

Obama and Trump laugh as Los Angeles burns

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A revealing incident took place at the funeral of former President Jimmy Carter on Thursday. Former President Barack Obama and President-Elect Donald Trump were filmed publicly laughing and joking with each other for several minutes during the proceedings.

When asked about the exchange in an interview Friday, Trump commented, “I didn’t realize how friendly it looked... I said, ‘Boy, they look like two people that like each other.’ And we probably do... we just get along.”

Trump and Obama were laughing at a public mourning for a man who held the highest office in the country. While they laughed, the second-largest city in America was engulfed in flames, with hundreds of thousands of people evacuated as thousands of buildings burned to the ground.

The two men shared their jokes as two members of America’s financial oligarchy. Obama, with a net worth of a quarter-billion dollars, maintains three mansions—in Washington D.C., Chicago and Martha’s Vineyard—and regularly vacations with America’s leading oligarchs. Trump, the embodiment of the financial aristocracy, has a net worth of over \$6 billion. To men like them, a fire that burns down one of their houses means nothing but a lucrative insurance payout. They simply cannot understand why anyone would expect them to pretend to be sad at such a moment.

But beyond the inappropriateness, poor taste and distance from social reality that the exchange expressed, it has a deeper objective significance. As with US President Joe Biden’s invitation to Trump to the White House on November 13, in which the two shook hands and promised a “peaceful transfer of power,” Obama’s friendly exchange with Trump sent a signal that dominant sections of the state are prepared to accept as president a man who, just months earlier,

they had correctly identified as a fascist and would-be dictator.

In an interview with journalist Bob Woodward, Mark Milley, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Trump, called Trump “a total fascist” and “the most dangerous person to this country... A fascist to the core.”

In an interview with *The Atlantic*, John Kelly, Trump’s former chief of staff, recalled that Trump wanted US generals to be loyal to him in the way that Hitler’s were loyal to him—i.e., by swearing an oath of personal loyalty. “Do you mean the Kaiser’s generals?” Kelly recalled, saying, “Surely you can’t mean Hitler’s generals? And he said, ‘Yeah, yeah, Hitler’s generals.’”

Citing these statements, two months ago Obama said at a rally:

In Donald Trump’s mind, the military does not exist to serve the Constitution or the American people. He does not see being commander-in-chief as a solemn, sacred responsibility. Just like everything else, he thinks the military exists to do his bidding, to serve his interests... We do not need four years of a wannabe king, a wannabe dictator.

Obama was speaking not merely as a former president, but was rather articulating the official position of the White House. In multiple instances over the past year, President Joe Biden said that Trump would act as a “dictator on day one.”

In October, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre was asked, “Is the president aware of John

Kelly's assertion that Donald Trump meets the definition of a fascist and that Trump wanted the kinds of generals Hitler had?"

To this, the White House spokesperson replied, "You've heard from the former president himself saying that he is going to be a dictator on day one. This is him, not us. This is him." She added, "Do we agree... Do we agree about that determination? Yes, we do. We do."

No one should conclude from the warm response given by US President Joe Biden, and now Barack Obama, to Trump that they were not serious about their warnings. Rather, they, together with the broader financial oligarchy they represent, have concluded that the form of government Trump is seeking to establish is acceptable.

Obama's first task upon taking office was to implement and extend the bailout of major banks and institutions in the aftermath of the 2008 market crash, making America's financial oligarchy, Trump included, vastly richer. Obama vastly expanded the powers of the presidency, including the 2011 killing of an American citizen through extrajudicial assassination.

He initiated the massive expansion of the US nuclear arsenal that was continued under Trump, who withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and then Biden, who likewise massively expanded the funding of the US military.

In 2016, as he was leaving office, Obama said of the incoming Trump presidency, "We're actually all on one team. This is an intramural scrimmage."

What he meant by this was that America's billionaires and its political establishment are all on one team, lined up against the vast and exploited working class. This oligarchy has decided to place its affairs in the hands of a man who has pledged to rule as a "dictator."

This week's episode should serve as a reminder that no opposition to fascism and dictatorship will come from any faction of the US political establishment. The opposition to Trump's attacks on democratic rights will come from the working class.



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