

The Civil War Election

9 September 2020

The US presidential election is now eight weeks away. The campaign between Trump and Biden is pitting an administration that is making an increasingly open appeal to violence and police-state repression against a Democratic Party campaign that, as always, offers no genuine alternative to the drive toward authoritarianism and war.

The Trump administration is utilizing the election campaign in an attempt to build up a right-wing, fascist movement on a ferociously antisocialist basis. Trump has followed up his praise of Kyle Rittenhouse, who murdered two protesters and injured a third in Kenosha, Wisconsin last month, with calls for vengeance directed against opponents of police violence.

At his press conference on Monday, the president hailed the killing of protester Michael Reinhoehl by US Marshals last week. “If somebody is breaking the law, there has got to be a form of retribution,” Trump declared, condoning extrajudicial reprisals from his supporters. The same day, he retweeted a statement from right-wing commentator Dinesh D’Souza declaring that political unrest would lead to the “rise of citizen militias around the country”—that is, fascist vigilante organizations like Patriot Prayer, responsible for terrorizing protesters in Portland, Oregon.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has noted, Trump is not running for president; he is running for Führer. His campaign seems to be modeled on Hitler’s bid for German Chancellor in 1932. Using language that is unprecedented in American history, Trump is seeking to create conditions, regardless of the outcome on November 3, in which he will emerge as the leader of an extra-constitutional, right-wing movement.

There is no doubt that if Trump wins, he will immediately escalate the suppression of democratic rights and police-state forms of rule.

Under these conditions, the argument of the Democratic Party is that all opposition to Trump must be directed behind the election of Biden. For workers to allow their struggles to be subordinated to the electoral considerations of the Democratic Party, however, would be a fatal political error.

Trump did not emerge from nowhere. He expresses in the most unvarnished form the essentially fascist, antidemocratic impulse of the American ruling class as a whole. That Trump is not some sort of demon unleashed from hell is revealed in the fact that the growth of authoritarianism and fascism is a universal phenomenon, from Brazil and India to France and Germany.

The working class must direct its opposition to the underlying disease of which Trump is an expression. What are the conditions that are fueling this crisis?

First, the coronavirus pandemic has exposed the catastrophic state to which capitalism has driven society. It is an extreme expression and product of the subordination of everything to the profit interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy.

The ruling class has effectively adopted a policy of “herd immunity,” that the virus should be allowed to spread without

restraint. The back-to-work campaign, spearheaded by Trump but implemented by both the Democrats and Republicans, has already led to an enormous surge in the death toll, which is now approaching 200,000 people. The University of Washington now estimates that the number of deaths by the end of the year could rise to above 400,000.

Second, alongside the health impact of the pandemic is a deepening social and economic crisis for millions of people. Despite the back-to-work campaign, there are more than 11 million fewer jobs now than before the pandemic hit. It is six weeks since Congress allowed federal unemployment benefits to expire, throwing millions into poverty. The number of Americans facing hunger this year is projected to increase by 45 percent, to more than 50 million.

The multitrillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street, sanctioned with the nearly unanimous support of Congress in late March, produced massive growth in the wealth of the oligarchy. On Tuesday, *Forbes* published its latest update on the wealth of American billionaires, reporting that the wealth of the richest 400 people has reached a record \$3.2 trillion, up \$240 billion from a year ago.

Third, the deepening economic, social and political crisis increases the danger that the ruling class will see war abroad as a means of resolving its problems at home. Trump is making aggressive moves in the South China Sea as part of its offensive against China, while the Democrats, if they come to power, are committed to an intensification of the conflict with Russia and war in the Middle East.

It is to these conditions that the Trump administration is responding. In its October 19, 2019 statement, “No to American fascism! Build a mass movement to force Trump out!,” the Socialist Equality Party stated:

To downplay, let alone deny, the fact that the Trump presidency is metastasizing rapidly into a right-wing authoritarian regime, with distinctly fascist characteristics, is to close one’s eyes to political reality. The old refrain, “It can’t happen here”—i.e., that American democracy is eternally immune from the cancer of fascism—is hopelessly out of date. The very fact that a thug like Trump ascended to the White House testifies to the terminal crisis of the existing political system.

These processes have only intensified over the past year, vastly accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. Trump’s fascist rhetoric is an attempt to beat back a growing social movement of the working class against the policies of the corporate and financial oligarchy.

The Democratic Party, however, represents another faction of the same oligarchy. Its appeal is to dominant factions of the military, intelligence agencies as the arbiters of political power to whom they will turn if Trump refuses to leave office. Its main aim is to suppress any form of social opposition that threatens the interests of the ruling

elite.

Over the past week, Biden has denounced protests over police violence, attacked socialism, and made clear that he will run his campaign on the most right-wing basis possible. In the final stages of the election, the Democrats are attempting to revive their anti-Russia campaign to ever more explicitly target left-wing opposition within the United States as the work of “foreign adversaries.”

Biden presents himself as the “man in the middle” under conditions of a developing civil war situation. His campaign offers nothing to address the social catastrophe confronting masses of people. The Democrats’ open embrace of militarist violence—welcoming as part of their “coalition” the leading architects of the Iraq war—even allows the fascistic Trump to posture as an opponent of the “military-industrial complex.”

The Democrats are above all opposed to raising any issues that undermine the economic and financial interests of the ruling elite. An indication of the social policies that a Biden campaign would pursue if in office was indicated in an article published in the *Washington Post* on Monday. Referring to the economic proposals released by the Biden campaign—consisting of milquetoast reforms that were the product of discussions with the “Sanders-Warren” wing of the party—the *Post* wrote:

But in private calls with Wall Street leaders, the Biden campaign made it clear those proposals would not be central to Biden’s agenda. “They basically said, ‘Listen, this is just an exercise to keep the Warren people happy, and don’t read too much into it,’” said one investment banker, referring to liberal supporters of Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-mass.). The banker, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe private talks, said that message was conveyed on multiple calls.

The Democratic Party, for all its denunciations of Trump, makes no mention of the essentially fascistic character of the policies he is pursuing. It should be recalled that even though Trump lost the last election by three million votes, the immediate response of the Democratic Party was to offer its collaboration. The election, Obama said, was an “intramural scrimmage” between two sides of the same team.

If the Democrats were to lose on November 3, or even if they were to win, the response would be no different. They will immediately offer an olive branch to Trump and the Republican Party.

The ability of Trump to attract and maintain a following is largely a product of the inability of the Democrats to offer anything. In the end, the actual differences are marginal, focused above all on foreign policy. The fact that the contest is even close, under conditions of mass death and social devastation, is an indictment of the Democratic Party. It is incapable of making a popular appeal precisely because of the class interests that it represents.

The strategy of the working class cannot be guided by the arithmetic of election but the logic of the class struggle.

The Socialist Equality Party and our election campaign—Joseph Kishore for president and Norissa Santa Cruz for vice president—direct all of our attention to the growth of working-class opposition. The election must be seen not as an end, but as part of a broader process. This will prepare the working class for whatever the outcome—whether it is Trump or Biden in the White House or whether it results in the direct intervention of the military.

There is already growing opposition in the working class. Teachers and parents are mobilizing against the efforts to reopen schools amidst the raging pandemic. Educators and students have begun to fight

against the dangerous reopening of colleges and universities, including a strike that began yesterday at the University of Michigan by 1,000 lecturers and graduate students.

There is seething anger among autoworkers, Amazon workers, transportation workers, service workers and other sections of the working class to the back-to-work campaign and the effort by the corporations to use the pandemic to increase exploitation. A “winter of discontent” is brewing with millions out of work and facing poverty and eviction.

This is combined with the continued protests over police violence and racism, sparked in late May following the murder of George Floyd. While fueled by the unending epidemic of police violence, the protests have given expression to deep social anger and a desire among millions of workers and youth to fight back.

The struggles of different sections of the working class must be organized and united through the formation of independent factory, workplace and neighborhood safety committees. The fight of teachers against the back-to-school campaign must be connected with the fight of students against the reopening of universities, the fight of workers against the horrific conditions in the plants, the fight of the unemployed against social devastation, and the fight of youth against police violence.

At issue in every struggle is the question of political power: What class rules and in whose interests. The only solution to the crisis is one that is directed at the capitalist system. A massive diversion of social resources away from the bailout of the rich and the financing of militarism and war is required. The wealth of the oligarchs must be seized, and the gigantic corporations and banks turned into public utilities to create the conditions for a globally coordinated program to save lives.

The fight against the pandemic is not primarily a medical question. As with every great problem confronting the working class—social inequality and poverty, war, environmental degradation, and dictatorship—it is a political and revolutionary question, which raises the need for the working class to take power in its own hands, to overthrow capitalism, and to restructure all of society on the basis of social need.

This program must become the basis for unifying all the struggles of the working class in the United States and, moreover, provide a lead to the fight of workers throughout the world.

The next two months are critical. The SEP and our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International are spearheading the fight to build a socialist leadership in the working class. This is the most urgent political task. The essential conclusion that must be drawn is to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (US) Political Committee

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>