

The political and social roots of the Democratic Party's anti-Russia hysteria

13 May 2017

The crisis surrounding the firing of FBI Director James Comey has been seized on by the Democratic Party and much of the media to escalate their anti-Russian campaign.

While denouncing Trump for supposedly colluding with the Kremlin, they all but ignore the administration's escalating assault on immigrants and its ongoing drive to destroy Medicaid, slash health care for millions of workers, lift corporate regulations and hand big business and the rich an immense tax windfall.

The Democrats choose to focus not on these attacks, but rather on a McCarthyite-style witch-hunt against Russia with anti-communist undertones. In the process, the Democrats have adopted the traditional language of the extreme right.

In its lead editorial Friday, headlined "The Trump-Russia Nexus," the *New York Times* lays out its case that Trump maintains an "unusually extensive network of relationships with a major foreign power," i.e., Russia. It demands "a thorough investigation of whether and how Russia interfered in the election and through whom."

The *Times*' "network of relationships" turns out to be little more than a series of business connections and contacts between Trump family members and associates and Russian interests, which are hardly unique for the American corporate-financial oligarchy and can be viewed as inherently sinister only if one starts from the premise that all things Russian are evil.

The list includes Trump business ties with Russian nationals, a speech by former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn in Moscow, a meeting between Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the Russian ambassador to the US, former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort's business dealings with a Russian oligarch and pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine, and links to Russian interests on the part of Trump advisers Roger Stone and Carter Page.

One could site similar relations with foreign countries involving the Bush family, not to mention the Clintons, with their far-flung machinations through the Clinton Foundation.

In a column published in the same edition of the *Times*, Paul Krugman goes even further, accusing Trump of using "presidential power to cover up possible foreign subversion of the US government." He declares not only Trump but the entire Republican Party to be little more than traitors, willing to work with the enemy to secure tax cuts for the rich.

"Today's Republicans just don't cooperate with Democrats, period," he writes. "They'd rather work with Vladimir Putin." He asks, "How did a whole party become so, well, un-American?"

Congressional hearings on alleged Russian hacking and possible Trump campaign collusion are replete with denunciations of Russia as a "hostile government" and "enemy power," mostly, but by no means exclusively, from the mouths of Democrats.

The presentation of Russia as some all-powerful monster menacing American democracy and plotting to conquer the world is absurd. The Putin government represents the Russian oligarchy. As with any capitalist power, it seeks to influence world events in its favor. But its operations pale in comparison to those of American imperialism.

It is a matter of historical fact that, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia vacated vast swaths of territory and spheres of influence throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In the subsequent decades, NATO expanded its borders hundreds of miles to the east, right to Russia's doorstep, while the US backed the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and the fascist-led, anti-Russian coup in Ukraine.

As for subverting governments and interfering in elections, there is hardly a country in the world, including Washington's European, North American and Asian

allies, where the CIA and the Pentagon are not working to insure the installation of pro-American regimes—from bankrolling “pro-democracy” NGOs to organizing regime-change operations and carrying out bloody wars.

No less absurd is the claim that Russian propaganda was responsible for the defeat of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election. Clinton ignored the working class and ran as the favored candidate of Wall Street and the military/intelligence apparatus. This enabled Trump to posture as an opponent of the status quo, while ensuring a precipitous drop in voter turnout for the Democratic candidate.

What is the real source of the anti-Russia hysteria gripping the US ruling elite?

There are major foreign policy issues at stake. Despite the dissolution of the USSR, which during the Cold War blocked the unchecked global domination of US imperialism, Russia has emerged as an obstacle to Washington’s drive for world hegemony. This is seen most sharply in Syria, where Russia intervened militarily to frustrate US efforts to oust President Bashar al-Assad.

No less important are domestic considerations. The ruling class is acutely aware of the immense class tensions that exist in the society over which it presides, tensions that have been artificially suppressed for many decades.

The United States is the most unequal country in the industrial world, with 20 billionaires possessing more wealth than half of the population. The 2016 elections themselves showed the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment and hostility to both parties, expressed in the support of millions of people for Clinton’s opponent in the Democratic primaries, Bernie Sanders, who falsely claimed to be an “independent” and a “socialist.”

Facing the threat of mounting social opposition, the US ruling class is seeking a new framework for the waging of war abroad and domestic repression at home. The “war on terror,” which has served this purpose for some fifteen years, is discredited, not least because the US is allied with Al Qaeda-linked Islamist forces in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East.

There is a need for a new narrative to divert social tensions, ideologically unify the nation, subordinate the working class and, when necessary, suppress opposition.

It is significant that it is the “left” that has been mobilized most directly in the McCarthyite campaign against Russia—figures such as Krugman, who earlier called Trump the “Siberian candidate,” and Michael Moore, who has gone from being an opponent of the war

in Iraq to denouncing Trump as a “Russian traitor” and appealing to the military to take action. The organizations that orbit the Democratic Party—the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative, publications like *Jacobin* and others—either remain silent about the conflicts within the ruling class, as they have since the firing of Comey, or openly endorse the campaign against Russia.

The Democratic Party has very consciously worked to integrate the anti-Russia hysteria with identity politics, seizing on various anti-democratic policies of the Putin government for this purpose. The aim is to mobilize more privileged sections of the upper-middle class behind the overall policy of imperialist war and social reaction.

The campaign takes root in fertile soil. This social layer, representing the top 5 to 10 percent of income earners, has been substantially enriched by the stock market boom and has interests that are sharply different from those of the working class. While they would prefer a more equitable distribution of wealth at the very top of society, they are predominantly concerned with preventing the growth of social opposition in the working class.

Thus the campaign against Russia expresses the most essential characteristics of the Democratic Party: the marriage of Wall Street, the military/intelligence apparatus and the affluent upper-middle class, mobilized around identity politics.

The Democratic Party cannot conduct a fight against Trump on any sort of progressive basis. It is terrified of a mass movement of the working class. Were Trump to either resign or be impeached as a result of this right-wing campaign, his administration would simply be replaced with another government of war, austerity and reaction.

This poses all the more clearly the urgent need for the working class to intervene with its own socialist and internationalist program.

Andre Damon

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>