

International Socialist Organization lines up behind Democrats' anti-Russian campaign against Trump

Barry Grey
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It took six days for the International Socialist Organization to issue a statement on Donald Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey, an event that triggered the most serious political crisis in the United States since Watergate, and arguably since the Civil War, and quickly came to dominate headlines in the US and internationally.

The article that was finally published May 15 on *SocialistWorker.org* makes clear why the ISO was so reluctant to go into print. The pseudo-left organization completely accepts the reactionary framework of the Democrats' opposition to Trump, which is based entirely on a warmongering campaign against Russia, reflecting the imperialist foreign policy positions of sections of the military-intelligence establishment.

The problem was how to obscure this support for one of the contending right-wing factions in the internecine war that has broken out within the state by means of some "left" rhetoric. The task was given to longtime *Socialist Worker* writers Danny Katch and Alan Maass.

The first thing that strikes one about their article ("The arrogance of the completely corrupt") is its unseriousness, superficiality and complacency. There is no analysis of the historical or social roots of the crisis that has erupted, or, for that matter, what created a political gangster like Trump and elevated him to the presidency. There is no discussion of the context of escalating war and social reaction and explosive working class anger within which the political breakdown has occurred.

Nor is there any warning about the dangers posed by the crisis or its revolutionary implications. In fact, there is only one passing reference to war, and the words "capitalism" and "socialism" do not appear.

Katch and Maass deride the "White House clown show" and present the main question as whether Trump fired Comey because Trump is corrupt or incompetent. "It's hard to tell," they conclude.

From there they come to their central point: "For the

record, there is currently no smoking-gun evidence to nail down a seriously criminal Trump-Russia connection. *And also for the record, there is no reason to believe some couldn't emerge, given that we know Trump is a lifelong crook with ties to Russian mobsters.*" (Emphasis added.)

Further on they refer to the "dubious international connections" of Trump aides Michael Flynn and Paul Manafort.

That the ISO seeks to lend credibility to the anti-Russia campaign spearheaded by the Democratic Party does not come as a surprise. It has avidly supported the neo-colonialist wars for regime-change in Libya and Syria and the US-NATO military encirclement of Russia.

Writers like Ashley Smith have written many articles on *Socialist Worker* denouncing opponents of the US war in Syria and declaring that the primary responsibility for the catastrophe inflicted on the country and its people rests not with American imperialism, but with the regime of Bashar al-Assad and its main allies, Russia and Iran.

The ISO, true to its anti-Communist "state capitalist" foundations, has lined up firmly in the camp of the most hardline anti-Russian militarists in the US ruling class. Alongside the Democratic Party, it reflects the concerns of much of the military-intelligence apparatus that Trump is inclined to pull away from the aggressive anti-Russia policy adopted by the Obama administration.

Katch and Maass downplay the seriousness of the political crisis that has erupted around Trump. Citing a Democratic senator who responded to Comey's firing by tweeting, "We're in a full-fledged constitutional crisis," they write, "Not quite yet—presidents are legally allowed to fire FBI directors..."

Their justification for such complacency is highly revealing. They write:

... the media's comparisons to the 1970s Watergate

scandal are valid—but with a very big difference: Richard Nixon was forced to resign the presidency because the scandal came at the end of an era when powerful social movements were rocking US institutions and creating divisions that reached into the US ruling class.

The context today is different. Clearly the level of social discontent and struggle is nowhere near as high. Like the Gilded Age of the late 1800s, this is a time of skyrocketing inequality and corruption, with one set of laws for the rich and another for the rest of us—and the political and social challenges to this state of affairs have been short-lived and disconnected.

These statements clearly define the social layers for which the authors and the ISO itself speak—wealthy, complacent and corrupt sections of the upper-middle class that are separated by an enormous class chasm from the working class. The ISO’s misreading of the sentiment among masses of working people—seething anger over attacks on health care, jobs, education and pensions—is almost astonishing. What Katch and Maass write reflects their own outlook, not that of the working class.

They ignore the fact that some 4 million people participated in anti-Trump demonstrations one day after his inauguration—the biggest single day of protest in US history. And that this was followed by a series of demonstrations involving tens of thousands against Trump’s attacks on immigrants, the environment and science.

Trump won the election by exploiting mass anti-establishment sentiment that was ignored by the right-wing, war-mongering campaign of Hillary Clinton. The growth of anti-capitalist sentiment in the historical bastion of anti-communism was reflected, although in an embryonic and distorted form, in the vote of 13 million people for Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries. People, including millions of workers, voted for Sanders because they (mistakenly) took for good coin his claim to be a socialist and his call for a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class.”

And if the “political and social challenges” have been “short-lived and disconnected,” this is in large measure due to the non-stop efforts of the ISO and other pseudo-left organizations to contain social opposition and channel it into the dead end of the Democratic Party. The ISO helped to corral the protest movement against the Iraq war in the early 2000s behind the Democrats and candidates such as Howard Dean and John Kerry, and then wind it up altogether after Obama was elected.

They promoted Obama and hailed his election as a

“transformative event.” In an article published on *Socialist Worker* shortly after Obama’s election, Maass himself gushed: “Obama’s election represents a historic change in US politics. The dam on expectations erected through 30 years of conservative dominance has broken.”

In the 2016 election, the ISO promoted Sanders, who played the critical role in deflecting mass anti-establishment sentiment in an attempt to bring it behind Clinton and the Democrats. Maass’ co-author, Danny Katch, did his bit in this reactionary effort, writing in April of last year:

The foundation of Bernie’s mass appeal is that in an era in which politicians are almost universally seen as corrupted by big money, he refuses to take money from corporate-funded political action committees. It is from this position of principle that Sanders has been able to effectively argue... that Hillary Clinton is fatally compromised by her reliance on big money donors who ‘expect to get something in return.’

Under Trump, the ISO has worked to channel social anger and protest behind the Democrats, continuing to build up demagogic frauds such as Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. They are, moreover, allied to and embedded in the trade union bureaucracy, which has betrayed every working class struggle since the end of the 1970s and made sure that “political and social challenges” were “short-lived and disconnected.”

In conclusion, Katch and Maass call for a “mass democracy movement” (not a mass anti-capitalist or socialist movement). They cite as a model the protest movement in South Korea that led to the impeachment of the incumbent president and election of the candidate of the Democratic Party of Korea, Moon Jae-in, a thoroughly conventional bourgeois politician and long-time party functionary, who has pledged support for Trump and US imperialism.

In American political terms, this is a formula for once again channeling social opposition behind the Democratic Party.



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