

At White House press conference, Trump calls reporter an “enemy of the people”

By Eric London
8 November 2018

At a press conference on Wednesday, following the previous day’s midterm elections, President Donald Trump launched into a fascistic rant, branding immigrants as “invaders” and denouncing CNN journalist Jim Acosta as an “enemy of the people.”

While the Democrats were signaling their desire to make an accommodation with the far-right demagogue, Trump made clear that his response to the election would be an even greater promotion of xenophobia and authoritarianism.

At the press conference, Acosta challenged Trump’s pre-election characterization of the migrant caravan fleeing violence and poverty in Central America as an “invasion.” Acosta said, “As you know, Mr. President, the caravan was not an invasion. It’s a group of migrants moving up from Central America towards the border with the US.”

At that point Trump demanded that Acosta stop talking, but the reporter attempted to continue asking questions. Trump then launched into a tirade, calling Acosta “a rude, terrible person.”

Acosta attempted to ask about Cesar Sayoc, the Trump supporter who mailed pipe bombs to CNN and prominent Democrats. This prompted the president to declare, “When you report fake news, which CNN does a lot, you are the enemy of the people.”

That evening, Acosta was barred from entering the White House grounds and his White House press pass was suspended.

When PBS’s Yamiche Alcindor, who is Haitian-American, asked Trump about the connection between his self-professed “nationalism” and the growth of “white nationalism,” Trump became unhinged. He said, “That’s such a racist question. Honestly, I mean, I know you have it written down and you’re going to tell me. Let me tell you, that’s a racist question.”

Trump’s comments come less than two weeks after far-right extremist Robert Bowers massacred 11 Jewish people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. Trump’s term “invasion” to describe immigrants was used by Bowers to justify his assault on the synagogue.

At the press conference, Trump went on to explain that he anticipates bipartisan support for his anti-immigrant measures. “Look, I speak to Democrats all the time,” he said. “They agree that a wall is necessary. A wall is necessary... Many of the people that we’ll be dealing with [i.e., Democrats], you know, in 2006, they approved the wall, essentially. It was a very strong border fence, but it was the same thing. And they all approved it. They all agreed. I have statements from every one of them.”

Trump is correct that the Democratic Party voted overwhelmingly for the Secure Fences Act of 2006, which militarized the border and paved the way for thousands of deaths among immigrants crossing the border through the desert. The Secure Fences Act passed the Senate 80–19, with “yes” votes from then-senators Obama, Biden, Boxer, Clinton and Sessions, as well as current senator and minority leader Charles Schumer.

Later in the day, Trump announced his decision to fire Attorney General Jeff Sessions. The move prompted denunciations by the Democrats in an indication of the right-wing character of the incoming split-power government in Washington.

Trump unceremoniously dismissed Sessions before the ink had dried on Tuesday’s election results. The vote gave the Democrats control of the House of Representatives, but strengthened the Republican majority in the Senate.

Though Sessions’ firing had been anticipated, Trump reportedly refused to allow him to remain at his post until the end of the week, as the former Alabama senator had requested. Trump has been vocal about his opposition to Sessions’ 2017 decision to recuse himself from overseeing the Justice Department investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible collusion by the Trump campaign. According to press reports, Trump has called Sessions a “traitor,” a “dumb southerner” and “mentally retarded.”

The Democratic Party reacted furiously to news of Sessions’ dismissal and defended the arch-reactionary, anti-immigrant Christian fundamentalist.

“The firing of Jeff Sessions will be investigated and people will be held accountable,” said Democratic Congressman Jerry Nadler, who will lead the House Judiciary Committee in January when the new Congress is seated. “If [Trump] abuses his office in such a fashion, there will be consequences.”

Democrats are incensed because Trump supporter Matthew Whitaker will now serve as acting attorney general. Since Whitaker has not recused himself from the Russia investigation being conducted by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, he will take over the oversight role presently exercised by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, a trusted ally of the political establishment. Whitaker is on record criticizing the Mueller probe and suggesting that the Justice Department cut off or reduce its funding.

Democratic Party-aligned groups such as MoveOn.org have even called for protests across the country, stating that Sessions’ dismissal and Whitaker’s appointment “cross a red line.”

The Democratic Party never called for demonstrations against Trump’s deployment of troops to the border with a license to shoot unarmed men, women and children, but it is now calling demonstrations to protest the removal of the architect of those policies.

Bernie Sanders, who was the cowardly lion when it came to the attacks by Trump and Sessions on the right to asylum and threats to rescind birthright citizenship, was transformed into the Great and Powerful Oz by Sessions’ dismissal.

“President Trump must allow Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation to continue unimpeded,” Sanders tweeted. “Any attempt by the president or the Justice Department to interfere with Mueller’s probe would be an obstruction of justice and impeachable offense.”

Senate Minority Leader Schumer made similar remarks at a press conference yesterday.

The Democrats have issued no similar statements threatening to use their new majority in the House of Representatives to investigate the decision by Sessions and Trump to pry immigrant children from their parents’ arms through the “Zero Tolerance” policy implemented this past spring.

Nor is Trump wrong to think that the Democrats will continue to acquiesce to his anti-immigrant measures. At a press conference yesterday, Democratic House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi defended her decision to ignore Trump’s attacks on immigrants in the run-up to the midterm election. When asked by a reporter whether Pelosi considered it a “mistake to stay silent” while Trump launched an unprecedented attack on immigrants, the California Democrat replied, “No, I do not.”

She admitted that the Democrats’ decision to cover over Trump’s fascist threats was a deliberate policy. “I urged our colleagues not to take the bait,” she said, and instead ordered Democrats to “stick with the program.” She continued, “That produced a big victory for us. I have no regret.”

This support gives the Trump administration the green light to intensify its attacks on immigrants and the democratic rights of the working class.

Last night, the *Wall Street Journal* quietly reported that on Friday Trump will officially announce a blanket ban on the right to asylum for all immigrants who cross the US-Mexico border without documents. Although this would be the most significant attack on the right to asylum in US history, the *Journal*’s report passed almost without comment in the rest of the corporate media. This order would result in the deportation of tens or hundreds of thousands of people who face death or persecution in their home countries.

The Democratic Party has announced its eagerness to collaborate with the Trump administration. But millions of voters supported the Democrats in Tuesday’s elections in the false hope that their vote would translate into opposition to Trump.

According to CNN exit polls, 74 percent of voters said recent right-wing extremist violence was “the most important” or “an important” factor in their decision to vote.

Meanwhile, even the Democratic electorate increasingly views the Russia investigation as a distraction. The same CNN exit poll showed that just 41 percent of the electorate views the investigation as “mostly justified,” compared with 54 percent who view it as “politically motivated.” This shift undoubtedly played into Trump’s decision to quickly remove Sessions, after Trump obtained better-than-expected election results in the Senate.

As workers move to the left, the Democrats fight all the more desperately to keep them from breaking free of the straightjacket of the two party system. Their efforts to collaborate with Trump will disillusion millions and pave the way for the explosive development of the class struggle in the weeks and months to come.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>