

Comey's Senate testimony: A political circus in Washington

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Former FBI Director James Comey's testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee yesterday was broadcast live across all cable and network news channels and was promoted beforehand as a historic moment in the investigation of President Donald Trump's alleged ties to Russian involvement in the US elections of 2016.

The media has been full of comparisons to the Watergate hearings, with Comey—until recently a leading figure in an intelligence apparatus that spies on the population without restraint—presented as a champion of democracy and constitutional government.

Hours after Comey's testimony, the *New York Times* published an editorial titled "Mr. Comey and All the Presidents Lies," a reference to the 1976 film based on *Washington Post* journalists Woodward and Bernstein's investigation of the Watergate scandal. The editorial concludes, "The FBI's mission, Mr. Comey declared, 'is to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution of the United States.' Let's hope that the principles he articulated, and those who hold them, guide this investigation in the days ahead."

The *Times*' comparison to Watergate reflects the delusional and false character of the Democratic Party's anti-Russia campaign, which more closely resembles the Republicans' antidemocratic attempts to apply pressure by making scandals of nonevents, from Whitewater and Monica Lewinsky to Benghazi, than it does the Watergate hearings of 1973.

The Watergate hearings exposed the fact that the president was directly implicated in a break-in and cover-up of the Democratic National Committee involving leading officials from Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP).

The break-in and subsequent cover-up took place in the midst of mass protests against the Vietnam War,

revelations about illegal bombing of Cambodia and Laos, and reports of widespread surveillance of the president's political enemies by the CIA and FBI. Each day, the hearings were broadcast to a daily audience of millions who were transfixed by evidence that Nixon was establishing an executive dictatorship where the actions of the president are beyond the reach of the law and attempted to cover his tracks by blocking any investigation. In June, Nixon's former Chief of Staff John Dean gave 245 pages of testimony and detailed conversations in which he told Nixon there was "a cancer on the presidency."

Fourteen years later, in May 1987, the House and Senate initiated hearings in a joint committee to uncover the Reagan administration's role in the Iran-Contra scandal. This was a scheme to secretly sell weapons to Iran—then under an arms embargo and at war with Iraq—to skirt the Boland Amendments that barred the Reagan administration from funding right-wing death squads in Nicaragua responsible for torturing, kidnapping, raping and executing tens of thousands.

At issue in the Comey hearing is something entirely different: a bitter conflict within the ruling class fought out primarily over questions of foreign policy.

The Democratic Party is *not* calling for hearings on Trump's mass deportation of undocumented immigrants, nor on the reduction in life expectancy that will result from Trump's proposed cuts to health care and Medicaid. As for Trump's foreign policy, the Democrats loudly applauded the administration's decision to launch Tomahawk missiles against Syria and to drop the "Massive Ordnance Air Blast" on Afghanistan in April.

During the administration of President Barack Obama, no hearings were called over the assassination

of US citizens without warrant or trial or over the mass surveillance revealed by Edward Snowden. The Senate Intelligence Committee did not even hold a public hearing when the CIA attempted to destroy the Senate torture report and threatened to jail Senate staffers for taking the report from CIA headquarters.

In full Joe McCarthy regalia, Senator Mark Warner, the committee vice chairman and its leading Democrat, declared yesterday, “We’re here because a foreign adversary attacked us here at home, plain and simple, not by guns or missiles, but by foreign operatives seeking to hijack our democratic process.” He portrayed Comey as a hero who is “willing to speak truth to power.”

During his testimony, Comey denounced Trump’s “odd and unexplained affection for the Russian dictator” while warning of the Russians: “They’ll be back.” But when pressed for evidence, Comey repeated the convenient claim that such evidence is “confidential” and cannot be given to the public.

There is nothing democratic in the Democratic Party’s alliance with the intelligence agencies and their joint claims that Trump is blocking an investigation into unsubstantiated allegations that Russia is responsible for Hillary Clinton’s defeat last November.

Significantly, the Democratic senators failed to question Comey about his announcement on October 28, 2016, just days before the election, that the FBI had reopened its criminal investigation into Hillary Clinton’s emails. This act of electoral meddling, which the former Democratic candidate herself maintains was a central reason for her defeat, was far more damaging than the allegations levied against Russia and Trump.

The claim that Trump is blocking a legitimate investigation is based on the antidemocratic assumption that the FBI has the “right” to launch investigations against whomever it chooses while hiding the supposed factual basis from the population. In the 1990s, the Republican Party whipped up similarly baseless “scandals” out of Bill Clinton’s personal life in an effort to carry out a shift in administration policy. The central difference is that the Democrats are currently pressuring Trump to carry out a belligerent shift in foreign policy that threatens to bring the US to war with nuclear-armed Russia.

The comparison between the Watergate and Iran-Contra hearings and Comey’s testimony yesterday is a

measure of the political degeneration of the Democratic Party. Only an organization as bankrupt as the Democrats could develop a campaign opposing Donald Trump from the right.

The section of the ruling class associated with the Democratic Party, separated from the masses by a vast chasm of wealth, is not fundamentally opposed to Trump’s reactionary social policies. They fear he is undermining the long-term interests of American imperialism and they will quickly warm up to Trump if he accedes to their foreign policy goals. They are equally aware that the election of Trump has only deepened social opposition, and they fear the prospects of a social explosion. Their anti-Russia campaign is in part aimed at directing this opposition along reactionary, nationalist lines.

The working class must conduct its opposition to Trump on an entirely different basis. Millions of workers in the US and worldwide will be devastated by the attacks on migrants, the proposals for massive cuts to social programs like Medicaid and food stamps, the tax breaks for the wealthy, the proposals to deregulate and privatize major industries, the ongoing mass surveillance, and the belligerent military actions worldwide.

A fight against this reactionary agenda must not be contaminated by alliances with the FBI, the CIA, the NSA and the Democratic Party. It must be based on uniting disparate struggles of the working class worldwide, drawing workers everywhere into a common fight for socialism.



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