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Republicans, Obama prepare post-election escalation of war, social attacks

By Patrick Martin

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In the wake of Tuesday’s electoral drubbing of the Democratic Party, the victorious Republicans and the Obama White House have begun an elaborate and highly orchestrated political charade. Amid talk of compromise and finding “common ground,” what is being organized in Washington is a gang-up of two right-wing, corporate-controlled parties against the working class.

Incoming Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and President Obama made media appearances only an hour apart Wednesday. Each pledged to collaborate with the other.

The American people “have chosen divided government” for the next two years, McConnell said. “We all have the same goal” of creating jobs and improving the living standards of the American people, Obama reciprocated, pledging to “get stuff done” with the Republicans, who will control both houses of Congress.

McConnell warned Obama not to issue an executive order exempting millions of undocumented workers from deportation, calling it “waving a red flag in front of a bull.” At his press conference, Obama reiterated a previous pledge—already postponed multiple times—to take executive action along those lines. But behind the scenes, talks will begin on an immigration measure along the lines demanded by corporate America to guarantee a secure supply of low-wage, brutally exploited labor.

At his press conference in Louisville, Kentucky, McConnell reassured Wall Street that there would be no repetition of the 2013 government shutdown that roiled the financial markets. “There will be no government shutdowns and no default on the national debt,” he said.

Obama held out the prospect of an agreement on a huge tax break for corporations that have \$2 trillion in profits stashed in overseas accounts to avoid income taxes, in effect rewarding them for tax evasion. McConnell and House Speaker John Boehner have already expressed support for such a deal.

The president revealed that his first post-election meeting with the congressional leadership from both parties, set for Friday at the White House, will include an extensive briefing by General Lloyd Austin, commander of US military forces in the Middle East, on the status of the war in Syria and Iraq against the Sunni fundamentalist group Islamic State.

He said he would seek congressional passage of an Authorization for the Use of Military Force similar to the resolutions pushed through by the Bush administration before the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, indicating that he expected support for the measure from the incoming Republican majorities in both houses.

The maneuvers between the two big-business parties were unfolding as overnight ballot-counting confirmed the dimensions of the Republican sweep—and demonstrated the mass abstention from voting on the part of the great majority of working people.

The Republicans took control of the US Senate, taking as of now 52 seats out of 100, a gain of at least seven seats, with two more seats, in Alaska and Louisiana, likely to fall into their hands. Of the 36 Senate seats at stake Tuesday, the two parties had targeted ten held by Democrats and three by Republicans as potentially vulnerable. Of these 13, Republicans won ten, Democrats only one, and Republicans lead in the two still undecided states.

Republican Dan Sullivan led Democratic Senator Mark Begich in Alaska, although there were still many remote areas not yet reporting. Begich would be the fourth Democratic senator defeated for reelection. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana would be the fifth. She is expected to lose a runoff December 6 after winning 42 percent of the vote in an eight-candidate primary Tuesday, while the two top Republicans took 52 percent between them.

In the House of Representatives, the Republicans added between 13 and 19 seats to their majority, depending on the outcome of a half dozen too-close-to-call races in New York, Arizona and California. The Democratic debacle had two components: a huge decline in turnout in heavily Democratic states like New York, Illinois and California; and a continuing decline in southern states and Appalachia.

The only remaining Democratic-held seats in the six states of the Deep South (South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas) are in black-majority districts. Not a single Democrat holds a congressional seat in the Appalachian coal-mining region (southwest Pennsylvania, southeastern Ohio, West Virginia, southwest Virginia, eastern Kentucky and Tennessee).

The rump Democratic Party caucus in the House, the smallest in 86 years, is concentrated in the Northeast and the Pacific Coast, with a few urban areas and industrial centers in the Midwest. If one starts in Richmond, Virginia and proceeds west, one can travel 3,000 miles to Oakland, California before encountering a congressional district held by a Democrat.

The Cook Political Report summed up the congressional vote in these terms: “Plain and simple, the story in House races was an epic turnout collapse and motivational deficit.”

The Democratic performance was so abysmal that in New York City, Republican Congressman Michael Grimm won reelection despite being under indictment on 20 felony counts relating to a restaurant business he owns (and despite his well-publicized threat of violence against a journalist).

In races for state governors, Republicans won a top-heavy majority of the 36 seats on the ballot Tuesday, including the largest and most politically important: Florida, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. While a Democrat defeated the incumbent Republican governor of Pennsylvania, Republican candidates won heavily Democratic states such as Massachusetts and Maryland. After Tuesday, 31 of the 50 states have Republican governors, and Republicans hold 65 state legislative chambers compared to 23 for Democrats, with the remainder tied or undecided.

Despite the sweeping character of its electoral triumph, however, the Republican Party has no mandate from voters for its right-wing program of tax cuts for business, destruction of social programs, and escalating militarism.

Voter turnout was at record lows, with two-thirds of those eligible to vote staying away from the polls. This mass abstention was particularly pronounced among the poorest and most oppressed sections of the working class—those most disillusioned by the empty promises of Obama’s 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns.

In Michigan, for example, voter turnout in Detroit was only 31 percent, well below the 40 percent level predicted by city officials. This shortfall accounts for the entire margin of defeat for the Democratic candidate for governor, Mark Schauer, running against Republican incumbent Rick Snyder.

Similarly, in Wisconsin, voter turnout was at record levels for a midterm election throughout the state, due to the sharp polarization caused by Republican Governor Scott Walker’s attacks on public employees. The exception was Milwaukee, the state’s largest city.

In Georgia, turnout among African-American voters was lower than in 2010, the last midterm election, demonstrating that right-wing Democratic candidate Michelle Nunn had sparked little support in her bid for an open Senate seat.

Exit polls showed the while many voters wished to express hostility to the Obama administration, congressional Republicans were even more unpopular: Some 30 percent of voters were satisfied with Obama, while only 25 percent were satisfied with the Republicans. Within

the framework of the two-party system, however, the only alternative to Obama was the Republicans.

Perhaps the most revealing finding in the exit polls was that two-thirds of those who cast ballots Tuesday viewed the US economic system as deeply unfair and rigged in favor of the wealthy. There was evidence in the exit polls that millions are losing faith in the capitalist system altogether, and not merely expressing discontent with the conditions of economic slump that have prevailed since the financial crash of 2008. While the proportion of those who viewed the economy as “not so good” or “poor” fell from nine out of ten in 2010 to seven out of ten in 2014, more than half now believe that the next generation will live worse than their parents.

A waitress in Alaska interviewed in an exit poll was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying: “I feel like I’m in that class of people that’s kind of getting left behind in this whirlwind... I’m in that economic class of people that works really, really hard and will probably never get too far ahead, barely makes it, and kind of gets punished for it.”

Needless to say, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans, controlled by corporate interests and bound hand-and-foot to the capitalist system, can address such class-based discontent.

The 2014 election marks the fourth time in the last five elections that the party in power, Democratic or Republican, was thrown out of office by voters. In 2006, the Democrats took control of the House and Senate, in 2008 they captured the White House. In 2010, Republicans recaptured the House and now, in 2014, they have recaptured the Senate.

These shifts from one party to the other have resolved none of the issues facing working people, nor can they, because the two parties are instruments of the same financial oligarchy.