

Political warfare in Washington escalates to crisis of capitalist rule

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One month after the US midterm elections, the conflict within the state apparatus is reaching a new stage. Within the political establishment, there are increasingly open calls for impeachment and possibly criminal proceedings against Trump, including from top Democrats in the incoming Congress.

On Friday, federal prosecutors filed legal papers in the case of Donald Trump's former personal lawyer Michael Cohen, directly accusing Trump of instructing Cohen to pay hush money in the run-up to the 2016 election to two women who claimed he had had extramarital sexual relations with them. The prosecutors identified this as a violation of campaign finance laws, a felony. As the *New York Times* put it, this was tantamount to naming Trump as an unindicted co-conspirator in a federal crime.

On Monday night, the *Washington Post* published an extraordinary open letter to the Senate signed by 44 former senators—33 Democrats, 10 Republicans and one independent—bearing the headline “The Senate has long stood in defense of democracy—and must again.”

While the letter is vague on specifics, it speaks unambiguously of a crisis threatening the entire political system. “We are entering a dangerous period,” the authors warn, marked by “serious challenges to the rule of law, the Constitution, our governing institutions and our national security.”

Citing the looming release of the Mueller report and the Democratic takeover of the House, it states: “The likely convergence of these two events will occur at a time when simmering regional conflict and global power confrontations continue to threaten our security, our economy and geopolitical stability.”

It continues: “At other critical moments in our history, when constitutional crises have threatened our foundations, it has been the Senate that has stood in defense of our democracy. Today is once again such a

time.”

Among the signatories are long-standing bulwarks of the military and state apparatus. They include two former Pentagon chiefs, William Cohen and Chuck Hagel, both Republicans who served in the cabinets of Democratic presidents, Clinton and Obama, respectively. The list also includes Democrats Bill Bradley, Tom Daschle, Chris Dodd, Gary Hart, John Kerry (secretary of state under Obama), Joe Lieberman and Jay Rockefeller, and Republicans Alan Simpson, Al D'Amato and John Warner (former secretary of the Navy).

The letter makes clear that growing sections of the political establishment from both major parties are increasingly concerned that the actions of the Trump administration, beginning with the president himself, threaten to undermine the ideological foundations of US imperialist operations all over the world and capitalist rule within the United States itself.

Trump's embrace of murder, his defense of fascists such as the neo-Nazis who marched last year in Charlottesville, his racist and fascistic attacks on immigrants, are blowing up a basic ideological pillar of US imperialist foreign policy—the pretense that the United States is a bulwark of human rights and democracy.

There are many diverse issues driving the conflict within the state. These include divisions over US imperialist foreign policy, particularly in regard to Russia, but also including relations with Washington's traditional allies and tactics in the confrontation with China. There are mounting concerns over the economic crisis and turmoil on the financial markets.

But there are more long-term and fundamental questions as the American ruling class prepares for war against nuclear-armed rivals such as Russia and China and confronts the prospect of an eruption of social

unrest at home. The intelligence agencies, fronted by the Democratic Party and major sections of the corporate media, have been waging an escalating campaign of internet censorship for going on two years to shore up American capitalism's internal defenses.

But the national security apparatus and its political agents look at the explosion of working-class protest against inequality and poverty in France and see the future—sooner rather than later—of the United States.

Under these conditions, there is waning confidence in the ruling class in the ability of Trump to handle such a crisis. In Trump they have someone who operates on the global stage on the basis of bullying and threats. Within the US, he is seen as illegitimate by major sections of the population.

The ruling class, after all, installed Obama to replace the discredited and hated Bush, and handed him a Nobel Peace Prize in an attempt to give US imperialism a face lift and cover over the stench of Bush's lies and atrocities in Iraq.

And while the central charge in the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller—Russian “meddling”—is a fabrication promoted by the Democrats and the intelligence establishment to prevent Trump from backing away from Obama's hardline anti-Russia policy, the investigations have exposed a measure of the criminality and corruption of Trump and his business operations.

Trump is not the source of the crisis, he is a symptom. He is not an outlier, but rather the personification of the ruling financial oligarchy, steeped in criminality and organically hostile to democratic rights. He is the product of the disintegration of American democracy, not its cause.

A month after the midterm election, it is already clear that nothing will change for the better for working people and youth under a Democratic House. Instead, the Democrats are intensifying their drive for internet censorship in the name of combating Russian “meddling” and “fake news.” They offer no policies to reverse decades of social counterrevolution.

The White House meeting Tuesday of the Democratic congressional leaders, Nancy Pelosi and Charles Schumer, with Trump, presented by the media as a battle royale, was a pathetic display of the cowardice and complicity of the Democratic Party. The two said nothing about Trump's crackdown on

immigrants or fascistic rants and instead touted their support for “border security” and pleaded for a deal with the administration.

There is nothing democratic or progressive about either of the warring sides, and even if Trump were to be ousted as a result of the intrigues within the state, it would not signal a victory for the working class or democracy. In the first instance, he would be replaced by Pence, who is being held in reserve—a somewhat less vulgar representative of the ruling class, but no less reactionary.

There is another process developing outside of and in opposition to the in-fighting within the ruling class. The social explosion that has rocked France in recent weeks has acquired broad popular support across Europe, the Middle East and the world. In the US, opposition among autoworkers to plant closures is growing as teachers in California organize new walkouts and demonstrations.

Workers must give no support to either faction or party. The basis for removing Trump and reversing the policies of war, repression and inequality that he represents lies in the developing struggle of the working class in the US and internationally.

This movement must be conducted consciously on the basis of a struggle against the source of these evils—the capitalist system itself. To develop this struggle workers must build democratic organizations of struggle independent of the trade unions and both big business parties—factory, workplace and neighborhood committees to broaden and link up all struggles nationally and internationally. A new leadership in the working class, the Socialist Equality Party, must be built to arm this movement with a socialist, internationalist and revolutionary program.

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