

Senate committee hearing blames Russian “information warfare” for social discontent in the US

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The hearings of the Senate Intelligence Committee Thursday into alleged interference by Moscow in the US elections marked a significant new stage in the anti-Russia hysteria that has dominated the US media and large sections of the political establishment for the past year.

Since the inauguration of Trump over two months ago, the unsubstantiated allegations that Russia “hacked” the US elections—promoted in particular by the Democratic Party—have served two interrelated purposes. On the one hand, the Democrats have worked to contain and redirect mass opposition to the Trump administration and prevent it from developing into an independent political movement of the working class. On the other hand, they have sought to force a “correction” in the foreign policy of the Trump administration to bring it into line with the campaign against Russia supported by the CIA and dominant sections of the military.

Such considerations continue to dominate Washington’s official debate. Defense Secretary James Mattis on Friday labeled Russia a “strategic competitor” to the United States, denounced it for its actions in Crimea and throughout Eastern Europe and threatened some form of retaliation for Russia’s alleged violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. This is the latest indication that the Trump administration is attempting to accommodate the demand that it take a harder line against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Intelligence Committee hearing, however, focused on another aspect of the anti-Russia campaign. The line promoted by the collection of political reactionaries appearing before the committee, and

parroted by their Democratic and Republican interlocutors, was that political and social discontent within the United States is largely attributable to the malevolent actions of Russia.

Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio declared that Putin is engaged in “informational warfare” intended “to steer Americans unwittingly in many different directions that can cause all sorts of danger and violence.” Russian media, he charged, is exploiting protests like the eruption of mass opposition to police violence and Occupy Wall Street “in the hopes of being able to report back to the world and their own people that America is a disaster.”

Mark Warner, the ranking Democrat on the committee, proclaimed that Russia has “sought to hijack our democratic process” including by attempting to “weaponize information.” The witnesses before the committee would explain, he said, how “Russia deployed this deluge of disinformation in a broader attempt to undermine America’s strength and leadership” and “to diminish and undermine our trust in the American media by blurring our faith in what is true and what is not.”

Republican Susan Collins, citing testimony to the committee from Clinton Watts, said that “the Russians...are trying to disrupt society, cast doubt on Western democracies.” The intelligence report released in January found, she said, that Russia Today (RT) “was instrumental in trying to advance the protest of Occupy Wall Street.” This prompted Eugene Rumer of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to respond that it “serves the interests of the Russian government to present [Occupy Wall Street and similar movements] as a major challenge,” because it “drives

the message...that the United States is not the perfect society.”

The cast of characters brought forward by the Senate to advance such arguments is itself significant. Watts, for example, is a member of the right-wing Foreign Policy Research Institute, formed in 1955 to oppose the “containment strategy” in relation to the Soviet Union, demanding a more aggressive “rollback” policy of restoring US imperialist domination over Eastern Europe and the USSR itself. Social discontent within the United States was denounced by it and other anti-Communist groups as the manifestation of Soviet propaganda.

Twenty-five years after the dissolution of the USSR, the anti-Communism of the Cold War is being resurrected in a new form, with capitalist Russia standing in for the Soviet Union. During the first half of the 20th century and into the 1950s and 60s, a section of the ruling class responded to the growth of social opposition and the class struggle by implementing various social reforms. No such reform tendency exists any longer within the ruling class, and indeed it is the Democrats (including supposedly “left” figures like Michael Moore) that have been most strident in their denunciation of the “Russian menace.”

The agitation over Russian “disinformation” has less to do with Russia or its relations with the Trump administration than it does with the state of American society. The American working class does not need RT to know that “America is a disaster” and that the “United States is not the perfect society,” nor is Russian “information warfare” necessary for the population to lose “trust in the American media” and the “democratic process.”

The United States is a society in which 400 individuals own more wealth than the bottom 61 percent of the country, or nearly 200 million people. It was reported this week that Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, increased his wealth in the past year alone by \$10.2 billion, or about \$34,000 for every one of the company’s 300,000 employees. Since 1980, the bottom half of the population has seen its income share fall from 20 percent to 12 percent, while the income share for the top one percent has risen from 12 percent to 20 percent.

A report published earlier this month from Princeton University economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton

reported that the sharp rise in mortality for white, middle-aged working-class Americans is driven largely by “deaths of despair”—that is, drug overdoses, complications from alcohol and suicide. The United States is facing the worst drug crisis in the history of the country, with opioid addiction tripling over the past decade.

Young people in the US face a future of low-paid work, permanent indebtedness and unemployment. Retirees are seeing their pensions slashed. The Trump administration is preparing to vastly escalate the bipartisan war on every social program, from Medicare and Medicaid to public education. Police in the United States, armed with military weaponry, kill more than 1,000 people every year. The intelligence agencies spy on the population without restraint.

All the institutions of the state are deeply discredited, and the two parties are broadly hated. The past presidential campaign was waged between the two most unpopular candidates in the history of the country. As for the media, it is deeply compromised by its role in “blurring...what is true and what is not,” that is, its propaganda in the service of the state and the ruling class.

Yet, according to the Democratic and Republican Senators, everyone is unhappy...because the Russians are sowing divisions.

The implications of this argument are far-reaching. In conjunction with a massive escalation of military violence abroad, the American ruling class is preparing domestic repression at home. It is aware of the seething social discontent within the country and is preparing the arguments for criminalizing dissent, banning publications and cracking down on freedom of expression, particularly on the Internet.

The desperate and obviously manufactured character of the campaign over Russian “misinformation” is an expression of the extreme crisis of American “democracy,” and the isolation and fear of the ruling class.



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