

Social crisis, class struggle and the 2020 election

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The 2020 election is taking place against the backdrop of the greatest social, economic and political crisis in the modern history of the United States.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply destabilized American society. Over 185,000 people have been killed. Some 27 million people are unemployed. Food lines stretch for city blocks, and one fifth of mothers with young children say their families do not have enough to eat.

The ruling class's efforts to force workers back on the job, despite a raging pandemic, have led to a wave of strikes and protests and seen millions of people demonstrate against police violence in thousands of cities and towns throughout the country.

The 2020 election is defined by these twin processes: the protracted crisis of American capitalism exposed by the pandemic, and the explosive growth of anti-capitalist sentiment and mass radicalization in the working class, as part of a growing wave of social protest all over the world.

In their own ways, last week's Democratic National Convention and this week's Republican National Convention represented the response of the parties of the ruling class to the eruption of social opposition, to which they are both hostile and which they both fear.

The more direct response comes from the Republicans. Speaker after speaker railed in hysterical fashion, some literally screaming, against a tide of left-wing opposition engulfing the nation. They ranted against "Marxism," "socialism" and "mob rule" by left-wing demonstrators.

In his fixation on the growth of socialist sentiment, Trump knows he is not speaking about the Democrats, such as Biden, Pelosi, Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. He has taken the measure of all of them, and some, such as Kamala Harris, he has directly financed. Rather, he expresses the dread within the ruling class of mass working class opposition emerging outside of the two-party system.

The Democrats' response is more sophisticated. Employing their army of professional apologists and left-talking spin doctors, the Democrats sought to present themselves as sympathetic to the demands of protesters

against police violence and of workers facing a social disaster. But this was only to chloroform and disarm the mounting opposition, to splinter it into an array of warring "identities," and to channel it into the dead end of racial politics.

It is a testament to the Democrats' sensitivity to the growth of social radicalization that Bernie Sanders dropped all talk of a "political revolution" as soon as the pandemic broke out. He has since become the most enthusiastic proponent of the corporate shill Joe Biden.

Like patent medicine salesmen, both parties peddle their candidates as the miracle cure for what ails the country. But it is already clear that this election, regardless of its outcome, will not restore any form of normalcy to American political life.

In fact, the crises facing the country are so vast, sweeping and all-pervasive that neither convention was capable of even addressing them by name.

American capitalism, its exports increasingly uncompetitive on the world market, is hooked on debt. Its corporations, with their astronomical valuations and massive executive bonuses, cannot survive without ever larger government handouts. On Thursday, the final day of the Republican convention, the Federal Reserve announced a change in its basic methodology whose only discernable purpose was to tell the financial markets that it would continue to give them ever more money in perpetuity.

"Low Rates Forever!" proclaimed the *Wall Street Journal*, declaring that the strategy will lead to "more financial manias, panics and crashes." The financial markets cheered, with all three stock indexes now in positive territory for the year despite what has been called the worst peacetime economic crisis in a century.

Millions are cutting back spending on food because Congress refused to extend emergency unemployment aid. However Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, has nearly doubled his wealth since the start of the year, becoming the first person with a net worth of \$200 billion.

In the background, there are mounting warnings that the

economic arrangement that gave rise to America's "exorbitant privilege"—the hegemony of the dollar—may be at an end, as the price of gold breaks record after record.

Unable to compete with China's rapidly developing technology sector, which has eclipsed the United States in several key areas, Washington is provoking a "Cold War" with Beijing. America has been continuously at war for three decades, but its effort to reconquer the Middle East has been a disaster. Its hulking military machine is under major strain. In simulated tabletop conflicts, insiders complain that China's military beats the United States. And yet, every day, the two countries are inching closer toward a military clash.

The toxic effects of inequality, reaction and war—with their resulting sociopathic detachment to human suffering—have been given expression in America's disastrous response to the pandemic, with its grisly toll of nearly 200,000 dead.

The only concern of the White House, local governments and major corporations is to sweep infections under the rug in order to limit corporate liability and paid time off. The number of tests is constantly shrinking, and the White House this week shockingly demanded that those exposed to the disease not be tested.

"Why Don't The Dead Matter?" asks a columnist for the military blog *Defense One*. Endless wars—"military adventures overseas that took... human lives... with near reckless abandon"—he argues, have made America "anesthetized" to death. Indeed, mass death has been so institutionalized that the nightly news does not even report the daily death toll.

The *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its 2017 statement "Palace Coup or Class Struggle" that the Democrats' opposition to Trump is centered on issues of foreign policy. They have demanded a more aggressive policy toward Russia and China, and even orchestrated Trump's impeachment based exclusively on claims that he was insufficiently supportive of Ukraine in its "hot war" with Russia.

At the same time, since Trump's election, the Democrats have worked on a bipartisan basis with the White House to slash corporate taxes, increase military spending to record highs, build up Trump's personal Gestapo of border patrol units, and carry out the largest bailout of major corporations in human history through the CARES Act.

This orientation continues in the 2020 election. The Democratic Party has cobbled together a coalition of right-wing former Republicans, generals, representatives of the state intelligence bureaucracy, members of the financial oligarchy and, most of all, the affluent suburbs, which are repeatedly invoked as the party's target demographic.

In other words, the Democratic Party is conducting its 2020 election campaign as a re-run of the 2016 election,

which resulted in the defeat of Hillary Clinton in the Electoral College despite the fact that she won the popular vote by more than three million ballots.

Trump is framing the election, as he noted ahead of his impeachment, as a "civil war," in which all methods of political, military and paramilitary struggle are permissible. By contrast, his Democratic opponents see the conflict, in the words of former President Barack Obama, as an "intramural scrimmage," in which the greatest mistake would be to play too rough.

Outside the conflicts in Washington, however, another political force is entering onto the scene. Over the past several months, workers in major manufacturing facilities throughout America's industrial heartland, as well as educators throughout the United States, have begun to form rank-and-file committees to resist the efforts by corporations and the government to force them to work in increasingly unsafe conditions.

Millions of workers and young people have participated in mass demonstrations—according to some, the largest protests in American history—against police violence and the Trump administration's deployment of federal troops to American cities.

However much Trump may rant and rave, puffing himself up in imitation of Mussolini, the next stage in American political life will be a movement not to the right, but to the left, in a mounting social and political offensive by the working class.

This movement has not yet found its leadership. But that is coming. The increased censorship of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the court-sanctioned efforts to keep the Socialist Equality Party presidential ticket, Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz, off the ballot speak to the pervading fear in the ruling class that revolutionary socialism will find a mass audience.

America is entering a revolutionary crisis, whose central characteristic will be the intersection of the historical traditions of Trotskyism, represented by the International Committee of the Fourth International, with the global mass movement of the working class.



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