

Trump falls victim to his own “herd immunity” policy

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President Trump was airlifted to Walter Reed Medical Center Friday evening after testing positive for COVID-19. According to the extremely limited information released by the White House, he was treated with a cocktail of experimental drugs during the day but had a persistent low-grade fever, a significant factor in the decision to send him to the hospital.

There is no sign that Trump’s coming down with COVID-19 has evoked any sympathy among broad layers of the American population. Among working people who have lost loved ones or barely survived a debilitating illness themselves, there is no doubt a powerful feeling that Trump is getting his just deserts. Given his role in downplaying the virus and disparaging the use of face masks, he is like an arsonist who has inadvertently set himself on fire.

Trump’s positive test for coronavirus has dramatically intensified the political crisis in the United States. It has thrown a spanner into the works, at least temporarily, for the fascist forces Trump was seeking to mobilize to spearhead an election coup d’état. And it has demonstrated the criminal recklessness of the policy of reopening the schools and forcing workers back to work in the face of the pandemic.

Millions of working people are being given an irrefutable demonstration of the real dangers posed by the coronavirus. If the President of the United States, ensconced in the White House, surrounded by an army of aides and Secret Service agents, and with access to the best medical technology, cannot be protected from COVID-19, how can workers in auto and meatpacking plants, or teachers and students in classrooms, be considered safe from this deadly threat?

Trump’s diagnosis coincides with the admission by Amazon that a staggering 20,000 of its US employees have tested positive for the coronavirus. The fortune of the world’s richest man, Jeff Bezos, like all capitalist

wealth, is amassed through the destruction of the health and lives of superexploited workers.

The lavish treatment afforded Trump, who is occupying the presidential suite at Walter Reed, attended by a retinue of medical personnel, while he continues to exercise the powers of his office, is in stark contrast to the treatment received by millions of COVID-19 patients whose suffering was exacerbated by the Trump administration’s neglect, indifference and incompetence.

Trump did not languish for hours in an emergency room before he could get a bed. He will not be attended by nurses wearing garbage bags instead of Personal Protective Equipment. There will be no shortage of ventilators and other specialized equipment and drugs if his case takes a turn for the worse. He will lack for nothing, while millions of working people have already gone two months since the cutoff of federal extended unemployment benefits.

The short-term political consequences of this event are highly unpredictable. They depend to a large extent on whether Trump, at age 74 and clinically obese, is able to recover rapidly or at all. It will be several days before it will be known whether Trump’s infection is mild or more severe. Patients of Trump’s age, weight and gender have a mortality rate from three to 11 percent.

If Trump remains hospitalized, the question of handing over day-to-day political authority to Vice President Mike Pence will be raised. A more severe illness, particularly if Trump requires a ventilator, will raise the question of invoking the 25th Amendment to the US Constitution, which allows the vice president to take the place of the president with the support of a majority of cabinet officers.

None of the information being released by the White House can be taken at face value. Questions remain about how long Trump has been ill, how long he has known he was infected, and how many people he may have infected

in the White House, Congress, and in his travels to and from campaign rallies. It is likely that he was infectious during the debate with his Democratic opponent Joe Biden Tuesday night in Cleveland. Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris have since tested negative.

The day-to-day operations of both the executive and legislative branches will be significantly disrupted by the Trump diagnosis. An undisclosed number of White House aides have tested positive, including Hope Hicks and Kellyanne Conway, as well as Trump's wife Melania. Republican senators Mike Lee and Thom Tillis, who visited the White House last Saturday for the announcement of the appointment of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, have both tested positive.

The Trump reelection campaign has announced that all events involving the president or any family members have either been postponed or rescheduled as virtual events. Trump's ability to participate in future debates is in question, with the next one set for October 15 in Miami, Florida. If Trump's illness worsens, there could be attempts to replace him as the Republican candidate, either on the November ballot, or in the Electoral College, whose voters meet December 14 in state capitals across the country.

In this crisis, the main role of the Democratic Party has been to downplay the threat of a political coup by Trump around the November 3 election. They seek to shut down any opposition to Trump that might give expression to the deep social anger in the working class. Their greatest fear is that Trump's illness could open the way to a more general collapse of the Republicans, leading to a sweeping victory in the November 3 election that puts Biden in the White House and installs a Democratic majority in the Senate as well as the House of Representatives. The last thing they want is to face popular expectations that a Biden administration will take immediate action to undo the horrific consequences of Trump's right-wing policies over the past four years.

Even if it comes to power in Washington as a consequence of this sudden turn of events, the Democratic Party remains a party of Wall Street and the CIA. Nancy Pelosi's first media comment after the news broke was that measures to preserve "continuity of government" were in place. Biden speaks incessantly of his desire to restore "normalcy" to American capitalism. In other words, the Democrats wish to maintain the American ruling elite in its accustomed position of undisturbed self-enrichment, while excluding the broad mass of working people from any say in the operations of American

society.

The Trump diagnosis does not alter the fundamental trajectory of the social and political crisis of American capitalism. Even if Trump were to die of the pandemic, he is not the cause of the fascist danger confronting the working class, but merely the instrument. It will disrupt the effort to build a personalist, authoritarian movement if the would-be Mussolini is removed from the political equation. But the American ruling elite will find new instruments unless the working class takes up the political struggle against the capitalist system that is so urgently needed.

As the WSWWS warned in our Perspective of October 1:

The ruling class knows that it confronts mass social anger that will take an explosive and potentially revolutionary form. This is what imparts to Trump's actions their frenzied and reckless character. Terrified of the development of social opposition, he sees in every protest and manifestation of opposition the danger of the "radical left" and "socialism." The growth of working class militancy, already apparent in the wave of strikes, has convinced a substantial section of the ruling class that they have no way out except through violence.

With or without Trump, the fundamental class issues remain, and American political life remains poised on a knife-edge. Fascist reaction, having tried to use Trump to smash through the front door and impose dictatorship, may be compelled to push through the back door. Without the intervention of the working class, it will find a political Plan B. The most urgent necessity is for working people and young people to take up a political struggle against the capitalist system and both the parties that defend it.



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