

More Signs of Establishment Moves Against Trump

by Hari Kumar, October 2020

1. *Inter-capitalist contradictions in the USA*

Recently I wrote¹ - that there had been an exodus of major sections of the ruling class from Trump's camp. In brief, the argument presented was that the main sections of the ruling class who have supported Trump included heavy industry and extractive industries - epitomised by the oil, gas, mining sectors. In contrast, the dominant section of the ruling class interests represented by the Democratic party are formed by the financial capitalists. But as Trump has failed to move out-shored American industry back to the USA, there has been a cooling between Trump and his industrial backers.

"The (*Trump-ite*) trade war has come at a cost. Tariffs imposed by the United States and retaliatory measures taken by aggrieved trading partners have shaved billions off the U.S. economy, according to a Federal Reserve paper. And a 2019 study by economists at the Fed, Princeton University and Columbia University showed that tariffs imposed additional burdens on American households, raising the cost of imports and curtailing exporters' access to markets. For all that cost, there has been no improvement in Mr. Trump's preferred indicator of economic dominance, the nation's trade balance."²

The Democratic Party has dived head-long into this opportunity. Recent overtures from the Democratic Party signal to sections of the heavy industrial capitalists, that they have no need to worry about the Democratic party leaders.

"In July, former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. presented an economic strategy to "rebuild domestic manufacturing capacity," restoring local supply chains from semiconductors to pharmaceuticals. In September he added a tax penalty to the plan, aimed at companies that move jobs to other countries, alongside a tax credit for businesses that bring them home. The proposals might have seemed like something from President Trump's playbook."²

This is a dramatic battle within the ruling class of the USA, but one that has enormous repercussions for the working peoples of the USA and the world. Meanwhile, events force most reasonable progressive observers to warn of a potential right-wing coup from a Trump-led counter-strike.^{1,3}

However as more and more sections of the USA come out against Trump, the likelihood of a transition to a Democratic Party Presidency rises. Recent statements by prominent bodies in the scientific establishment are very relevant here. Significant sections of American society have signaled their unwillingness to live with the Trumpites. This has become so widespread, that it has now extended to important sections of the ideological superstructure.

¹ The Stakes Rise: Inter-Capitalist Warfare in the USA Ruling Class – Dumping Trump', Marxism Leninism Currents Today; at <http://ml-today.com/2020/07/24/the-stakes-rise-inter-capitalist-warfare-in-the-usa-ruling-class-dumping-trump/>

² Eduardo Porter, "Trump, Biden and 'Made in U.S.A.': Same Refrain, Varying Notes," New York Times, Sep 29, 2020; at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/28/business/economy/biden-trump-made-in-usa.html>

³ Jeremy Brecher, "Social Self-Defense Against the Impending Trump Coup"; Berlin Left at: <https://www.theleftberlin.com/post/social-self-defense-against-the-impending-trump-coup>

2. *The Superstructure of states*

Marx and Engels are famous for their sharp focus on the essential economic factor driving changes in society, or as they termed it - the 'base'. But as they pointed out in their joint work – '*The German Ideology*' – the ruling thoughts of a society reflect the ideas of the owners of this base

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.”⁴

This edifice around a particular society, one reflecting its economic base is called the 'superstructure'. The ideas of the ruling class are organised by the superstructure:

“The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.”⁵

Of course the relationship between base and super-structure is not a simple one-way street. And at a time when the ruling class is so severely divided within itself, there is plenty of scope for wobbling super-structures. Nonetheless, if establishment chunks leave their cloistered worlds and join in an open battle within the ruling class, this is significant. Such a seismic shift can be seen now in the USA, with the recent statements of the New England Journal of Medicine,⁶ and 'Science'⁷. In both cases, the editorial board has been quite outspoken about the current elections taking place now.

3. *Physicians and Scientists in todays state*

Marx and Engels proclaimed that in its chase of total power and control:

“The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.”⁸

While the general thrust was fully correct, there were a few later developments. These included the fostering of illusions in “the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science” etc – that they are '*better*' than your average Joanne or Joe. But in fact at bottom, most of these occupations are *objectively* part of the working class. If they employ any staff, they may be considered to be in the vacillating petit-bourgeoisie – prey to fascist ideology. A few of them have ascended to high management positions in state medical systems. Some fewer, even own huge companies – whether in the pharmaceutical industries or in the 'Health Management' industries. These latter two categories are clearly another breed of person. Such physicians have become *part* of the ruling capitalist class.

⁴ K. Marx, 1859 'The German Ideology'; Volume 5, *Collected Works*; Moscow 1976; p. 59.

⁵ K. Marx, 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; Moscow, 1977.

⁶ The Editors, 'Dying in a Leadership Vacuum'; October 8, 2020; *New England Journal of Medicine* 2020; 383:1479-1480; free access at: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMe2029812>

⁷ H. Holden Thorp, 'Two words Trump can't say'; later amended to 'Words Matter'; *Science*, 09 Oct 2020, Vol 37, Issue 6513, free access at: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/370/6513/eabf0577>

⁸ K.Marx and F.Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*; section 1.

However the vast majority of physicians and scientists remain - *objectively* - a specialised form of worker. I believe this also the case of the members of the very prominent scientists making up the editorial boards of such journals. Yet they invariably – at least in usual time! - take a ‘neutral’ position on what might be labeled as ‘partisan politics’. *What have these editors of the NEJM and Science said?*

Unsurprisingly they focus on the COVID aspect of the current USA crisis. Nonetheless, some long quotes are worth reading. For example the NEJM ⁶:

“Covid-19 has created a crisis throughout the world. This crisis has produced a test of leadership. With no good options to combat a novel pathogen, countries were forced to make hard choices about how to respond. Here in the United States, our leaders have failed that test. They have taken a crisis and turned it into a tragedy. The magnitude of this failure is astonishing...”

The United States leads the world in Covid-19 cases and in deaths due to the disease, far exceeding the numbers in much larger countries, such as China. The death rate in this country is more than double that of Canada, exceeds that of Japan, a country with a vulnerable and elderly population, by a factor of almost 50, and even dwarfs the rates in lower-middle-income countries, such as Vietnam, by a factor of almost 2000. Covid-19 is an overwhelming challenge, and many factors contribute to its severity. But the one we can control is how we behave. And in the United States we have consistently behaved poorly. We know that we could have done better...

Why has the United States handled this pandemic so badly? We have failed at almost every step. We had ample warning, but when the disease first arrived, we were incapable of testing effectively and couldn’t provide even the most basic personal protective equipment to health care workers and the general public. And we continue to be way behind the curve in testing. While the absolute numbers of tests have increased substantially, the more useful metric is the number of tests performed per infected person, a rate that puts us far down the international list, below such places as Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia, countries that cannot boast the biomedical infrastructure or the manufacturing capacity that we have. Moreover, a lack of emphasis on developing capacity has meant that U.S. test results are often long delayed, rendering the results useless.”

The *NEJM* editors continue that the (short-term) ‘solutions’ are not exactly rocket science. It is the mixed messages, vacillation and political opportunism of the leading politicians that is to blame for the current USA health crisis of COVID:

“Although we tend to focus on technology, most of the interventions that have large effects are not complicated. The United States instituted quarantine and isolation measures late and inconsistently, often without any effort to enforce them, after the disease had spread substantially in many communities. Our rules on social distancing have in many places been lackadaisical at best, with loosening of restrictions long before adequate disease control had been achieved. And in much of the country, people simply don’t wear masks, largely because our leaders have stated outright that masks are political tools rather than effective infection control measures. The government has appropriately

invested heavily in vaccine development, but its rhetoric has politicized the development process and led to growing public distrust.”

There is no hesitation to castigate the Federal (“consistently inadequate”) – or regional governments (lacking in ‘competence’); or the “politicization: of the Food Drugs Administration (FDA):

“The response of our nation’s leaders has been consistently inadequate. The federal government has largely abandoned disease control to the states. Governors have varied in their responses, not so much by party as by competence. But whatever their competence, governors do not have the tools that Washington controls. Instead of using those tools, the federal government has undermined them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which was the world’s leading disease response organization, has been eviscerated and has suffered dramatic testing and policy failures. The National Institutes of Health have played a key role in vaccine development but have been excluded from much crucial government decision-making. And the Food and Drug Administration has been shamefully politicized, appearing to respond to pressure from the administration rather than scientific evidence. Our current leaders have undercut trust in science and in government, causing damage that will certainly outlast them. Instead of relying on expertise, the administration has turned to uninformed “opinion leaders” and charlatans who obscure the truth and facilitate the promulgation of outright lies.”

Meanwhile the editor of *Science* is more succinct, but more pithily scathing:

“When it comes to the crisis of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), Trump’s words could not be more destructive. When scientists tried to tell him a crisis was coming, he called it “their new hoax.” About the extraordinary number of lives lost he says, “it is what it is.... It’s no wonder that the braggard who said, “I alone can fix it” can’t bring himself.. (to say): ”Two words for those who have borne the battle of COVID-19. Two words Donald Trump simply can’t say: “Thank you.”⁷

If this is considered as tame language by left-wingers – they must be living in their own bubble far, far away from all other humans.

Thus the open positions of the *NEJM* and *Science* editors are important. But what do they signify? The increasing contradictions within society, force everyone to take sides. Numerous articles show the scale of this, including my own relatively early warning to progressives to take this pandemic seriously.⁹ As regards the USA election, if Trump should launch a coup, at this stage it is not just the workers who will face him down – as suggested by some. It is rather his opposition within the ruling class, including the military.² Nonetheless, in the longer term – only a solid Marxist working class party can assist the working class to ensure a more equitable society.

⁹ ‘How Should Marxists View the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2019-2020?’, March 17, 2020; at: <http://ml-today.com/2020/03/17/how-should-marxists-view-the-covid-19-pandemic-of-2019-2020/>