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Trump names fascist Bannon as top adviser, confirms plans to deport immigrants

By Tom Eley

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The extreme right-wing character of the incoming US administration came into sharper focus on Sunday when, interviewed on the news program “60 Minutes,” President-elect Donald Trump declared that he intends to imprison and deport 2 to 3 million immigrants.

This followed the announcement earlier in the day of his first two administrative appointees—Republican Party Chairman Reince Priebus as White House chief of staff, and, as top White House advisor, the fascist Steve Bannon, previously Trump’s campaign CEO and executive chairman of Breitbart News.

Trump’s appointments and his provocations against immigrants make clear that, despite the fact that he will have lost the popular vote by upwards of 2 million when all the ballots are counted, he intends to press forward with the most right-wing presidential agenda in American history.

The groveling of Democratic Party leaders, from President Barack Obama to failed presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, as well as the capitulatory outpourings from yesterday’s anti-Trump editorialists such as the *New York Times*’ Thomas Friedman, Nicholas Kristof and Paul Krugman, have only strengthened Trump’s conviction that he has nothing to fear from such quarters and encouraged him to proceed with his authoritarian agenda.

The liberal media has been full of speculation that having secured the presidency, Trump will dispense with his most extreme right-wing positions. But in his “60 Minutes” interview, he offered no indication that he would backtrack from his campaign’s extreme anti-immigrant rhetoric, which included calls for mass deportations, the banning of Muslim immigrants and the construction of a wall separating the US and Mexico along the two nations’ nearly 2,000-mile border.

“What we are going to do is get the people that are criminal and have criminal records, gang members, drug dealers, we have a lot of these people—probably two million, it could be even three million—we are getting them out of our country or we are going to incarcerate,” Trump said. “But we’re getting them out of our country. They’re here illegally.”

Trump is evidently referring to Department of Homeland Security data that suggest there are approximately 1.9 million immigrants in the US who have been convicted of a crime and are therefore, technically speaking, eligible for deportation. However, the majority of these “criminals” are legal and documented immigrants, and many of the crimes for which they have been convicted are minor offenses. Currently, immigration authorities may use discretion to disregard petty crimes, especially in cases where deportation would separate foreign-born parents from US-born children.

Trump’s plan to rapidly deport 2 million to 3 million immigrants could be realized only through the suspension of due process and the implementation of a massive police operation and creation of what would be, in all but name, a concentration camp system. That this is the implication of Trump’s plan was indirectly acknowledged by Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan, who told CNN’s “State of the Union” program that the Republican Party is “not planning on erecting a deportation force... I think we should put people’s minds at ease.”

On the contrary, the threat must be taken very seriously. The infrastructure for such a massive police state operation has been developing for eight years under the Obama administration, which deported a record number of immigrants—2.4 million—in its first six years, far surpassing the record of the George W. Bush administration. It is estimated that over the course of its full eight years, the Obama administration will have deported 3.2 million men, women and children.

Trump’s plan is a grave threat to immigrant workers and the entire working class. There are some 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US, a substantial share of the upwards of 40 million total immigrants. Over two-thirds of all adult undocumented immigrants have been in the US for at least 10 years.

If one adds to the figure of 40 million immigrants the US-born children of immigrants, who by virtue of the Fourteenth Amendment are US citizens, one reaches a figure of over 80 million, or one fourth of the total US population.

Trump also told “60 Minutes” that he intends to carry through with his promise to build a wall along the length of the US-Mexican border, which he said could include sections of fencing and existing natural barriers. This reactionary proposal would make the pathways for immigrants to

the US more dangerous than they already are, resulting in more deaths in the desert, and, increasingly, in the waters of the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

Interviewer Lesley Stahl did not ask Trump about his proposals to ban Muslim immigrants or threats made on the campaign trail to launch trade war with China and incinerate the Middle East. The interview was largely a promotional event for the president-elect, including a lengthy discussion with Trump's wife and children.

The media largely ignored Trump's appointment of a fascist to the position of top presidential advisor. There were, however, scattered statements of protest. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid said in a statement: "President-elect Trump's choice of Steve Bannon as his top aide signals that white supremacists will be represented at the highest levels in Trump's White House."

The Southern Poverty Law Center blasted the choice of Bannon, calling him "the main driver behind Breitbart becoming a white ethno-nationalist propaganda mill." The organization cited Breitbart headlines, including a call to fly the Confederate flag weeks after fatal shootings at a black Charleston, South Carolina church, and another declaring that political correctness "protects Muslim rape culture." The Anti-Defamation League also denounced the appointment of Bannon.

Bannon's Breitbart News openly solidarizes itself with Europe's neo-fascist parties, including the National Front in France, the Alternative for Germany, and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain. Reader comments on Breitbart News articles are frequently laced with racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric. A recent Twitter analysis found that 31 percent of those using the white supremacist hashtag #whitegenocide follow Breitbart, as do 62 percent of users of the anti-Muslim hashtag #counterjihad.

Bannon is a leading figure of the so-called "alt-right" movement, which includes in its ranks neo-Nazi and white supremacist organizations. In a July interview with *Mother Jones*, Bannon boasted that Breitbart News is "the platform of the alt-right," which he called the American version of France's neo-fascist National Front.

Breitbart regularly publishes material by the anti-Muslim bigot Pamela Geller. Last spring, it published a lengthy defense of the "white nationalist" movement called "An Establishment Conservative's Guide to the Alt-Right."

In announcing the two appointments, the Trump transition team took the unusual step of describing Bannon, a former Goldman Sachs investment banker and Hollywood producer, and Priebus as "equal partners," effectively elevating the position of Bannon in the Trump White House.

Priebus's position, White House chief of staff, is a formally recognized title that has existed for decades. Bannon's title, described in the statement as "chief strategist and senior counselor to the president," is not, though recent precedent underscores that it will be a politically powerful position. Karl Rove and David Axelrod had similar titles in the George W. Bush and Obama administrations, respectively.

The appointment of Priebus, who is presented as a “mainstream” Republican, is meant to provide cover for the integration of Bannon into the White House. Bannon was credited with turning Trump’s election campaign in a fascistic direction after he was appointed to replace Paul Manafort as head of the campaign.

Another figure widely rumored as a likely Trump appointee is former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who has been a prominent backer of the real estate mogul for months. Asked Sunday by George Stephanopoulos on ABC’s “This Week” program to address the protests that have swept the US in response to Trump’s victory, Giuliani responded with the language of dictatorship, equating demonstrations with “riots” and rejecting the right to peacefully assemble in places not mandated by the police.

“Now where it goes into violence, I have a zero tolerance for riots,” said Giuliani, who is being touted for the post of attorney general in the Trump administration. “I, you know, took over a city that had two riots in four years, and I had none. And they knew they couldn’t riot on me. And when I saw the people on the street in New York City, I said to myself, you’re breaking Giuliani’s rules. You don’t take my streets. You can have my sidewalks.”

Yet another likely cabinet appointee in the Trump administration, former congressman Newt Gingrich, told CBS’s *Face the Nation* Sunday morning that Trump would be “very, very aggressive” in his first year in office. Trump should “swing for the fences,” Gingrich said. In separate interviews, Gingrich and Giuliani both insisted that Trump had a “mandate” in spite of his defeat in the popular vote.