statements.
- 6/ Tell the public big lies, causing them to doubt the truth and to believe fictions that support the tyrants' goals.
- 7/ Blame economic stresses on immigrants or racial or religious minorities, and foment public bias and even violence against them.

8/ Attribute acts of domestic violence to ‘enemies within,’ and use such events as excuses to beef up internal security and limit civil liberties.

9/ Threaten mass deportations, registries of religious minorities, and the banning of refugees.

10/ Seek to eliminate or reduce the influence of competing centers of power, such as labor unions and opposition parties.

11/ Appoint family members to high positions of authority

12/ Surround themselves with their own personal security force rather than a security detail accountable to the public.

13/ Put generals into top civilian posts

14/ Make personal alliances with foreign dictators.

15/ Draw no distinction between personal property and public property, profiteering from their public office.

Consider yourself warned [about the disturbing authoritarianism of Trump].”

Indeed. Sounds like any number of U.S.-backed right-wing authoritarian governments past and present. Banana-republicanism blows back to the imperial “homeland.”

But what pre-existing “democracy” is Trump “taki[ng] control” of, exactly? It is well known and established that the United States’ political order is an abject corporate and financial plutocracy – an oligarchy of and for Wealthy Few. You don’t have to be a supposedly wild-eyed leftist radical to know this. Just ask the establishment liberal political scientists Martin Gilens (Princeton) and Benjamin Page (Northwestern). Over the past three plus decades, these leading academic researchers have determined, the U.S. political system has functioned as “an oligarchy,” where wealthy elites and their corporations “rule.” Examining data from more than 1,800 different policy initiatives in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Gilens and Page found that wealthy and well-connected elites consistently steer the direction of the country, regardless of and against the will of the U.S. majority and irrespective of which major party holds the White House and/or Congress. “The central point that emerges from our research is that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy,” Gilens and Page write, “while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence.” As Gilens explained to the liberal online journal *Talking Points Memo* two years ago, “ordinary citizens have virtually no influence over what their government does in the United States.” Such is the harsh reality of “really existing capitalist democracy” in the U.S., what Noam Chomsky has called “RECD, pronounced as ‘wrecked.’”

At the same time, we might want to think of the coming authoritarian Trump regime as something that was installed by Hillary Clinton to no small degree. The Clintons and their allies

in the Democratic National Committee rigged the media and electoral game to defeat Bernie Sanders, the leftish social-democratic Democratic presidential candidate who wanted to run against Trump in (policy and ideological) accord with majority progressive public opinion. Consistent with his quaint aspiration, Sanders would likely have stood a better chance than Mrs. Clinton against The Donald. The polls last spring and summer showed Sanders besting Hillary by far in match-ups against Trump – and defeating Trump by a wide margin. Exit polling data suggests strongly that Sanders would have prevailed in the general election.

Hillary's first job was to crush the more viable of the two top Democratic contenders. She succeeded in that assignment, in some very ugly ways. With Sanders defeated and determined to honor his sheepdog pledge to support the eventual Democratic nominee (much to the consternation of many of his supporters), Hillary then proceeded to run a horrible campaign that seemed designed to elect Trump. She was her usual wooden, unimaginative, uninspiring, and conservative self on the campaign trail. Turning her back on the supposedly horrid white working class majority and disdaining the progressive left, the Clinton marketing campaign ran with an ideologically vapid and centrist bourgeois identitarianism that had no real popular traction. As Conor Lynch noted on *Salon* last November, "The Clinton campaign tried to make this election all about Trump's hatefulness ('Love Trumps Hate') and his 'basket of deplorables,' *while offering no real vision of progressive and populist change*. And when those on the left raised legitimate concerns about Clinton's uninspiring message or her political baggage during and after the primaries, they were ridiculously labeled sexist or racist 'bros' by establishment figures (even though some of Clinton's harshest progressive critics were in fact women and people of color)." Earlier in the year, Daniel Denvir insightfully described the Clinton's strategy as "peak neoliberalism, where a distorted version of identity politics is used to defend an oligarchy and a national security state, celebrating diversity in the management of exploitation and warfare."

Hardly the makings of a successful campaign in a time when the top tenth of the upper One Percent owns nearly 90 percent of the nation's wealth and after seven years in which 94% of the 10 million new jobs created have been temporary positions. The jobs are "temporary, contract positions, or part-time 'gig' jobs in a variety of fields"

The selective fake-populist billionaire Trump walked into the voter vacuum left by Hillary's vacuous bourgeois-identitarian neoliberalism, deceptively promising to honor the nation's forgotten working class and bring back America's lost era of good manufacturing jobs.

No Mystery

Sanders knew Hillary was doomed, by the way, near the end. The first dent in my sense that Hillary was "of course" going to defeat Trump – as nearly all the "expert" polls predicted – came the Friday after the Chicago Cubs won the World Series and before Election Day. Sanders was scheduled to speak for Hillary in Iowa City's College Green Park, just three blocks from my house. When running on his own in the primaries, the Vermont senator had over-filled a local community center beyond standing room. It was the same across Iowa and in other "heartland" locations where Trump beat Hillary with some help from the usual racist right-wing voter suppression. (Sanders spoke to giant crowds in remarkable progressive gatherings that the

dominant corporate media could barely cover even while it drooled and obsessed over every one of the Donald's bizarre and despicable Tweets and other statements.) But, now, just four days before Hillary's contest with the ultimate Deplorable candidate and speaking on Mrs. Clinton's behalf, Sanders couldn't fill half of the city-block-sized park. His baritone denunciations of Trump echoed emptily off the porches of disinterested homes in hyper-liberal, bright-blue Iowa City. It was depressing. A smattering of Bernie kids stood around applauding politely but with little enthusiasm. No mystery there. As Bruce Levine recently reflected on *CounterPunch*:

“Bernie Sanders put his 12 million primary voters and other supporters in a double-bind. For Sanders supporters, Hillary Clinton epitomized what they despised. Clinton has been: heavily supported by Wall Street and arms dealers; repeatedly pro-war from Iraq to Libya; a friend and admirer of Henry Kissinger, who for Sanders supporters is one of the greatest war criminals in world history; a former board member of the anti-labor union Wal-Mart Board of Directors; a co-sponsor of the Flag-Protection Act of 2005, which included prison terms for those who destroy the flag; and has had an otherwise despicable and untrustworthy history for progressives.

... Sanders had good reason to believe that Clinton as president would likely betray campaign progressive promises and simply blame failure on the Republicans. But rather than choosing Nader's path, Sanders suppressed the reality of Clinton, and asked his supporters to do the same.... Many Sanders supporters could not shed the reality of Hillary Clinton's anti-progressive history and that the Democratic Party establishment had sabotaged Sanders (who the polls had shown had a much better chance than Clinton of beating Trump); and these supporters lost faith in both Sanders and the electoral process and did not vote—a political-self psychotic break of sorts for people who had ardently believed in voting.”

After the election, I ran into one of Sanders' leading Iowa activists – a smart retired historian who played a significant role in convincing Sanders to throw his hat in the Democratic presidential ring. That same Friday, the activist told me, Sanders reported privately that he was getting a similar tepid response in other “heartland” locations. Mrs. Clinton was “in big trouble,” Sanders confided. I wonder how surprised Hillary was, really.

She might want to think of 2016 as a victory. She served her Wall Street and other corporate donors well by keeping the progressives at bay in the junior partner wing of the national capitalist party duopoly.

Make no mistake: she preferred beating Sanders and then losing to Trump over Sanders beating her and going on to defeat Trump. Hillary and other good neoliberal Democrats like Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Charles Schumer (the Wall Street Senator who “P”BS now praises as the new “leader of the opposition to Trump”), Rahm Emanuel, and Nancy Pelosi know that their first and foremost enemy is “the left,” not the right.

For a second time in the new millennium and in the Americas Mrs. Clinton helped install an authoritarian and racist right-wing government after defeating “the left.” Zelaya had to be seized at gunpoint and flown to another country. Sanders could be defeated through rigged caucuses, primaries, and media coverage along with the explicitly authoritarian super-delegate and campaign finance systems. And then he had to campaign for his political assassin!

After helping put “Pepe” Trump in the next White House, Hillary quickly instructed Americans that they owed Herr Donald “an open mind and a chance to lead.” She urged Americans to “accept this result” and the “peaceful transfer of power.” Sound familiar?

Don’t be surprised if she hopes to exploit popular anger at the right-wing president she helped place in power to make yet another vapid and vicious, fake-/anti-progressive “peak neoliberal” run for the presidency in 2020. “The left” must be defeated at all costs – including the victory of the right. You’ve been warned.