

Washington's political crisis over the Comey firing: A harbinger of revolutionary upheavals

Joseph Kishore
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The political crisis gripping Washington has far-reaching consequences and implications for both the United States and the entire world. The state apparatus in the center of world capitalism, the main imperialist power, is visibly breaking apart, torn by conflicts and mutual recriminations.

With the furor over the firing of FBI Director James Comey, a crisis that has been developing since the inauguration of Trump nearly four months ago is reaching a new stage.

The immediate issue at stake in the conflict within the ruling class is clear. During the election and in its aftermath, powerful sections of the military-intelligence apparatus that backed the campaign of Democrat Hillary Clinton have been concerned that the Trump administration would not aggressively pursue the war in Syria and the campaign against Russia. Hence the charges of Russian “hacking” of the election and of Trump’s “softness” toward Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump’s cruise missile attack on Syria in early April was greeted with universal support from Democrats and the media, but this did not last long. There were immediate demands that Trump back up this act of aggression with a “comprehensive strategy” to overthrow Assad.

There are, however, deeper issues involved. While the Trump administration speaks for and personifies the American financial aristocracy, it also poses significant problems for the ruling class. More than any other presidency in American history, it is rife with corruption and nepotism. The billionaire real estate mogul and reality TV star has imported into the White House the personal interests of his entire extended family, which sees possession of the executive office as an opportunity for moneymaking on a grand scale.

For the ruling class, the persona of the occupant of the White House is not an insignificant matter. Trump is seen as erratic and uncontrollable, unwilling or incapable of subordinating his actions and tweets to the demands of the “deep state.” In the weeks leading up to his ouster, Comey is said to have called Trump “crazy” (in relation to Trump’s tweets about the Obama administration ordering him to be wiretapped during the election campaign) and “outside the realm of the normal.”

This has serious consequences for the interests of the

American ruling class. Internationally, the US is increasingly seen as a “rogue state,” undermining the global domination of American imperialism. Domestically, the Trump administration is broadly despised. While he was able to exploit social anger during the election campaign, he nevertheless took office having lost the popular vote, with approval numbers close to or exceeding all-time lows for new presidents.

The *New York Times*, which has served as a mouthpiece for those within the intelligence establishment opposed to the Trump administration, expressed the concerns of sections of the ruling class in its “open letter” to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein published Thursday. The newspaper called on Rosenstein to act quickly to dispel the “dark cloud of suspicion surrounding this president” by appointing a “special counsel who is independent of both the [Justice] department and the White House.”

The *Times* appealed to Rosenstein to exercise his “reputation for probity” and recognize Trump’s “contempt for ethical standards of past presidents.” Trump has “mixed his business interests with his public responsibilities. He has boasted that conflict-of-interest laws do not apply to him as president. And from the moment he took office, Mr. Trump has shown a despot’s willingness to invent his own version of the truth and to weaponize the federal government to confirm that version...”

Contrary to the narrative of the *Times*, however, Trump is not an aberration, an inexplicable departure from the high “ethical standards” of past presidents. As the WWSW has noted previously, he is not some interloper in the Garden of Eden of American democracy. He is the product and culmination of a deeper, more fundamental crisis that has been decades in the making.

What “ethical standards” is the *Times* referring to? The past half-century has been a story of political decay and degeneration. Is the *Times* referring to Lyndon Johnson, who lied to justify the expansion of the war in Vietnam, which resulted in the deaths of millions of people? Or Nixon, brought down by the Watergate scandal and revelations of criminal activities within the United States and around the world? Or Carter, who initiated the policy of financing Islamic

fundamentalist organizations in Afghanistan to stoke a proxy war against the Soviet Union?

Perhaps the *Times* is referring to Ronald Reagan, the former actor turned politician, who led a government throughout the 1980s characterized by criminality, including the Iran-Contra crisis of 1986, which arose out of the administration's violation of laws passed by Congress. Or George W. Bush, whose administration, coming to power through the theft of an election, manufactured its own "version of the truth"—aided and abetted by the *New York Times* itself—to justify an illegal war of aggression against Iraq, and which seized on the events of September 11 to eviscerate the constitution under the banner of the "war on terror."

Then there is Obama, marketed by the media and the *Times* as the candidate of "change," who spent eight years overseeing a historic transfer of wealth to the rich and will go down in history as the president who institutionalized the assassination of US citizens without due process. Since leaving office, he is doing his best to "mix his business interests with his public responsibilities" by leveraging his status as a former president into a multimillion-dollar payout.

The protracted decay and unspeakable corruption of American politics is an expression of broader social processes: a quarter-century of unending war, four decades of escalating social inequality, an economic system that is rooted in parasitism and dependent on the inflation of one financial bubble after the next.

Underlying everything is a deep popular alienation, artificially suppressed by the trade unions and what passes for the political "left."

It is necessary to stress again the deeply reactionary character of the Democratic Party's campaign against Trump. The Democrats are terrified, more than anything else, of the prospect that mass disaffection will break out in an uncontrolled fashion. They speak for sections of the corporate-financial elite and the US intelligence agencies, allied with privileged upper-middle class layers to which they appeal on the basis of identity politics.

Their orientation is not to working class opposition to the right-wing policies of the Trump administration, but to the CIA, FBI and military, with unstated agendas worked out behind the scenes, in the hopes that perhaps some sort of rearrangement can be organized to create a more stable government, and particularly one that will pursue aggression against Russia.

For the Democratic Party, the anti-Russia hysteria is not only about foreign policy and the interests of American imperialism. It is also about finding some way to contain, redirect and if necessary repress domestic opposition. Hence, the unending denunciations of Russia for engaging in "information warfare," for stoking up social unrest, as if the collapse in the vote for Clinton in key manufacturing states, or the decline in voter turnout in urban centers, was due to Russian propaganda and not the right-wing policies of the Democratic Party itself.

Whatever medicine the Democrats try to administer, they are dealing with a terminal disease, of which they themselves are a symptom. The very attempt to find a cure will only deepen the crisis. The crisis in Washington could itself become the catalyst for an economic meltdown. Trump, seeking to maintain his position, could respond by launching a new war. And if a change in regime were organized, any new government would be no less committed to war abroad and social counterrevolution within the United States.

The political crisis has all the characteristics of a prerevolutionary situation. The ruling class is not able to rule in the old way, and the working class is not able to live in the old way.

For the working class, the critical question is to intervene politically with an independent program and organization. Within the framework of the Democratic and Republican parties and the bourgeois political system, there cannot be any settlement of a democratic character or one that offers a way out of the catastrophe into which capitalism is leading the population of the entire world.

"The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historical events," the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote in the preface to his *History of the Russian Revolution*. It is this direct interference that is now above all else required. The working class cannot remain on the sidelines, allowing policy to be set by the cabal of ruling class representatives. It must advance its own solution—the reorganization of economic life, in the United States and internationally, on the basis of equality, peace and socialism.



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