

The Great Intra-Class Confrontation of 2017 in the U.S.

By Samuel Rojas, February 2017

Two sides of a ruling class confrontation

Even though we live days of extreme confrontation in the U.S. political scene, nothing much is new, except, of course, for the high levels of confrontation. The U.S. ruling class is sharply divided. The two main sectors of this ruling class can no longer keep harmony and are now fighting it out. The wealthy are fighting out.

On one side, we have the liberals, represented by the Democratic Party. On the other side, the conservatives, represented by a subverted Republican Party. However, this confrontation is not new. It is possible that this open intra-class war begun in 2009, with the election of the first U.S. African American President, Barack Obama.

Traditionally, in this U.S. capitalist democracy, Democrats and Republicans take turns to administer their state. In 2009, republican president George W. Bush delivered a capitalist economy in shambles, with a collapsed financial system after years of monetary and lending speculation. Previous republican administrations had brought the U.S. capitalist economy into a recession and the financial markets were in disarray. At the center of the crisis was the real estate lending fiasco. For all their talk about state non-interfere in the markets, the state jumped in to save the day. U.S. people's tax dollars and debt acquired on their name, bailed out the capitalist economy and President Bush asked Congress authorization to spend more than 700 billion dollars to buy out bad mortgages.

Under these circumstances, the U.S. voting base was ready for "change". This readiness for change resulted in the election a polished, liberal, Barack Obama to be elected president, and later on re-elected for 4 more years. During his tenure he continued the so-called economic stimulus for the wealthy, strengthened regulations in many different areas of the economy, so that capitalism could function in a more controlled manner. Republicans offered fierce opposition, and in practice, during his second tenure they interfered daily with this administration. This opposition forced President Obama to make use of executive powers and rule by executive orders, to attempt to fulfill some of his campaign promises. It must be said, that in 2009 democrats controlled both the house and Senate, yet the right-wing allied with Republicans many times to stop some of the legislation attempted by Obama. In 2011, democrats lost their majority in the House, and in 2015, lost both.

But, clearly on Obama's second term, Republicans declared war on liberal democrats and president Obama.

During the 2016 election process, the traditional Republican political machine was subverted by an unlikely candidate, the billionaire Donald Trump, energized by a right-wing populism that offered to “drain the establishment swamp”. That establishment, no doubt also included the republican politicians that during the primaries ridiculed and opposed him. On the other capitalist camp, the democrats went with Hillary Clinton, offering continuation of the Obama legacy.

Much has been and will be written about this nasty, confrontational campaign, that Trump pushed to the limits, with an equal response from Clinton. In the end, Trump, the politically incorrect, uneducated, racist, sexist, candidate who once said "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters," was absolutely right.

This highly divided ruling class, with CNN v. Fox, with liberals v. populist conservatives, capital globalists v. capitalist protectionist nationalists, has arrived to a point where the latter have complete control over the executive, House and Senate, on their way to control the Supreme Court, and the military.

The working class that supported and supports the Trump camp

Traditionally, organized labor has sided with the Democratic Party. It was not different during the last elections. The AFL-CIO General Board, representing 12.5 million members endorsed Hillary Clinton's candidacy. Likewise the SEIU leadership representing 1.9 million members endorsed the democratic candidate. The IBEW with a membership of about 800 thousands also endorsed the democrats. The Teamsters Union leadership representing 1.4 million members also added their support to Clinton.

The Trump candidacy also received the support of smaller union such as the Fraternal Order of Police (about 350,000 members), National Border Patrol Council, representing 16,000 members, National Immigration and Customs Enforcement Council (7,600 members), union representing Immigration and Customs Enforcement. In August 2016, the Washington Times reported that the National Industrial Base Workforce Coalition had supported Trump's candidacy. According to the paper, this “is an ad-hoc group of union local presidents from states including California, Ohio, Florida, West Virginia and Maryland. They represent some of the workers in what national security experts call the “defense industrial base,” the American industrial capacity to produce ships, satellites, aircraft and the other tools of war. These union local presidents represent, among others, parts of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the International Association of Machinists, the coal miners and the United Steelworkers union. Unusually, it also contains a strong group of West Virginia coal miners.”

Yet, Donald Trump received important support from the working class, mostly whites, some members of the same unions whose leaderships had endorsed Clinton, but many, the great majority, were either unemployed, sub-employed.

Trump's message to these working people was clear, "you are the forgotten ones, your jobs have been taken by U.S. companies moving abroad for cheap labor, and by undocumented migrant workers coming into the United States." A good dose of national chauvinism, racism, immigrant scapegoating and criminalization, and the populist formula was completed.

The crisis of capitalism and the shaping of fascism

We are confronted with a political crisis within the capitalist ruling class. Clearly, the capitalist adversaries, democrats v. republicans, have reached a level of disagreement that has unleashed a political war. This crisis is compounded by internal struggles within each of these two capitalist parties. Nowhere was this most clearly demonstrated than during the elections primaries.

Within the Democratic Party, the traditional establishment operators gathered around Hillary Clinton. A more progressive branch in the democratic grassroots rallied for Bernie Sanders, a social democratic senator, who had no qualms naming capitalism as the system responsible for suffering in the U.S. and proposing instead socialist alternatives. In spite of a young and energized democratic base that supported Sanders, the political operators managed to have Clinton be the Democratic Party candidate.

The opposite phenomenon took place within the Republican Party. The billionaire reality show actor, Donald Trump, using his fortune, run a campaign appealing to the extreme right-wing, and against the establishment, including the Republican Party establishment. Among those who publicly opposed him were the Bushes, Mitt Romney, and many other important political figures. The Republican Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan spoke against Trump during the campaign and didn't bring himself up to openly say that he supported Trump even at their own convention. After Trump's surprising victory in the U.S. electoral college, republicans forgot their criticisms and subserviently lined up behind him, in particular Rep. Paul Ryan.

However, those internal divisions still prevail in both capitalist parties. These are the fundamental elements of this crisis, which in the end is a crisis of capitalism.

The great mass of workers and unemployed workers, all of us, remain in the middle of this confrontation of capitalist titans. Those who have the analytical tools, the training and the resources, can dig deeper in the definitions of camps, in particular to define what business, industrial, and financial groups are aligned behind the warriors.

We are witnessing the rise of fascism in the United States. Many if not all characteristics of historical fascism can be observed in the propaganda of Trump during his campaign and his actions as president.

Again, the professors can intervene to provide more details on this matter. The works of Umberto Eco in *Eternal (Ur) Fascism: 14 ways of Looking at a Blackshirt* (1995), or other scholarly works on the subject matter, will make us tremble as we compare what we are now living. Here is a look at Eco's definitions:

1. The cult of tradition. "One has only to look at the syllabus of every fascist movement to find the major traditionalist thinkers. The Nazi gnosis was nourished by traditionalist, syncretistic, occult elements."
2. The rejection of modernism. "The Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, is seen as the beginning of modern depravity. In this sense Ur-Fascism can be defined as irrationalism."
3. The cult of action for action's sake. "Action being beautiful in itself, it must be taken before, or without, any previous reflection. Thinking is a form of emasculation."
4. Disagreement is treason. "The critical spirit makes distinctions, and to distinguish is a sign of modernism. In modern culture the scientific community praises disagreement as a way to improve knowledge."
5. Fear of difference. "The first appeal of a fascist or prematurely fascist movement is an appeal against the intruders. Thus Ur-Fascism is racist by definition."
6. Appeal to social frustration. "One of the most typical features of the historical fascism was the appeal to a frustrated middle class, a class suffering from an economic crisis or feelings of political humiliation, and frightened by the pressure of lower social groups."
7. The obsession with a plot. "The followers must feel besieged. The easiest way to solve the plot is the appeal to xenophobia."
8. The enemy is both strong and weak. "By a continuous shifting of rhetorical focus, the enemies are at the same time too strong and too weak."
9. Pacifism is trafficking with the enemy. "For Ur-Fascism there is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for struggle."
10. Contempt for the weak. "Elitism is a typical aspect of any reactionary ideology."

11. Everybody is educated to become a hero. “In Ur-Fascist ideology, heroism is the norm. This cult of heroism is strictly linked with the cult of death.”

12. Machismo and weaponry. “Machismo implies both disdain for women and intolerance and condemnation of nonstandard sexual habits, from chastity to homosexuality.”

13. Selective populism. “There is in our future a TV or Internet populism, in which the emotional response of a selected group of citizens can be presented and accepted as the Voice of the People.”

14. Ur-Fascism speaks Newspeak. “All the Nazi or Fascist schoolbooks made use of an impoverished vocabulary, and an elementary syntax, in order to limit the instruments for complex and critical reasoning.”

Beyond theoretical considerations, we can verify that the current Trump presidency is nourished by racism against immigrants, has a blanket admonition of the media as an “enemy of America”, Trump has complete disregard for human rights, criminalizes all migrant workers, promotes his own personality cult, equates weakness with bad, criticizes its own legal system when it doesn’t rule on his favor, and has begun to “campaign” again in order to mobilize mass support behind him. There are so many other elements that point to the rise of fascism in the midst of this capitalist crisis that goes beyond the scope of this brief article.

Resistance to Trump in favor of Democrats or an independent path?

Democrats have lost control of the House, Senate and the Executive and are desperate to regain a footing in the power circle again. This is why you can see democratic politicians showing up on mass rallies to champion the freedom people are demanding. However, democrats are part of the problem. In the end, capitalism is the problem for us. For democrats and republican, the issue is control of the administration of capitalism to apply the tactics that they think best can exploit labor and generate profits.

Yet, it is hard to see how to develop a resistance movement that would generate its own alternative when the U.S. working class takes sides with the two competing capitalist camps. It might be that youth are the only hope to overcome this crisis and emerge from it with a better proposal for a system based on humanity and cooperation rather than profits and competition.