

Palace coup or class struggle: The political crisis in Washington and the strategy of the working class

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1. Five months into the administration of Donald Trump, the vicious political warfare in Washington has reached a critical stage. The testimony of former FBI Director James Comey before the Senate Intelligence Committee last week is being used by Trump's opponents, within the media and political establishment, to escalate charges of Russian interference in the US elections, and collusion and cover-up on the part of Trump and other administration officials.

2. The charges against Trump have a synthetic and fraudulent character, which is similar to the Republican-led scandal-mongering over former President Bill Clinton's Whitewater real estate investments and his sexual relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky; the investigations into Hillary Clinton's role in the 2012 attack in Benghazi and accusations related to her use of a private email server, and the claims—promoted by Trump himself—that Barack Obama was not an American citizen. In all these cases, the real sources of the divisions within the ruling elite were deliberately obscured with a smelly heap of allegations.

3. The latest eruption of political warfare in Washington is rooted in intractable social, economic and geopolitical crises that are eroding the foundations of the global dominance and national stability of American capitalism. Twenty-five years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the efforts of American imperialism to sustain its dominance through a series of military actions have led to a series of debacles. Nearly a decade after the global economic crash of 2008, in which the recklessness of Wall Street played the major role, the American financial system remains highly unstable, sustained by an endless expansion of debt. The diseased character of the American economic system has created an oligarchic social system, the chief characteristics of which are parasitism and a staggering level of social inequality.

4. The election of Trump was not an accident. Trump is the personification of the oligarchy that rules America. His administration, composed of billionaires and former generals, is sharply escalating a bipartisan program of social counterrevolution and reckless militarism internationally. But within the ruling class there exist bitter divisions over how American capitalism should respond to its national and international problems. These divisions have assumed, under Trump, an extraordinary intensity.

5. 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. This requires that

it has a clear understanding of the class dynamics of the unfolding political crisis.

6. There are three basic forms of opposition to the Trump administration, representing the interests of different social classes.

The ruling class opposition to Trump

7. First, there is the opposition of powerful sections of the capitalist class. Trump's opponents within the political establishment, including both Democrats and Republicans, speak for a faction of the corporate and financial elite. The methods they are using in their campaign against Trump are fundamentally anti-democratic, involving behind-the-scenes plotting with elements within the military/intelligence establishment and corporate-financial elite. These are the methods of a palace coup.

8. Their differences with the Trump administration are centered primarily on issues of foreign policy. Their real concern is not with Russia's supposed "subversion" of American democracy, as if this could compare to the subversion of American democracy by the ruling class itself, but with Russia's actions in Syria, which have frustrated US efforts to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad. They are determined to prevent Trump from weakening the anti-Russia policy developed under Obama, which the Hillary Clinton campaign was dedicated to expanding.

9. The maniacal focus on Russia is not an accident. Trump's foreign policy priorities are focused, as is well known, on confronting China. His alleged advocacy of a "deal" with Russia is incompatible with the strategic plan backed by dominant sections of the military, intelligence and foreign policy establishment. The destruction of Russia's ability to frustrate American military operations is seen as central to control of the Eurasian landmass, without which an American victory in the long-term conflict with China is considered impossible.

10. If Trump were removed from office by his opponents in the "deep state" and the Democratic Party, it would not represent a victory for democracy, let alone an improvement in the conditions of the working class. Under the Obama administration, the ruling class oversaw the greatest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in US history, as well as an expansion of war abroad and a continued growth in the power of the military-intelligence apparatus. Hillary Clinton, the favored candidate of Wall Street, was pledged to deepen all of these policies while escalating the war in Syria and the confrontation with Russia. The Democrats are not calling for hearings on the assault on health care, the attack on immigrant workers, the elevation of far-right nationalist forces within the administration, or war plans against North Korea, Iran and China.

11. If the Democrats were to achieve their aims, with the removal of Trump through some form of political coup, it would place Vice President Mike Pence in the White House, a man more polished than Trump but no less reactionary.

The opposition of the upper-middle class

12. Another component of the anti-Trump camp consists of affluent sections of the middle class, whose opposition to the Republican Party is focused on effecting a more favorable distribution of wealth within the wealthiest 10 percent of the population. This layer is represented by various political tendencies that operate mainly in the orbit of the Democratic Party, including a host of pseudo-left organizations (the Democratic Socialists of America, the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative, the Greens) that prioritize racial, gender and sexual identity over class divisions.

13. The characteristic feature of middle class politics is its lack of independence from the ruling class. It seeks to influence the Democratic Party and win its support for marginal reforms of the capitalist system. While the more left-liberal elements within this political milieu refer to issues of social inequality, they combine, in the most unprincipled manner, semi-reformist appeals with support for the Democratic Party and the aims of American imperialism. This is bound up with the fact that their own privileged economic position is based on the record rise in corporate profits and stock prices. Their primary political function is to maintain the domination of the ruling class over the working class. During the 2016 elections, they promoted the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who channeled mass social opposition behind the campaign of Hillary Clinton, the candidate of Wall Street and the intelligence agencies. Sanders is now a leading member of the Democratic Party caucus in the US Senate.

The opposition of the working class

14. A third and altogether different conflict is developing—between the ruling class and the working class, the broad mass of the population, which is suffering various forms of social distress and is completely excluded from political life.

15. The reality of the social crisis in the United States is the objective basis for innumerable forms of resistance and opposition by the working class. Despite the Obama administration's claims as it left office, that life in America had never been better, real unemployment is at 8.6 percent, wages are stagnant and workers face brutal working conditions and intensifying exploitation. Corporate profits as a share of income remain near record highs, and the share of income going to labor near record lows.

16. The health care crisis is acute and getting worse. Obamacare has intensified the drive by corporations to shift the cost of health care to their employees. The deterioration of national health care, combined with a spiraling drug epidemic, has led to rising mortality rates and declining life expectancy. Older workers are working longer because they cannot afford to retire, while young workers are burdened by intolerable levels of student debt.

17. The wealth monopolized by a tiny layer of the US population is beyond the comprehension of most people. As economist Branko Milanovic notes in his recently published book, *Global Inequality*, most people are simply unable to grasp what a billion dollars means. To illustrate the dimensions of such wealth, he explains that an individual with one million dollars, who spent one thousand dollars every day, would exhaust his fortune in less than three years. It would take a billionaire, spending money at the same rate, 2,700 years!

18. The top 1 percent of families now possess roughly the same amount of wealth as the bottom 90 percent, while 20 individuals have as much wealth as the bottom half. Forty percent of families in the US have zero or negative wealth, meaning their debts surpass their assets. The individuals who comprise the wealthiest 0.1 and 0.01 percent of the population function as their own political weather systems, having at their disposal vast sums of money to buy elections, bribe politicians and otherwise

control the political process. The Trump administration is, itself, the political reflection of the oligarchic character of American society, the outcome of a half-century of social counterrevolution overseen by both Democrats and Republicans.

The political strategy of the working class

19. There are many signs of growing social anger among broad sections of the working class, for whom conditions of life are becoming intolerable. The old phrases used in the past to describe life in the United States—"the land of unlimited opportunity," "the American Dream," etc.—have become meaningless because they bear no relation to reality. It is becoming obvious to the great mass of working people that the existing society serves exclusively the interests of those who are already very wealthy. Access to the basic necessities of life, such as high-quality education, a safe environment, decent housing, secure employment, adequate leisure time and affordable medical care, is determined at birth—that is, by the class and economic status of the family into which an individual is born.

20. The relentless deterioration of the conditions of life for the working class within the United States, and the pointless violence of the endless wars waged by the ruling class around the world, are reflected in a profound change in the social consciousness of masses of people. In a country where the political leaders and the media constantly sing hymns to the glory of capitalism, polls reveal an upsurge of interest in and support for socialism, especially among young people.

21. 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. The social counterrevolution of the ruling elites is about to encounter an upsurge of the American working class. The many different forms of social protest—in work places, communities and entire cities—will acquire an ever more distinct working class identity, anti-capitalist orientation and socialistic character. Struggles in individual work places and communities will draw into unified struggle broader sections of the working class.

22. Moreover, the intersection of the class struggle within the United States with the eruption of international class struggle will weaken the debilitating influence of chauvinistic nationalism and inspire the development of a deeply-felt sense of international class solidarity among American workers. The working class will see the fight against social oppression at home and against war beyond the borders of the United States as two inseparably connected elements of the same struggle.

23. Mass struggles are on the agenda in the United States. Protest rallies, demonstrations and strikes will tend to acquire a general nation-wide 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 objective social tendency must be developed as a conscious strategy of working class struggle. The task of linking the struggles against all the deplorable social conditions of life under capitalism, with the political struggle against Trump and both big business parties, based on a socialist program, must be raised and become a topic of discussion within factories, workplaces, working class communities, and schools and colleges throughout the country.

24. Preparation for mass working class struggles requires the development of an interconnected network of popular workplace and neighborhood committees, independent of and in opposition to the pro-corporate and anti-working class trade unions. Mass opposition in the

working class to the Trump administration must be connected with clear anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and socialist demands that address the needs of the great mass of the people.

25. The Socialist Equality Party urges that the strategy for struggle advanced in this statement be widely discussed among all sections of workers, youth and students, and all those who oppose capitalism and recognize the necessity for socialism. Distribute this statement among co-workers and friends. Send to the WSWS your comments and suggestions. We welcome all thoughtful contributions aimed at advancing the interests of the working class.

25. We call on all those who want to be part of this struggle to join the Socialist Equality Party. We urge youth and students to form chapters of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). The task of the Socialist Equality Party and IYSSE is to make conscious what is an emerging objective movement, to impart an ever-greater level of understanding to the working class of its aims, to clarify the nature of the movement that is developing. The SEP will advocate and assist in the formation of factory committees and the development of oppositional organizations among youth and students. It will fight to connect the growth of struggle in the working class to a socialist, internationalist and anti-imperialist political movement to take state power and reorganize economic life on the basis of social need instead of private profit.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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