

CEOs and top Republicans distance themselves from Trump's pro-Nazi remarks—but not from Trump

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After a string of CEOs quit President Trump's manufacturing council over his remarks on the deadly rampage of neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, Virginia over the weekend, which left one dead and 19 wounded, the president declared he is disbanding two economic advisory panels that included the heads of some of America's largest companies.

The corporate executives began distancing themselves from the White House Monday after Trump's initial remarks in which he failed to condemn the fascist rioters. The first to leave was Kenneth C. Frazier, the chief executive of drugmaker Merck, who resigned from the manufacturing council early Monday. Frazier, the lone African-American on the advisory panel, tweeted, "As CEO of Merck and as a matter of personal conscience I feel a responsibility to take a stand against intolerance and extremism."

Later that night two more CEOs, Kevin Plank of Under Armour and Brian Krzanich of Intel, left the same group. The exodus continued on Tuesday, with three leaders of labor and non-profit business groups leaving the council.

On Wednesday, hedge fund boss Stephen A. Schwarzman, the chief executive of the Blackstone Group, organized a conference call for members of the president's Strategic and Policy Forum following the president's remarks at a press conference at Trump Tower in which he equated white nationalist hate groups with the protesters opposing them.

Press reports about the call say that after a discussion among the dozen prominent CEOs, the decision was made to put an end to the group altogether. The forum included Laurence D. Fink of BlackRock, Ginni Rometty of IBM, Rich Lesser of the Boston Consulting

Group and Toby Cosgrove of the Cleveland Clinic, among others.

"Intolerance, racism and violence have absolutely no place in this country and are an affront to core American values," said a statement released by the council. "We believe the debate over forum participation has become a distraction from our well-intentioned and sincere desire to aid vital policy discussions on how to improve the lives of everyday Americans. As such, the president and we are disbanding the forum."

Soon after, Trump announced on Twitter that he would end both his advisory councils, rather than put "pressure" on executives.

Such groups are meant to provide the large corporations a direct line to the White House, but they are hardly essential for that purpose, since every US administration in modern history has done the bidding of corporate America. Advisory councils are more ceremonial and an opportunity for mutual schmoozing. Moreover, in the Trump administration in particular, CEOs do not need such connections to the White House when they have former CEOs in powerful positions, like former ExxonMobil boss Rex Tillerson as secretary of state and former corporate raider Wilbur Ross as secretary of commerce.

There is nothing courageous or democratic in the actions of these millionaires and billionaires resigning from meaningless presidential "councils." The politically calculated act cost them nothing, and in fact, may improve their net worth: Merck shares closed up 0.5 percent on the New York Stock Exchange after Frazier's resignation.

In a similar fashion, many top Republicans have

distanced themselves from Trump's remarks. House Speaker Paul Ryan tweeted, "We must be clear. White supremacy is repulsive. This bigotry is counter to all this country stands for. There can be no moral ambiguity." Although he did not name the president, he was compelled to state that he did not share Trump's views.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell likewise issued a statement declaring, "We all have a responsibility to stand against hate and violence, wherever it raises its evil head." He noted that white supremacists were planning a rally in his home state, adding, "Their messages of hate and bigotry are not welcome in Kentucky and should not be welcome anywhere in America."

Also like Ryan, McConnell made no reference to Trump personally or to his declaration of sympathy with the neo-Nazis who rampaged through Charlottesville last weekend and caused the death of anti-Nazi protester Heather Heyer.

Equally mealy-mouthed and cowardly was the joint statement issued by former presidents George H. W. Bush and his son George W. Bush, which did not name Trump, and confined itself to declaring, "America must always reject racial bigotry, anti-Semitism, and hatred in all forms."

A few Republicans went further, actually naming Trump in their statements.

Senator Marco Rubio, a former candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, tweeted yesterday, "Mr. President you can't allow #WhiteSupremacists to share only part of the blame. They support idea which cost nation and world so much pain."

Senator Lindsey Graham, another former presidential candidate, said Trump "took a step backward by again suggesting there is moral equivalency between the white supremacist neo-Nazis and KKK members who attended the Charlottesville rally" and the people demonstrating against them. He said that the Republican Party should oppose putting "a welcome mat out for the David Dukes of the world."

The criticism of Trump from these layers, however worded, has nothing in common with the genuine outrage and protest which has erupted throughout the country from the working class. The Republican Party, like the entire US ruling class and its political system, is in deep crisis, whose fundamental cause is the

bankruptcy of capitalism and the mass alienation from both capitalist parties among the vast majority of working people.

Trump's critics within the political establishment, including both Democrats and Republicans, speak for varying factions of the corporate and financial elite. These figures have made vast fortunes (Kevin Plank of Under Armour for example is worth \$1.73 billion, Stephen A. Schwarzman of the Blackstone Group, \$12.4 billion) not by holding "vital policy discussions on how to improve the lives of everyday Americans" as the cabal of CEOs claimed in their resignation statement, but just the opposite: by pushing policies which that have destroyed living standards, slashed wages, and led to the overall deterioration of the lives of working class Americans.

In striking contrast to the opposition from within the ruling elite, from Saturday evening through Wednesday, solidarity demonstrations were called in more than 400 cities across the country in which hundreds of thousands of workers and youth protested the fascist violence and the presidency of Donald Trump. In Miami, candles were lit for those who were injured the killed while people sang "We Shall Overcome". Protesters flooded Union Square in New York chanting "No Trump, no KKK, no Fascist USA". Thousands of marchers in Washington chanted "Shame!" outside of Trump's hotel. Protests and vigils continue to be held not just in the US, but throughout the world.



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