

The noose tightens around Trump

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Following Monday's FBI raid on President Donald Trump's personal lawyer Michael Cohen, the survival of the Trump presidency appears increasingly problematic.

The use of tactics against a sitting president normally reserved for mafia dons or alleged terrorists takes the months-long conflict within the ruling class and the state to an entirely new level. The fact that the raid was carried out as Trump was meeting with his generals to discuss military action against Syria underscores the explosive level of tensions within the ruling elite.

On the basis of a referral from Special Counsel Robert Mueller, whose investigation into alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 election and possible Trump collusion has been the focus of the campaign by sections of the intelligence establishment and the Democratic Party against the White House, FBI agents seized Cohen's computer, phone and personal financial records. They also took documents relating to hush money paid during the 2016 election campaign to a porn star and a former Playboy playmate who claim to have had affairs with Trump. The FBI swept up a wealth of data, including privileged communications between Trump and his lawyer.

Cohen, a longtime lawyer and confidant of Trump, boasts of being the president's "fixer." Mueller and the anti-Trump camp within the ruling elite know very well that the billionaire New York real estate and gambling speculator-turned president is mired in criminal activity, which is certain to be reflected in the material seized from Cohen.

They have Trump by the throat, and Trump knows it.

Mueller executed a calculated maneuver to immunize himself from charges of overreach. He referred a criminal investigation of Cohen on charges of banking and wire fraud and election campaign violations to the US attorney's office, which executed the warrants and oversaw the FBI raid. This indicates that Mueller is working toward an indictment not only against Cohen, but also against Trump.

The extraordinary events of Monday suggest that a criminal indictment or the threat of one is overtaking a strategy based on impeachment, which would be difficult to obtain in a Republican-controlled Congress. Even if a sitting president cannot be prosecuted and must first be removed

from office, the calculation may be that the threat of massive fines and jail time will convince Trump to resign.

Trump's rambling tirade Monday in advance of a meeting with his national security team on Syria, in which he denounced Mueller, his attorney general Jeff Sessions and his deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein, who has authority over the special counsel, reflected his own crisis and the dilemma in which he finds himself.

His talk of possibly firing Mueller and/or his top Justice Department officials evoked a sharp rebuke from some leading Republicans in Congress. The Republican chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Chuck Grassley, warned Tuesday that it would be "political suicide" for Trump to take that route.

These extraordinary events are part of a ferocious conflict within the highest levels of the ruling elite and its state apparatus. The battle concerns fundamental issues of US imperialist foreign policy. Trump's opponents, spearheaded by the Democratic Party and the bulk of the corporate media, are allied with the dominant sections of the intelligence establishment, which consider Trump to be insufficiently aggressive in waging war in Syria and confronting Russia.

They have been using the Mueller investigation and the phony narrative of "Russian meddling" and Moscow-inspired "fake news" to pressure Trump to escalate the US offensive against Russia. But Monday's raid indicates that decisive sections of the ruling class have lost confidence in Trump's ability to manage their foreign policy or deal with the increasingly tense internal situation.

The political turmoil in Washington is being intensified by the convergence of crises on a number of fronts. The US is facing a deepening geopolitical crisis, most sharply expressed in the failure of its proxy war in Syria. Its economic crisis is intensifying, with Trump's trade war measures against China threatening unknown consequences, the financial markets in turmoil, trade deficits growing and budget deficits heading for \$1 trillion a year.

Most dangerous of all is the growth of working-class opposition, with teachers' strikes, protests and rebellions against the corporatist unions spreading from West Virginia to Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona and other states. The fact

that most of these strikes are taking place in states that voted for Trump is seen as an indication that the ability of Trump to disorient the working class with his social demagoguery has drastically eroded.

It is the class struggle, not the palace intrigues within the ruling elite, that provides the basis for a progressive and democratic—that is, revolutionary—solution to the crisis of American capitalism. Left to its own devices, the ruling elite will resolve its problems with Trump by shifting the political system even further to the right, with or without the current president. Were Trump to be removed by impeachment or forced to resign, he would be replaced by Vice President Mike Pence, a more polished but no less reactionary enemy of the working class.

The same forces, including virtually the entire Democratic Party, that are rushing to defend Mueller and the raid on Trump's lawyer are demanding that Trump carry out a major military attack on Syria, far beyond the one-off missile strike he ordered last April, and that the confrontation with Russia be escalated even to the point of military conflict.

The *New York Times*' Tuesday edition carried an editorial demanding that Trump massively escalate the US military intervention in Syria. That evening, it posted an editorial defending the FBI raid and excoriating Trump for diverting attention from the supposed Syrian gas attack by denouncing the raid on his lawyer.

It stated: "Among the grotesqueries that faded into the background of Mr. Trump's carnival of misgovernment during the past 24 hours was that Monday's [national security] meeting was ostensibly called to discuss a matter of global significance: a reported chemical weapons attack on Syrian civilians. Mr. Trump instead made it about him..."

One thing that is striking is the utter inability of the Democratic Party—which helped push through Trump's tax cuts for the rich, voted for his record Pentagon budget and dropped any defense of DACA recipients facing the threat of deportation—to make any genuine appeal to the broader population. In its conflict with Trump it relies entirely on the FBI and the CIA.

Last June, the *World Socialist Web Site* published a Perspective column titled "Palace coup or class struggle: The political crisis in Washington and the strategy of the working class." It stated, in part:

The working class confronts in Trump and his administration a vicious enemy, dedicated to the destruction of its democratic rights and a further lowering of its living standards. It is a government that is pursuing an international agenda based on "America

First" chauvinism. The working class must oppose this government and seek its removal. But this task must not be entrusted to Trump's factional opponents in the ruling class. The working class cannot remain a bystander in the fight between Trump and the Democrats. Rather, it must develop its struggle against Trump under its own banner and with its own program...

The interaction of objective conditions of crisis, both within the United States and internationally, and the radicalization of mass social consciousness will find expression in the eruption of class struggle. The decades-long suppression of the class struggle by the trade union bureaucracy, the Democratic Party and the affluent sponsors of various forms of identity politics is coming to an end...

Mass struggles are on the agenda in the United States. Protest rallies, demonstrations and strikes will tend to acquire a general nationwide character. The political conclusion that flows from this analysis is that the fight of the working class against Trump and all that he represents will raise ever more urgently the necessity of a political mass movement, independent of and opposed to both the Republicans and the Democrats, against the capitalist system and its state.

This analysis is being vindicated by the deepening of the political crisis, which now confronts a growing wave of social opposition in the working class. The confirmation of our analysis makes it all the more urgent that workers and young people take up the fight for the revolutionary socialist perspective of the Socialist Equality Party.

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