

Florida Republicans pushing through bills denouncing socialism, limiting voting by mail and targeting left-wing professors

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Earlier this month, the Florida House of Representatives adopted Resolution HR 145, named the “Individual Liberty, Private Property, and Democracy” Act, which “denounces democratic socialism in favor of the true American values of individual liberty, private property, and constitutional democracy.”

Republican Representative Tom Fabricio, the sponsor of the resolution, told reporters: “This is a message from the Florida House of Representatives to say that we stand by our economic system, progress, and our system of government.”

The resolution was adopted 79-36, with four of the 42 sitting Democrats voting in favor. The rest of the “yea” votes were supplied by Republicans, who have given denunciations of socialism a prominent place in their promotion of far-right and fascist forces and their intensifying attack on democratic rights.

The Florida legislation is consistent with bills being introduced in Republican-controlled states across the US further undermining the ability of working class and poor people to vote, targeting left-wing protests against police violence, and facilitating witch-hunts against professors singled out by right-wing forces.

On both the national and state level, a large majority of Republican Party organizations continue to promote Trump’s fabricated claim of a “stolen election” and attack the few Republican members of Congress and state officials who voted for his impeachment or refused to accede to his demands that they overturn the election results. This underscores the complicity of the Republican Party in the far-reaching conspiracy to maintain Trump in power as de facto dictator, which culminated in the storming of the US Capitol on January 6 by fascist insurrectionists whipped up by Trump and openly or tacitly supported by the Republican Party and sections of the financial oligarchy and military/police/intelligence apparatus.

That the Republican Party has become an incubator of far-right and fascist forces is further demonstrated by the

ascendancy within the party of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, one of Trump’s most diehard defenders. In his 2018 gubernatorial election campaign, DeSantis followed Trump’s lead by placing denunciations of socialism at its center.

On Monday, the majority-Republican Florida Senate approved a restrictive voting bill (SB 90), which includes limits on the casting of ballots by mail and the availability of ballot drop boxes. The legislation would limit where drop boxes can be placed and require those casting ballots in this fashion to show identification to an election official first.

A third bill advanced by Republicans (HB 233), which is currently awaiting the signature of DeSantis, encourages the reporting of university lecturers who supposedly stifle “intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity” on college campuses. It also requires all state-funded institutions of postsecondary education to conduct an annual survey of faculty and students to establish how well “intellectual freedoms” are protected on campus. This is intended as an assault on what Republicans call “Marxist professors and students” at public universities, who allegedly push their politics on “conservative” students.

HB 233 lines up with the activities of right-wing activist groups such as Turning Point USA, which maintains an online watchlist of “radical” professors who “advance leftist propaganda in the classroom.” There is no doubt that this would be used not only against professors, but also against student organizations such as the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), which has had members of Turning Point USA attend and disrupt its public meetings on Florida university campuses in years past.

The response of the Democrats to such bills and resolutions has been utterly feckless. Following the line set by President Biden, who stated shortly after the January 6 coup attempt that “America” needed a “strong” Republican Party, the Florida Democrats have merely chastised their “Republican colleagues” and couched their criticisms in the

language of racist identity politics.

Regarding the anti-socialist resolution that was passed in the House, Democrats either tried to amend the resolution or denounced the Republicans for wasting time talking about socialism in the first place. Representative Fentrice Driskell of Tampa, for instance, argued that lawmakers should be talking about COVID-19 rather than socialism. “There are many important issues that we can take up in this body as a Legislature, but members, this is not one of them.” In reality, the Biden administration and the Democratic Party have in all essentials continued Trump’s criminal policy of “herd immunity,” ignoring the repeated warnings of reputable scientists that the premature reopening of non-essential industries and schools in the midst of a still raging pandemic would result in new eruptions of the pandemic and countless thousands of additional deaths.

Those Florida Democrats who tried and failed to amend the resolution did not seek to remove any of the fascistic language, but rather to append a denunciation of fascism, defined entirely as a manifestation of white racism, to the bill’s anti-communist attack on socialism. Democrats denounced “neo-Nazis and neo-fascists” solely for their “divisiveness” and their “white supremacy, bigotry, and race and religious hatred.” The more fundamental class issues in the turn by capitalist governments all over the world toward dictatorship and the promotion of fascist forces were deliberately obscured.

The Democrats made a similar response to the Senate bill restricting mail-in voting (SB 90). According to the *Guardian*, Democratic State Senator Audrey Gibson and other black senators called these restrictions “an extension of the legacy of the Jim Crow South.” While the Republicans, in seeking to roll back the historic gains in voting rights for African-Americans achieved through the mass civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s—with the active support and participation of tens of thousands of white workers and youth—appeal to racist and other backward sentiments, their attack on the right to vote is directed against the working class as a whole.

In the case of HB 233, which gives right-wing organizations the legal means to attack left-wing professors and students, the Democrats once again placed this anti-democratic attack entirely within a racistist framework, attributing it to “white supremacy.” Dr. Karen Morian, the president of the United Faculty of Florida, pointed to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), a historically black university, as the main target of the Republican attack.

In all of these cases, the Democrats are seeking to cover up the more basic class issues in the turn by the ruling class toward fascism—an international process driven by the crisis

of the capitalist system and the growth of the class struggle. In so doing, the Democratic Party, one of the oldest capitalist parties in the world—historically the party of the Southern slaveowners and later the party of Jim Crow segregation in the South—seeks to sow divisions in the working class and block the development of a united and politically conscious struggle against the real source of racism and all forms of national chauvinism, the capitalist system.

It is significant that Florida is playing a particularly prominent role in the Republican-led attack on basic democratic rights, against which the Democrats are neither able nor willing to conduct a serious struggle. This is the state where the Democrats allowed the 2000 presidential election to be stolen by George W. Bush and the Republicans.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained at the time, the 5-4 US Supreme Court ruling by the Republican majority on the court shutting down a vote recount in Florida that would have given the state’s electoral votes to the winner of the popular vote, Democrat Al Gore, and thereby a majority of electoral votes and the presidency, and the refusal of the Democrats to oppose it, demonstrated that there was no longer any significant constituency within the ruling class for the defense of democratic rights.

Florida was also where Governor DeSantis ordered the arrest of Rebekah Jones, the courageous COVID-19 whistleblower and scientist who was jailed for refusing, as an official of the Florida Department of Health, to doctor coronavirus case numbers.

In addition to the measures denouncing socialism and boosting the drive by the far-right to purge the campuses of faculty it deems to be left-wing, the “anti-riot” bill (HB 1) was recently signed into law by DeSantis. This act criminalizes popular protests against police violence and ensures that funding cannot be cut from police departments in the state.



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