

The Trump campaign indictments and the political crisis in America

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The indictments against Trump campaign aides handed down Monday by Special Counsel and former FBI Director Robert Mueller mark a significant intensification of the political crisis in the United States.

Trump's former campaign chairman Paul Manafort and Manafort's longtime assistant Richard Gates, who also served on the Trump campaign team, were indicted on 12 counts of money laundering, conspiracy, filing false reports and failing to register as representatives of a foreign power. The latter charge was connected to their work as lobbyists for the former president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, and his pro-Russian political party.

Perhaps even more threatening to Trump was the guilty plea entered by a former foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign, George Papadopoulos. He was arrested in July and has been cooperating with the Mueller investigation since then. He entered into a plea bargain on October 5, admitting to having lied to FBI agents, but Mueller kept the charges against him and the plea deal secret until Monday.

Papadopoulos told Mueller's prosecutors that he met with several Russians in 2016 who claimed to have ties to the Kremlin and who offered to provide the Trump campaign with "dirt" on Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. The court papers cite Papadopoulos's discussions with high-level Trump campaign officials, one of whom has been identified in the press as Manafort, on pursuing the Russian contacts.

This is being hailed by Democrats and allied media outlets as evidence of collusion between the Trump campaign and the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin to swing the 2016 election in favor of Trump.

It is virtually certain that more indictments will follow in an aggressive investigation centered on Trump himself. Mueller was appointed special prosecutor following Trump's firing of then-FBI Director James Comey last

May. He was given a mandate to investigate alleged Russian meddling in the election and possible collusion and obstruction of justice by Trump and his team.

In a series of tweets, Trump dismissed the indictments of Manafort and Gates as having no connection to their work for his election and called Papadopoulos a liar who played no significant role in his campaign. His far-right allies, including *Breitbart News* chief Stephen Bannon and Rupert Murdoch's *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, are urging congressional Republicans to demand Mueller's resignation, take measures to throttle his investigation, end congressional probes of Russian interference and instead aggressively investigate charges of Democratic collusion with Moscow.

The indictments mark a new stage in a ferocious conflict within the American ruling class that has been raging since the election campaign and has escalated since Trump's inauguration. In this conflict, there is nothing remotely democratic or progressive on either side.

The Trump administration, dominated by generals and billionaires, is the most reactionary government in US history and a ruthless enemy of the working class. As it threatens to launch nuclear war against North Korea and stages endless provocations against Iran and China, while destroying health care, removing all regulations on big business, promoting police violence, witch-hunting immigrants and preparing to implement a multitrillion-dollar tax cut for the rich, it enjoys broad support in the financial oligarchy and sections of the military.

Trump, in league with Bannon, is deliberately cultivating the development of a ferociously nationalist, pseudo-populist movement outside of the political establishment and, if necessary, independent of the Republican Party.

But what is the basis of the Democrats' opposition to Trump? Virtually absent from the commentary in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other Democratic Party-

aligned media outlets is any reference to Trump's reactionary domestic and foreign policy. Instead, the Democrats are attacking Trump for being "soft" on Russia and directing their appeal to the military and the intelligence agencies.

Mueller, for many years the head of the FBI, personifies the deep state—the unelected and unaccountable bureaucracy of police, military and spies that is the real arbiter of US policies both at home and abroad. The Democratic Party is joined at the hip with this reactionary apparatus of repression and violence.

The Democrats are not opposing Trump's glorification of the military and global saber rattling. They recently voted overwhelmingly for the biggest Pentagon budget in US history, in excess of the amount requested by Trump, and are pushing in Congress for a new authorization of force resolution to guarantee a blank check for military interventions.

They have dropped their token opposition to Trump's attacks on immigrants and refugees and are angling for a deal on new health care cuts and a massive reduction in corporate taxes.

Under conditions where Trump's poll ratings have sunk to record lows and the Republican Party is facing an open split between anti-Trump and pro-Trump factions, the last thing the Democrats want is to encourage a popular mobilization of opposition to the government's policies. In the first place, the Democrats are in basic agreement with the administration's program of war, austerity and repression. Secondly, they fear a thousand times more the threat of an upsurge of working-class opposition than they do retribution from their opponents within the ruling class.

The claim of Russian meddling, based not on facts but rather on the say-so of the intelligence agencies, has taken on the character of a neo-McCarthyite witch hunt, in which social and political opposition to the policies of the ruling class is attributed to the malign intervention of the Kremlin.

Increasingly, the reactionary and absurd narrative of Russian subversion has been directed toward the suppression of left-wing and antiwar political opposition. With the Democrats and allied news outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in the forefront, the supposed menace of Russian-inspired "fake news" has been used to crack down on social media and the Internet, with progressive and left-wing websites, first and foremost the *World Socialist Web Site*, increasingly blacklisted by the tech giants Google, Facebook and

Twitter. This campaign has ever more openly become an attack on free speech and political expression.

The right-wing character of the Democrats' opposition to Trump was summed up in a column published Tuesday in the *New York Times* by Michelle Goldberg headlined "The Plot Against America." Goldberg, who has written for the *Nation* and *Salon* and is currently on the staff of the Democratic-aligned *American Prospect*, denounces the Trump-Russia "campaign against our democracy" and declares that "for all his nationalist bluster, his campaign was a vehicle for Russian subversion."

At the same time, the *Times*' foreign policy columnist Thomas Friedman publishes one op-ed piece after another calling on the generals in Trump's cabinet to oust the president and take direct control of the affairs of state.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in its June 13, 2017 statement "Palace coup or class struggle: The political crisis in Washington and the strategy of the working class:"

The working class confronts in Trump and his administration a vicious enemy, dedicated to the destruction of its democratic rights and a further lowering of its living standards. It is a government that is pursuing an international agenda based on "America First" chauvinism. The working class must oppose this government and seek its removal. But this task must not be entrusted to Trump's factional opponents in the ruling class. The working class cannot remain a bystander in the fight between Trump and the Democrats. Rather, it must develop its struggle against Trump under its own banner and with its own program.

This means the development of an independent political struggle of the working class based on the program of workers' power, the international unity of the working class and socialism, in opposition to both parties and all factions of the capitalist class.



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