

A revolutionary situation?

written by Gary Wilson
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In Oakland, Calif., Heena Shah marches with her family. Photo: David Bacon

Nov. 12 — An upheaval is underway. The vote against Donald Trump, while expected by many, was more significant than any had predicted. Despite multifarious efforts to suppress the Black and Latinx vote, Joe Biden's unprecedented 7-million-plus lead in the popular vote clearly came from the Black, Latinx, Indigenous and Asian communities.

The workers will expect results. It was, after all, a vote for health care, to end the pandemic, and for jobs and housing.

Trump voters were not mostly working-class people. The biggest number of Trump voters are managers and supervisors, and the millions who make up the police-state apparatus and the prison-industrial complex. The biggest number have an income of over \$100,000 a year, according to reports. Yeah, there are a lot of them, but that doesn't make them working class.

The vote against Trump was not a revolution, but it accelerated the government crisis that is unfolding. Not since the Civil War and Reconstruction has there been any uncertainty as to how the government would proceed.

Behind this political crisis is the economic crisis, aggravated by a killer pandemic. The capitalist crisis is the 900-pound monster in the room that few are talking about.

There is a general capitalist crisis on a world level, and the rumbles of instability are widely felt.

The pandemic did not create the crisis, but it has accelerated the Depression-level conditions.

Karl Marx explains that capitalist production is divided into two departments: producing the means of production, and producing the products that are consumed. Both these sectors have been hit by a crisis of overproduction, often referred to as

“overcapacity” by bourgeois economists.

Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, said on [the status of the global economy](#): “Global growth will turn sharply negative in 2020 ... In fact, we anticipate the worst economic fallout since the Great Depression. ... We now project that over 170 countries will experience negative per capita income growth this year. The bleak outlook applies to advanced and developing economies alike. This crisis knows no boundaries.”

The idea that the U.S. was somehow exempt from global political, economic and social problems was always untrue, but now it is clearly absurd. The U.S. economy is completely integrated in the world economy. U.S. imperialism has intractable international problems that cannot be solved through sheer military might, which itself has been scaled back due to the economic crisis.

Not only are workers disillusioned with the system, but even the capitalists have lost faith in capitalism. With the decline of manufacturing, Wall Street has resorted to speculative markets in place of once great industries — high-stakes gambling that is volatile and experiencing unprecedented swings up and down.

That’s the background to the U.S. presidential elections. Donald Trump’s refusal to concede the election and his declaration of victory despite losing the popular vote exposes an open fissure in the ruling class.

Not Trump’s first coup attempt

What’s unfolding is a crisis in the ruling class over how to maintain their rule, how to respond to the crisis, how to stop U.S. imperialism’s decline.

Trump’s stand is not just the megalomaniac talk of an individual. He must have support in the ruling class. This has been developing for a while. This is not Trump’s first coup attempt. On June 1, [Trump called out the military](#).

The afternoon of June 1 saw the unprecedented sight of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley in battle fatigues, with Attorney General William Barr, on the White House grounds in advance of Trump's speech in the Rose Garden. They appeared to be reviewing the troops which were lined up facing the protesters in Lafayette Park across the street.

Suddenly, the whole nation witnessed the aggressive and violent action by 5,000 National Guard troops and federal agents, decked out in full body armor, to move the protesters out of the way just before the president came out to speak about dominating the streets. Trump said, "As we speak, I am dispatching thousands and thousands of heavily armed soldiers, military personnel and law enforcement officers" across the country.

Shortly after that, Trump led Barr, Milley, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and others over to a church, where he famously held up a Bible.

The military occupation of major cities across the U.S. didn't happen and the coup attempt was halted. The military commanders blinked and then pulled back their support. For one thing, a top general noted, the troops couldn't be relied on — a great many come from the Black and Brown communities they were supposed to suppress.

Trump is now making a second coup attempt, in a different way. One of his first steps was to purge the Pentagon, putting his closest supporters into top positions.

The current crisis reveals the great instability of U.S. capitalism. Some might say that it is in a pre-revolutionary stage, though not every revolutionary situation leads to a revolution.

Symptoms of revolutionary situation

Russian Marxist V.I. Lenin asked rhetorically: "What, generally speaking, are the

symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms.”

Abridged, the three are:

1. When it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, a split in the ruling classes. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for “the lower classes not to want” to live in the old way; it is also necessary that “the upper classes should be unable” to rule in the old way;
2. When the suffering of the oppressed classes has grown more acute than usual;
3. When there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who are drawn in by the circumstances of the crisis and by the upper classes themselves into independent historical action.

Marxism is a method for looking at developments and making sense of them, to see the trends. Seeing a revolutionary situation is not a prediction, but more like a doctor’s prognosis after examining the patient, an assessment of the current condition and possible outcome.

A capitalist economic crisis leads to social and political crises. In the process of any revolutionary change, the first small, quantitative changes can lead to sudden, qualitative leaps forward in people’s thinking. Events are already having an impact on consciousness, and even more dramatic events are in store for the future.

A revolutionary upheaval at this time may manifest itself as a struggle for real democracy and social equality for workers and oppressed peoples.

