

The political and social roots of fascist violence in the US

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The eruption of Nazi violence in Charlottesville, Virginia over the weekend has come as a shock to millions of people in the United States and around the world. The images of pro-Nazi white supremacists assaulting counter-protesters and the brutal murder of 32-year-old Heather Heyer have exposed the socially and politically rancid state of American society. Nazi thugs rampaged through a university town and terrorized students and other residents while smirking policemen stood by and winked their encouragement to the attackers. The country that presumes to preach morality to the world and holds itself up as the beacon of law and democratic stability is breaking apart at the seams.

There is a vast difference between the deep-felt anger of millions of ordinary people over the events in Charlottesville and the formal hand-wringing and hypocritical condemnations of violence by politicians from the Democratic and Republican parties and the corporate media. Their statements reek of insincerity. Their pro forma denunciations of the violence in Charlottesville are devoid of any serious examination of the underlying social and political conditions out of which it arose.

Typical was Monday's editorial ("The Hate He Dares Not Speak Of") in the *New York Times*, which speaks for the Democratic Party. The editors criticized Trump for not condemning the white supremacist groups responsible for the violence. They declared that Trump "is alone in modern presidential history in his willingness to summon demons of bigotry and intolerance in service to himself." The president is clinging to white supremacists, the editors added, "in his desperation to rescue his failing presidency."

Were it not for Trump, the *Times* implies, the streets of America would resound with hymns of brotherly love. But the "Evil Trump" interpretation of history explains nothing. The swaggering thug in the White House is, like

the violence in Charlottesville, a symptom of a deep and intractable crisis.

As a political and social phenomenon, fascism is a product of capitalism in extreme crisis. Analyzing the rise of the Nazi movement in Germany in 1932, Trotsky explained that the ruling class turns to fascism "at the moment when the 'normal' police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium... Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie and the bands of declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat—all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy." ("What Next? Vital Question for the German Proletariat")

Fascism is not yet a mass movement in the United States. The national mobilization of far-right organizations to oppose the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee drew only several hundred people.

Notwithstanding their limited support among the broad mass of the population, however, these reactionary elements enjoy the backing of powerful sections of the state, including the White House itself. They have the financial support of billionaire backers (Stephen Bannon, Trump's fascist chief strategist, has developed close ties to hedge fund executive Robert Mercer). And they have the active sympathy of significant sections of the police and military apparatus.

Throughout his campaign and his first seven months in office, Trump and his fascist advisors have pursued a definite political strategy, based on the belief that they can exploit widespread social anger and political disorientation to develop an extra-parliamentary movement to violently suppress any popular opposition to a policy of extreme militarism and social reaction.

However, Trump is less the creator than the outcome of protracted economic, social and political processes. His administration, composed of oligarchs and generals, arises out of a quarter-century of unending war, four decades of social counterrevolution and the increasingly authoritarian character of American politics. Torture, drone assassinations, wars of aggression, police murder—overseen by both Democrats and Republicans—form the backdrop to the events in Charlottesville.

Trump's greatest asset has been the character and orientation of his political opponents within the ruling class. He defeated Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election because the Democrats ran as the party of the status quo, the embodiment of complacency and self-satisfaction. Since the election, their opposition to Trump has been oriented entirely to the intelligence agencies and the military, where fascist elements flourish, on the basis of demands for a more aggressive policy against Russia. They are unable and unwilling to advance a program that can command any significant popular support since they represent an alliance of Wall Street and privileged layers of the upper-middle class.

Trump has been able to win a certain base in regions of the country that have been devastated by deindustrialization, profiting from the reactionary role of the trade unions, which long ago abandoned any opposition to the demands of the corporations, promoting instead the poisonous ideology of economic nationalism. The “American first” agenda of the Trump administration has found fertile ground among the privileged and thoroughly corrupt trade union executives.

An additional ideological factor has served to fuel the rise of white nationalist organizations: the legitimization of explicitly racist politics by the Democratic Party. While the Democrats and their media affiliates have denounced the openly racist actions of the neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, the fact remains that the white nationalists have been aided and abetted by the relentless promotion by the Democratic Party and its allies of race as the primary category of social and political analysis.

Endless columns and articles have appeared in the pages of the *New York Times* and other publications promoting the concept of “whiteness” and “white privilege.” It was *Times* columnist Charles Blow who, in a June 2016 column denouncing the film *Free State of Jones*, attacked “the white liberal insistence that race is merely a subordinate construction of class.” As the *World Socialist Web Site* commented at the time, Blow “is not a fascist,

but he thinks very much like one.”

The obsessive fixation on racial politics, from the Democratic Party and the fraternity of pseudo-left organizations that operate in its orbit, reached a peak in the election campaign of Hillary Clinton, which was organized on the principal that all social problems are reducible to race and racism, and that the grievances of workers who are white are the product not of unemployment and poverty, but of racism and privilege.

The racist interpretation of politics, culture and society by the Democrats was politically convenient in that it served to divert attention from the issues of social inequality and war, while blaming white workers—not the capitalist system and the ruling class—for the election of Trump.

As the Trump administration was intensifying its cultivation of fascist forces over the past several months, Google—in alliance with those sections of the state particularly associated with the Democratic Party—was implementing a program of censorship targeting left-wing and progressive websites, above all, the *World Socialist Web Site*. The response of all factions of the ruling class to the social and political crisis that has produced Trump is to seek to block and suppress any challenge to the capitalist system.

Long historical experience has demonstrated that fascism can be fought only through the mobilization of the working class on a socialist and revolutionary program. The fight against the extreme right must be developed through the unification of all sections of the working class, of all races, genders and nationalities. Opposition to fascism must be connected to the fight against war, social inequality, unemployment, low wages, police violence and all the social ills produced by capitalism.

So long as the interests of the working class are not articulated and advanced by taking on an independent political form, it is the forces of the extreme right that will benefit. The urgent task is to build a revolutionary leadership in the working class—the Socialist Equality Party.



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