

On the eve of the US midterm elections: The political issues facing the working class

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The US midterm elections are being held under conditions of escalating political crisis. Whatever the outcome, the elections will set the stage for a further shift of US politics to the right.

In the weeks leading up to the election, Trump has intensified his drive to develop a far-right movement, making an increasingly open fascistic appeal. He has delivered a series of speeches attacking migrants fleeing the consequences of US imperialist oppression and capitalist exploitation in Central America. Some 15,000 troops are being deployed to the US-Mexico border, in violation of US law, amidst threats by Trump that the military will meet the refugees with murderous violence.

The president has declared his administration's determination to abolish birthright citizenship, guaranteed by the 14th amendment of the US Constitution, enacted after the Civil War to ensure full rights for freed slaves and their children.

The Trump administration's appeals to violence have already had horrific consequences. The pipe bombs sent by a Trump supporter to prominent Democrats and supporters of the Democratic Party were followed just over a week ago by the mass shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, leaving 11 people dead—the worst act of violence against Jews in US history. In justifying his rampage, the accused killer used language drawn directly from Trump's campaign speeches, combining anti-Semitism with anti-immigrant chauvinism.

Trump brings to a head a combination of protracted processes. His administration is the political outcome of a quarter-century of unending war in the Middle East and Central Asia, and all of the crimes—torture, rendition, drone assassinations—with which these wars are associated. It is the product of decades of rising social inequality, financial parasitism and government criminality. It is the vomiting up of the undigested barbarism of American capitalism.

That Trump is not an aberration in an otherwise healthy political system is demonstrated by how the Democrats have conducted their own campaign—what they say and do not say, and who they are running.

The Democrats are going out of their way to adapt themselves at every stage to the Trump administration, while the media downplays the significance of Trump's actions and the dangers they present. As Democratic House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi explained, they want to “show voters that Democrats are a governing party, not the leftist mob that Mr. Trump describes—and to extend an arm of cooperation to the president after an electoral rebuke.” They hope, as they have hoped throughout the two years of Trump's administration, to reach an accommodation on foreign policy, the better to pursue the basic agenda of the ruling class at home and abroad.

They are working to cover up the far-reaching significance of

Trump's actions and declarations. Top Democrats, from Pelosi to the nominally “independent” Bernie Sanders, have refused to say anything about the fascistic attack on immigrants, with Sanders declaring of the Pittsburgh shooting: “I'm not going to sit here and blame the president.”

Sanders, who in 2016 claimed to be leading a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class,” has been campaigning in recent weeks for right-wing establishment candidates. As for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Democratic Socialists of America member who won a Democratic Party congressional primary in the summer, she has dropped her previous call to “abolish ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement),” following the Democratic Party's line of not talking about Trump's police-state moves against immigrants.

If the Democrats win the House, the balance of power in that body will be in the hands of the unprecedented number of Democratic candidates drawn from the intelligence and military apparatus. If they were to win the Senate, their agenda would be set by individuals like Joe Manchin (West Virginia), who has said he favors the building of “700 to 900 miles” of a wall on the US-Mexico border; Joe Donnelly (Indiana), who supports rescinding birthright citizenship; and Claire McCaskill (Missouri), who has said she “100 percent supports” Trump's attack on the caravan of Central American immigrants making their way through Mexico to the US border.

Whatever the rhetoric, and however the seats of the Senate and House of Representatives are allocated, the basic factors that drive American politics will persist. These are:

1. The determination of the ruling class to maintain the global position of American capitalism through military force, including world war:

This central strategy has dominated American policy for decades. Seventeen years of the “war on terror,” including wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, have devastated entire countries and left more than one million people dead. The Trump administration has officially announced the end of the “war on terror” and ordered the military to begin preparing for “great power conflict” with Russia or China.

In the weeks leading up to the elections, the administration withdrew from a key Cold War-era nuclear arms agreement (the INF Treaty) and threatened to launch preemptive strikes against Russia. At the same time, it effectively declared a new “cold war” against China. With no public discussion and on a bipartisan basis, the administration has initiated the largest military buildup since the end of the Cold War.

Opposition to the unending and expanding wars of American imperialism has been completely excluded from the election

campaigns of both the Democrats and Republicans.

The Democrats fully support the strategic aim of the American ruling class to maintain its global supremacy through military force. From the beginning of the Trump administration, the Democrats, channeling powerful sections of the military and intelligence apparatus, have centered their opposition to Trump on the concern that he was pulling back from war in the Middle East and confrontation with Russia.

2. The staggering levels of social inequality, which cannot be changed by any election, and which infect every institution of the capitalist state:

Ten years after the 2008 financial crisis, social inequality is at historic highs. Three individuals now possess more wealth than the bottom half of the population, and just three families have a combined fortune of \$348.7 billion, four million times the median family wealth. The vast majority of the population confronts the many manifestations of social crisis—declining wages, soaring health care costs, a drug overdose epidemic and decaying social infrastructure.

These conditions are the product of the policies of the Obama administration, which supported and oversaw the bailout of the banks following the financial meltdown in 2008. Since Trump's election, the Democrats have collaborated in the implementation of massive tax cuts for the rich, which they have no intention of rolling back whatever the outcome of the elections.

The Democrats represent a political alliance of Wall Street and privileged sections of the middle class. Over the past two years, their central focus, in addition to the anti-Russia campaign, has been the promotion of the politics of race and gender, particularly through the #MeToo campaign. The aim has been to divide the working class while advancing the interests of factions within the top 10 percent that are competing over positions of power, money and privilege.

3. The crisis of democratic forms of rule and the turn to authoritarianism:

The crisis of American democracy, of which the Trump administration is an extreme expression, expresses the alignment of political forms with the oligarchical character of American society.

While Trump pursues his strategy of developing an authoritarian movement, the Democrats likewise support the destruction of democratic rights, but in a different way. They have focused on demands that social media companies censor the internet, under the guise of combating “fake news” and blocking organizations that “sow discontent.” In the course of their conflict with Trump, they have hailed such enemies of democratic rights as former CIA Director John Brennan, responsible for torture and domestic spying.

Trump is himself the product of a protracted decay of democratic forms of rule. Nodal points in this process were the Clinton impeachment in 1998, the theft of the 2000 election, the launching of the “war on terror” after the 9/11 attacks, accompanied by the erection of a massive apparatus of domestic spying, and the Obama administration's policy of drone assassination, including of US citizens.

The political strategy of the working class

A solution to all of the great problems confronting mankind—the growth of social inequality, the attack on immigrant workers and refugees, the expansion of global conflict, the destruction of democratic rights—depends on the independent organization and intervention of the working class. It is not through the rearrangement of seats in Congress and the phony battles within the ruling class that a way forward will be found, but through an open struggle between

opposed social classes.

The same capitalist crisis that is producing the rise of fascism and the far-right, in the United States and internationally, is also producing growing resistance and opposition from the working class, the broad mass of the population, which is completely excluded from official political life. In its June 13, 2017 statement, “Palace coup or class struggle: The political crisis in Washington and the strategy of the working class,” the Political Committee of the Socialist Equality Party (US) stated:

The interaction of objective conditions of crisis, both within the United States and internationally, and the radicalization of mass social consciousness will find expression in the eruption of class struggle. The decades-long suppression of the class struggle by the trade union bureaucracy, the Democratic Party and the affluent sponsors of various forms of identity politics is coming to an end. The social counterrevolution of the ruling elites is about to encounter an upsurge of the American working class.

Since this statement was written, there have been many signs of growing working class struggle in the US and internationally, including the strike wave by US teachers in the spring, the mass opposition among UPS workers to a concessions contract backed by the Teamsters, and huge strike authorization votes by steel workers, postal workers and other sections of the working class. Anger and unrest among all sections of the working class are mounting.

These struggles must be expanded and unified through the construction of new organizations of working class struggle, independent of the unions, including rank-and-file workplace, factory and neighborhood committees.

The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading the fight to arm the developing objective movement of workers and youth with a revolutionary program and perspective. In the 2018 elections, it has run Niles Niemuth in Michigan's 12th Congressional District to bring a socialist program to workers throughout the region and beyond.

The future of humanity depends on the overthrow of the existing social system and all its political institutions, and the democratic reorganization of economic life based on equality and the satisfaction of social needs. The alternative to international socialist revolution is a return to the worst forms of barbarism of the 20th century.

Whatever happens tomorrow, the basic task is the same: Joining and building the SEP, its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



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