

Political warfare explodes in Washington

Patrick Martin and Barry Grey**31 October 2016**

Just a week before Election Day, the crisis gripping the American ruling class and its state, marked by intractable and bitter internal conflicts, has erupted into open political warfare.

Last Friday's letter from Federal Bureau of Investigation Director James Comey to Congress announcing new "investigative steps" in the probe of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, itself a manifestation of the crisis, has brought the underlying tensions to the boiling point. It has exposed raging conflicts within the FBI and, more broadly, the national security apparatus as a whole.

Comey's cryptic letter acknowledged that the FBI has not actually reviewed a new batch of emails that "appear to be pertinent" to its previous investigation into Clinton's use of a private email server for official business while she was secretary of state. The agency, he wrote, "cannot yet assess whether or not this material may be significant." This astonishing admission makes all the more extraordinary Comey's decision to make the discovery of the new emails a public issue only eleven days before the election.

In a rapid-fire series of developments this weekend, Justice Department officials revealed that they had opposed Comey's decision to send the letter, arguing that it violated a longstanding principle that no Justice Department or FBI action that might impact on a candidate should be announced within 60 days of an election.

The Clinton campaign and congressional Democrats lashed out at Comey for the timing of the letter. At a campaign rally in Daytona Beach, Florida, Clinton said Comey's action is "not just strange, it's unprecedented." She also tweeted that "FBI Director Comey bowed to partisan pressure," suggesting that the letter was an effort to appease congressional Republican leaders opposed to Comey's determination last July that there was no basis for criminal charges against Clinton over her use of a private email server.

Democratic Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid sent a letter to Comey suggesting that he had violated the law forbidding government employees to use their official positions to influence the result of an election. "I am writing to inform you that my office has determined that these

actions may violate the Hatch Act," he wrote. "Through your partisan actions, you may have broken the law."

He added that Comey had "demonstrated a disturbing double standard for the treatment of sensitive information, with what appears to be clear intent to aid one political party over another," because he had made public the renewed FBI interest in Clinton's emails, but was silent on what Reid called "explosive information" supposedly connecting Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump to Russian government officials.

Here Reid was resorting to the Russia-baiting that has been the Clinton campaign's main response to the publication by WikiLeaks of tens of thousands of emails and other documents sent or received by campaign chairman John Podesta, including devastating information on Bill Clinton's use of the Clinton Foundation to obtain lucrative speaking engagements with corporations and business associations. Campaign spokesmen have refused to discuss the contents of the emails, claiming that they were hacked by Russian government agents and then handed over to WikiLeaks to damage Clinton and help Trump.

NBC News reported Sunday that the FBI has now obtained a search warrant to go through all 650,000 emails found on the laptop of former congressman Anthony Weiner, the estranged husband of Clinton's closest aide, Huma Abedin. Weiner is under FBI investigation for allegedly sending sexually explicit text messages to an underage girl.

The *Wall Street Journal* gave details, in a story posted on its web site Sunday afternoon, of the explosive internal crisis within the FBI that led to Comey's letter to Congress. By this account, there has been a fierce battle within the FBI and between the FBI and the Justice Department not only over the Clinton email investigation, but over separate investigations involving four FBI field offices (New York, Washington DC, Los Angeles and Little Rock, Arkansas) into the operations of the Clinton Foundation.

More than eight months ago, FBI agents presented plans for a more aggressive investigation of the foundation to career prosecutors in the Justice Department, only to have the proposal blocked on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence. The FBI offices nonetheless continued

their investigations, which were intensified after the Clinton email investigation was wound up in July.

The *Journal* report suggests that either a substantial faction within the FBI was convinced that top FBI officials were covering up criminal activities on the part of Hillary and Bill Clinton, or the FBI dissidents were politically motivated to use agency resources to undermine Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, or both.

When top officials in the FBI and Justice Department opposed these efforts, open rebellion followed, expressed in leaks to the *Wall Street Journal* centrally targeting FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, whose wife was an unsuccessful Democratic candidate for state senate in Virginia last year. According to some press reports, Comey sent his letter to Congress last week because he was convinced the information would become public anyway through further leaks by FBI subordinates.

The open warfare engulfing Washington on the eve of a presidential election reveals that the entire political system and the state apparatus itself are riven by tensions and conflicts so deep and bitter that they cannot be contained within the traditional framework of bourgeois elections. Fueling these tensions is the convergence of crises on the economic, geopolitical, internal political and social fronts.

The US and world economy remain mired in stagnation more than eight years after the 2008 Wall Street crash, and there are growing fears that central bank policies designed to buttress the banks and drive up stock prices are leading to a new financial disaster. The economic crisis is fueling social anger and alienation from the entire political system, as reflected in different ways in the mass support for the anti-Wall Street campaign of the self-styled "socialist" Bernie Sanders and the "America first" pseudo-populist campaign of Donald Trump.

Twenty-five years of unending war and fifteen years of the "war on terror" have failed to secure US hegemony in the Middle East and only heightened fears within the ruling elite that US imperialism is losing ground to rivals such as Russia and China. The disarray of US policy in Syria, in particular, has led to bitter conflicts and recriminations over US policy, and demands for a major escalation of military violence, not only in Syria, but throughout the Middle East. These are combined with calls for a more aggressive confrontation with Russia and China.

The great danger is that these conflicts are being fought out behind the backs of the working class by different factions of the same reactionary ruling class. Unless the working class intervenes as an independent political and revolutionary force, fighting for its own interests in opposition to all parties and factions of the capitalist class, the crisis will inevitably result in ever more right-wing

policies at home and ever wider wars abroad, leading inexorably to a new world war.

The capitalist two-party system offers only two reactionary alternatives: the fascistic billionaire Trump, who demands a vast increase in military spending and authoritarian methods of rule, and the multimillionaire Clinton, the favorite of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, who would continue and escalate the right-wing policies of the Obama administration.

All factions of the ruling elite agree on concealing the implications of the world capitalist crisis from working people. Hence the degraded character of the bourgeois election campaign, with any serious discussion of the social crisis and the war danger drowned out by media sensationalism over a succession of sex scandals and anti-Russian propaganda.

The Socialist Equality Party entered the 2016 elections to prepare the working class for the political convulsions that have already begun, even before the ballots are counted on Election Day. Our candidates, Jerry White for president and Niles Niemuth for vice president, have consistently warned that the capitalist campaigns are aimed at concealing the crisis and disarming working people. The SEP election campaign is not fundamentally about votes, but about building a political leadership in the working class for the great struggles to come.

We urge all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to actively support the SEP election campaign. There is no time to lose. It is necessary to take a stand against social inequality, political repression and war.

The SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are holding a conference at Wayne State University in Detroit this Saturday, November 5, titled "Socialism vs. Capitalism and War." The purpose of this conference is to lay the political basis for the development of a movement against imperialist war nationally and internationally, based on the working class and the fight for socialism. Make plans to attend and register for the conference today.



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