Trump delivers diatribe against press at CIA headquarters

Barry Grey
23 January 2017

One day after US President Donald Trump delivered an ultranationalist speech at his inaguration, and even as millions in the US and hundreds of thousands more around the world were protesting his inauguration, Trump went to the Langley, Virginia headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency to pledge his "love" and "1,000 percent" support.

The bulk of his rambling remarks, however, consisted of an attack on the media. Trump first accused the press of fabricating a feud between his transition team and the intelligence agencies and then charged it with deliberately underreporting the turnout for his inauguration the previous day. The new administration's open feud with the corporate-controlled media underscores the degree of conflict and tension within the state as Trump takes office.

Trump's anger is directed in the first instance against an utterly corrupt and subservient corporate-controlled press, which is rightly held in contempt by broad sections of the population because of its role as a purveyor of government lies and propaganda.

The new government, a direct instrument of the financial oligarchy, is nevertheless out to further muzzle the media in order to carry through a violent attack on the democratic rights and social conditions of the working class and prepare bigger and bloodier wars internationally.

"And the reason you're my first stop," Trump told the audience of some 400 CIA employees, "is that, as you know, I have a running war with the media. They are among the most dishonest human beings on earth… they sort of made it sound like I had a feud with the intelligence community."

Just ten days before, Trump had used his first postelection press conference to accuse the CIA of leaking a report claiming that the Kremlin had a dossier of compromising information on him. He compared the CIA's alleged leak to the tactics of Nazi Germany.

This was a high point in a months-long public conflict between Trump and the bulk of the intelligence establishment over official claims of Russian government intervention in the 2016 election, allegedly aimed at undermining Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and tipping the vote to Trump.

Spearheaded politically by the Democratic Party and the Clinton campaign, and promoted by most of the corporate media, the McCarthyite-style campaign portrayed Trump as a stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin because he talked of seeking improved relations with the Kremlin. This warmongering agitation, carried out without any factual substantiation of Russian meddling in the election, was initially aimed at attacking Trump from the right and creating the conditions for a Clinton administration to sharply escalate US military preparations against Russia. After Trump's unexpected election victory, the campaign was revived in an attempt to block any rapprochement by the incoming government with Moscow.

Despite the complicity of the media in this reactionary campaign, Trump's attempt to portray his feud with the CIA as a media invention is a patent lie. In Langley, he followed up this charge with a harangue against the press for allegedly underestimating the turnout for the inauguration in order to discredit his administration.

He estimated the attendance at "a million, a million and a half people," an absurdly inflated figure refuted by aerial photographs showing a far smaller crowd than for Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration and by Washington Metro statistics pointing to a crowd of about 250,000.

Saying "we caught them in a beauty" of a lie, he declared ominously, "And I think they're going to pay a big price."

He then made much of an inaccurate report published Friday by *Time* magazine, and quickly retracted, that Trump had moved a bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. out of

© World Socialist Web Site

the Oval Office.

Several hours later, the new White House held an, if anything, even more bizarre event. Trump press secretary Sean Spicer called a news conference in the White House briefing room at which he angrily attacked the press corps for lying about the inauguration turnout and all but accused it of sedition. After lashing out for some ten minutes, spouting a series of falsehoods about the attendance at the previous day's event, he turned on his heels and walked out, refusing to take questions from the stunned reporters.

At neither appearance was any acknowledgment made of the unprecedented character and massive scale of the anti-Trump demonstration taking place a few blocks away and the hundreds of others taking place across the country and internationally.

Declaring Friday's turnout to be "the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period, both in person and around the globe,"—a complete fabrication—Spicer added, "These attempts to lessen the enthusiasm of the inauguration are shameful and wrong."

He then accused the media of "sowing division" with "deliberately false reporting" in an effort to undermine the new president, whose address was about "unifying the country."

"There's been a lot of talk in the media about the responsibility to hold Donald Trump accountable," he warned, "and I'm here to tell you that it goes two ways. We are going to hold the press accountable as well."

This was followed up by further threats against the press by Trump spokespeople who appeared on the Sunday morning news interview programs.

White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus told "Fox News Sunday" that "The media, from day one, has been talking about delegitimizing the election, talking about the Russians, talking about everything you can imagine, except the fact that we need to move this country forward."

He continued: "I'm saying there's an obsession by the media to delegitimize this president, and we are not going to sit around and let it happen. We're going to fight back tooth and nail every day, and twice on Sunday."

Top Trump aide Kellyanne Conway reinforced the attack in an appearance on NBC News' "Meet the Press." Speaking of Trump, she declared, "He has just absorbed an unprecedented…deluge of negative criticism and coverage that's frankly unfair and a little bit dangerous to our democracy."

In relation to press accounts of Spicer's performance, she said, "It is completely irresponsible, if not worse, for members of the media to be calling our press secretary a liar or worse…" She called Spicer's lies "alternative facts" and followed with a direct threat: "If we are going to keep referring to our press secretary in those type of terms, I think we are going to have to rethink our relationship here."

Cowardly to its core and thoroughly bribed by the corporate elite, the establishment press is incapable of offering a principled defense of freedom of the press and speech.

Nor will the Democrats oppose Trump's assault on democratic rights. This has already been demonstrated by the attempts of leading Democrats to attack Trump's appearance at CIA headquarters from the right.

The *New York Times*, which functions as the unofficial house organ of the Democratic Party, managed to incorporate an attack on WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in its coverage of Trump's appearance, writing: "He did not mention his apparent willingness to believe Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, who is widely detested at the CIA, over his own intelligence agencies."

Adam Schiff of California, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, and Charles Schumer, the Democratic Senate minority leader, both attacked Trump for showing insufficient deference to the CIA. Neither of them even raised the threat to press freedom and democratic rights posed by the administration's broadsides.

Schiff said: "While standing in front of the stairs representing CIA personnel who lost their lives in the service of their country—hallowed ground—Trump gave little more than a perfunctory acknowledgment of their service and sacrifice."

Schumer, appearing on ABC News' "This Week" program, denounced Trump for raising the possibility of reducing sanctions against Russia. He touted legislation he is cosponsoring with Republican war hawks John McCain and Lindsey Graham to block the executive branch from easing the sanctions.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site