

Week three of the Trump presidency: A crisis of bourgeois rule and turn toward dictatorship

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Three extraordinary developments over the past several days have exposed the breakdown of democratic forms of rule in the United States.

On Monday, Trump delivered a political speech at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida in which he attacked the press and implied that it was aiding the enemy by not reporting terrorist attacks. “They have their reasons and you understand that,” Trump told the military, appealing for its support. Defending his anti-Muslim travel ban, he said, “We need strong programs” to keep out “people that want to destroy us and destroy our country.”

Two days later, on Wednesday, Trump gave a speech before a police organization, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, bitterly attacking the judiciary. The appearance came on the eve of a decision by a three-judge panel of the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals on his travel ban.

“We need security in our country,” Trump told the police. “And we have to give you the weapons that you need. And this [the order on immigration] is a weapon that you need. And they [the courts] are trying to take it away from you, maybe because of politics or maybe because of political views. We can’t let that happen.”

This was nothing less than a call from the US president for the police to oppose or defy an unfavorable court ruling. He underscored the point by adding, “One of the reasons I was elected was because of law and order and security... And they’re taking away our weapons one by one, that’s what they’re doing.”

In between these two speeches, on Tuesday night, Republicans in the US Senate took the extraordinary step of halting a speech by Democratic Senator

Elizabeth Warren against the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions for attorney general, the nation’s chief law enforcement official.

Warren was reading from a letter sent by Coretta Scott King, the widow of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1986 opposing the nomination of Sessions for a federal judgeship. Republican Senators interrupted Warren, invoking an obscure rule barring senators from imputing to other senators “any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a senator.” Warren was ordered to stop talking and return to her seat.

The invocation of this gag rule recalls in its own way the pre-Civil War rule established in Congress to prevent members of either house from talking about slavery on the floor of the legislative chambers. The ban on discussion of slavery was imposed because the issue was so explosive.

Each one of these events is an indication of a violent break with the most basic forms of bourgeois democracy. The first targeted the press, which is protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution; the second was an attack on the judiciary, one of the three “coequal,” according to the Constitution, branches of government; the third was an attempt to muzzle debate in Congress.

Within this context, the response of the Democratic Party is significant. When Warren was told to sit down, she complied, and no Democrat took any serious action to block the gag order. The debate continued throughout the day Wednesday, culminating in a 52–47 vote to confirm Sessions as the next attorney general.

As for Trump’s speeches before the military and police, they have been downplayed or ignored and their

ominous implications covered up.

There are significant political divisions within the ruling class, but these are centered on issues of foreign policy. While Democrats, including Warren, have engaged in empty posturing over Trump's various far-right cabinet appointments, they have done nothing to prevent the nominations from going through.

What they have relentlessly pursued, however, is a campaign to demonize Russia and denounce Trump for being too close to Russian President Vladimir Putin. This has been their main point of attack against the new president.

They speak for those factions of the military-intelligence apparatus that backed the Hillary Clinton campaign in large part out of concern that Trump will shift away from an aggressive anti-Russia policy. The new administration is for the present focusing its war-mongering on China and Iran.

While the immediate object of Trump's vitriol is his critics within the establishment, the more fundamental target is the working class, and the methods being prepared against working-class opposition are far more violent. His speech on Wednesday was a pledge to eliminate all restraints on the use of force by the police. "My message today is that you have a true, true friend in the White House," he proclaimed. "I support our police. I support our sheriffs. And we support the men and women of law enforcement."

The Trump administration expresses the dictatorship of the American oligarchy in its most ruthless form. His administration, packed with billionaires and generals, is determined to massively expand the military in preparation for a major war while escalating the social counterrevolution within the United States. This includes the slashing of health care, the destruction of public education and the elimination of all restraints on corporate profits. To implement this policy, the most basic democratic forms must be cast aside.

The Trump administration is not an aberration in an otherwise healthy society. It is the culmination of a longstanding crisis of American democracy. In 2000, when the Supreme Court intervened in the election to halt the recount of ballots in Florida and hand the presidency to George W. Bush, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted that the decision of the court and the absence of any serious opposition from the Democratic Party demonstrated the absence of any significant

constituency for democratic rights within the ruling class.

The past sixteen years have confirmed this analysis. Under Bush, the attacks of September 11, 2001 were used to proclaim a "war on terror" and justify unending war abroad and the most far-reaching attacks on democratic rights within the United States. Far from reversing these processes, Obama extended them, including the assertion of the right of the president to order the extra-judicial assassination of US citizens.

Now, with the rise to power of Trump, openly dictatorial measures are being prepared.

Every revolutionary situation arises from a violent breakdown in traditional forms of rule. It is no longer possible for the ruling class to rule in the old way, and it is no longer possible for the working class to live in the old way. Both conditions are not only present, they are far advanced.

The central strategic question is the building of an independent revolutionary leadership in the working class, opposed to all of the political representatives of the ruling class, which connects the defense of democratic rights to the fight against war, inequality and the capitalist system.



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