

Trump's firing of Comey: A new stage in the crisis of class rule

Patrick Martin
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President Donald Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey marks a new stage in the protracted crisis of the US political system. Comey's dismissal on Tuesday has been followed by escalating political warfare centered on conflicts within the ruling class over foreign policy, particularly in relation to Russia.

Leading Democrats and some Republicans are stepping up calls for an independent commission or special prosecutor to investigate links between Russia and the Trump campaign. The Senate Intelligence Committee announced late yesterday that it has issued a subpoena to Trump's former national security advisor Michael Flynn demanding information relating to communications with Russian officials.

Trump's decision to fire Comey has all the earmarks of an administration in political disarray, desperate to strengthen its control over the state apparatus. Media reports indicate that before he was fired, Comey asked the Justice Department for more resources to pursue the investigation into supposed Russian hacking of the election.

The *New York Times*, which has spearheaded the anti-Russia campaign, drew parallels to the "Saturday Night Massacre" in October 1973, when, during the Watergate crisis, Nixon forced the resignation of his attorney general and deputy attorney general, followed by the firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. The *Times* proclaimed that an investigation was needed to determine "whether the presidency was effectively stolen by a hostile foreign power," that is, Russia.

If there is an analogy between Watergate and the present conflict, it is that the latter, as with the former, expresses an enormous crisis of class rule. Unlike Watergate, however, there is no democratic principle asserted, however limited, by either side in the current conflict.

There is no doubt that the Trump administration represents something new in American politics—the rise of a fascistic, gangster element to the heights of executive power. Trump personifies the open and naked rule of the oligarchy.

Trump did not emerge from nowhere, however. He is the product of a protracted process of political decay, which reached a turning point in the stolen election of 2000, when the Democratic Party could not rouse itself to oppose the hijacking of the presidency by a right-wing majority on the Supreme Court and allowed Bush to take office despite losing the popular vote to Al Gore.

The eight years of the Bush administration ended in multiple catastrophes: military (Iraq), social (Hurricane Katrina), and economic (the 2008 Wall Street crash). Obama was brought to power to give the ruling elite a facelift after Bush, who left office the most hated president since Nixon himself. The aim was to contain and channel social discontent in the wake of the economic and financial collapse of 2008. But the content of Obama's policies was to expand US military aggression abroad and intensify the assault on working-class living standards and democratic rights at home.

The continued decline in social conditions for working people—in sharp contrast to the bonanza on Wall Street—set the stage for Trump to capitalize on mass disappointment and disillusionment.

For the ruling class, the break with constitutional forms of rule embodied in the Trump administration is fraught with danger.

Giving voice to the concerns within the ruling elite, former Bush aide Peter Wehner wrote in the *New York Times* that Trump is "a man of illiberal tendencies who was unlikely to be contained by norms and customs. He would not use power benevolently but unwisely,

recklessly, and in ways that would undermine our democratic institutions and faith in our government.”

Foreign Policy magazine, in a statement by its editor and CEO David Rothkopf, a former managing director of Kissinger Associates and one-time official in the Clinton administration, warned that under Trump, “We have all the makings of a banana republic.” Rothkopf wrote that American democracy ran the risk of being fatally discredited, creating a situation where “the world will see the United States as a failing state, one that is turning its back on the core ideas on which it was founded—that no individual is above the law...”

It is a fact of immense political significance, however, that the Democratic Party has from the beginning opposed Trump on the most reactionary basis, focused on demands for a more aggressive foreign policy in Syria and against Russia. In demonizing the Putin regime in Moscow, the Democrats (joined by the most hardline Republican militarists such as John McCain) are laying the basis for a full-scale war with Russia that would mean the nuclear annihilation of the planet.

There is an unbridgeable social gulf between the mass opposition to Trump that exists among working people and youth, which has erupted in major protests during the first four months of the Trump administration, and the anti-Trump campaign being waged by the Democratic Party and the military-intelligence apparatus.

Millions have marched against Trump’s witch hunt of immigrants, his attempts to suppress climate science, his rollback of environmental regulations, his attacks on democratic rights. They did not march to defend the FBI or demand war with Russia. But that is the ground on which the Democratic Party has chosen to take its stand, allying itself with the most powerful sections of the military-intelligence establishment. It fears a movement from below just as much as Trump. Its focus is to preempt the opposition from below and divert it into reactionary channels.

What happens next in the conflict within the ruling class is uncertain. But history shows that a crisis of class rule is a harbinger of social revolution.

For the working class to defend its interests, it must refuse to line up behind either faction of the political establishment. The Democrats and Republicans are the parties of the billionaires. The working class must

oppose the Trump administration on the basis of its complete political independence from the two-party system and its own revolutionary socialist program directed against the profit system as a whole.



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