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Imperialism, the “war on terror” and anti-Muslim hysteria

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On Monday, Donald Trump, the billionaire candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, called for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” following the terror attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California. This is only the latest in a series of increasingly fascistic and violent demands from the Republican frontrunner.

Although he went farther than other members of the US political establishment, Trump’s call was in line with remarks by other politicians, including Republican Senator Ted Cruz, who called for a ban on Muslim, but not Christian, refugees from Syria last month, and Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, who said he had ordered state police to place mosques under surveillance.

David Bowers, the Democratic Party mayor of Roanoke, Virginia, last month approvingly invoked America’s history of interning Japanese Americans in concentration camps during the Second World War. “It appears that the threat of harm to America from ISIS now is just as real and serious as that from our enemies then,” Bowers declared.

The resurgence of such reactionary political demands in the United States is mirrored in the other imperialist countries. In Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron has branded opponents of the authorization of war in Syria as “terrorist sympathizers.” In France, Marine Le Pen’s neo-fascist National Front (FN) received the largest share of the vote in this week’s regional elections,

amidst the effective abrogation of democratic rights by the government of President François Hollande and the promotion of a climate of fear and hysteria in the wake of the November 13 attacks in Paris.

Throughout Europe, there has been a deliberate whipping up of anti-Muslim chauvinism in response to the refugee crisis, as all the major powers seek to justify their plans for the expansion of war in Syria.

In the US, the statements by Trump have been met with self-righteous indignation by politicians and media figures, who claim they are shocked by his statements. Who are they kidding? The blathering of this fascistic imbecile expresses only in more concentrated form the perpetual hysteria one hears every day in the media. The difference between Trump and someone like CNN's Wolf Blitzer is just a matter of degree. He is the product of a diseased political environment.

As for Obama, in his national address on Sunday, the president postured as a critic of Republican calls for targeting Muslims. Yet the Obama administration is responsible for the continuation of an imperialist policy in the Middle East that has devastated entire countries, with at least a million people, mainly Muslim, killed in the process.

The unleashing of the forces of extreme reaction is, in fact, an organic expression of the nature of imperialism itself. As Lenin stressed, imperialism is "reaction all down the line." Writing in the midst of World War I, he wrote, "The difference between the democratic-republican and the reactionary-monarchist imperialist bourgeoisie is obliterated precisely because they are both rotting alive." The putrefaction of contemporary capitalist society—based on parasitism, financial swindling, war and looting—is once again spewing up political filth in the form of racist demagoguery.

The whole experience of the 20th century has demonstrated the fact that imperialist war is always accompanied by attacks on democratic rights and the whipping up of xenophobia. American involvement in World War I, nominally undertaken by Woodrow Wilson to make the world safe for democracy, brought with it the lynching of workers and the imprisonment of socialist leaders including Eugene V. Debs, followed by the anti-socialist Palmer Raids.

The period leading up to and during World War II brought with it unspeakable horrors, including the rise of fascism and the Nazi Party's "final solution," which led to the murder of 11 million people and the extermination of a large section of European Jewry. In the United States, the administration of Franklin Roosevelt oversaw the internment of Japanese Americans and the imprisonment of leading members of the Trotskyist movement under the Smith Act.

The period of the Korean War was the heyday of McCarthyite witch-hunts of socialists in the trade unions and entertainment industry. The French colonial war in Algeria brought the country to the brink of civil war, including the massacre of peaceful demonstrators and the invocation of a state of emergency. During the Vietnam War, the FBI in the US massively infiltrated political organizations and oversaw assassinations of oppositional figures, including leading members of the Black Panthers.

During every imperialist war, the ruling class seeks to cultivate the most backward and racist sentiments. The “war on terror,” which has led to the deaths of at least a million Muslims, is no different, creating an environment in which racist hysteria is relentlessly promoted in the media.

The deep social roots of the drive to war and the attack on democratic rights are demonstrated by the fact that the end of the Bush administration did not lead to a significant change in course. In fact, the abrogation of democratic rights continued under Obama, whose particular contribution was the institutionalization of state-sponsored murder as a central plank of American foreign policy.

The political impotence of what counts for contemporary liberalism, as well as the various pseudo-left organizations, is a result of the fact that they are deeply implicated in promoting and justifying war and militarism.

There is not widespread or deep-rooted popular support for the conceptions advocated by Trump and the political establishment as a whole, despite the constant barrage of media propaganda. But the organized expression of anti-imperialist and democratic sentiments depends on the independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a program directed at the source of war and political reaction: the capitalist system.