

# Seven days in March: The Trump administration and the breakdown of American democracy

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15 March 2018

The Trump administration has taken a series of actions this week that expose the authoritarian character of the government and the breakdown of democratic forms of rule in the United States.

On Tuesday, Trump summarily fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, announcing that he would be replaced by close Trump supporter and current CIA Director Mike Pompeo. Tillerson reportedly learned of the change at the same time as the media, when it was announced in a 140-character tweet.

The form of the change in personnel at the highest level of the state is significant. Trump treats his cabinet, and expects them to act, as an assemblage of courtiers, loyal only to him. The Secretary of State is the senior cabinet post, which historically carries with it the greatest prestige, and the occupant of this position is the fourth person in the legal line of succession to the presidency.

Trump chooses ciphers, humiliates them publicly, and then throws them out as if they were pieces of garbage. He thereby demonstrates his contempt not only for individuals, but also the office they occupy.

The same statement on Twitter announced the nomination of Pompeo to succeed Tillerson, the first time that an intelligence official has been elevated to the post of principal foreign representative of the US government. Trump also announced the nomination of CIA Deputy Director Gina Haspel to succeed Pompeo. Haspel is notorious for her role in directing the CIA's rendition and torture program, including waterboarding at a secret CIA prison in Thailand.

These are only the latest in a week of ominous decisions and actions emanating from the White House:

- \* The Justice Department filed suit against the state

of California, seeking to use the courts to crush any opposition to intensified mass repression against immigrants. During a visit to southern California to view models of his proposed wall along the US-Mexico border, Trump declared that state officials were aiding criminals and putting the police at risk of being murdered by immigrants.

- \* Rejecting the urgings of many advisers, one of whom resigned in protest, Trump signed an order imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, while boasting of his desire to start a trade war that would have incalculable effects on the world economy.

- \* Trump agreed to a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, without even informing his top military and diplomatic aides, in what is widely viewed as an effort to stage-manage an international provocation—through the summit's collapse or failure—that would become the pretext for war.

- \* Addressing a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, Trump threatened the media, denounced political opponents in vulgar and racist terms, and called for the execution of drug dealers.

All these events have a similar character: Trump conducts himself more and more in the manner of a Mussolini, putting into practice his frequent declaration during the 2016 campaign that only he could put right what is wrong about American society. He conducts himself, not as the elected representative of the American people, or even as the leader of one of the two main capitalist parties, but as a personalist ruler, an authoritarian of the Latin American or fascist type, the arbiter of all major social and political issues.

Trump has now ordered a military parade in Washington, tentatively set for Veteran's Day, five

days after the midterm elections. No doubt he expects to use a display of military force, with warplanes in skies over the White House and Capitol, to offset the expected negative results at the polls. It raises the question: What is Trump up to?

There will be more “surprises” from Trump. There has been a tendency in the press to dismiss him as a buffoon who does not know what he is doing. With this comes an underestimation of the political danger.

Trump is a criminal type, used to working within the milieu of the underworld of Atlantic City, Las Vegas and the New York real estate market. He is inclined to play “*va banque*” (go for broke). There is, moreover, a tradition in American politics of starting a war in an attempt to resolve domestic political crises, and any such war would bring with it the most catastrophic consequences.

Equally ominous is the complete lack of any response or significant protest within official political circles. Trump’s own cabinet is largely drawn from people who have no political constituency of their own—millionaires and billionaires, frequently as backward and ignorant as Trump himself, and as indifferent to democratic rights and constitutional norms.

The Democrats are not opponents of the growing conspiracy against constitutional norms, they are another form of their breakdown. They have presented the trio of military officers holding top positions in the administration—White House chief of staff John Kelly, National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster, and Defense Secretary James Mattis—as the “adults in the room” who will supposedly curb Trump’s excesses. But the prominence of the military in Trump’s inner circle is only one more expression of the drift towards authoritarian rule.

As the WSWS has documented in an extensive survey of Democratic candidates in the midterm elections, the party has essentially undergone a “friendly takeover” by the CIA. The Democrats’ response to the nomination of the torturer Haspel to head the agency was summed up by Dianne Feinstein, the second-ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee: “She seems to have the confidence of the agency, which is good.”

In centering its criticism of Trump on fabricated allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 election,

the Democrats have acted as the voice of sections of the military-intelligence apparatus opposed to any abandonment of the strongly anti-Russian policy adopted under the Obama administration.

Working people in the United States—and around the world—have no alternative within the framework of capitalist politics. On the one hand, Trump is governing as an ultra-right radical, seeking to cultivate a fascistic social base, operating outside of any known constitutional or legal framework. On the other hand, a political opposition that is so far removed from any democratic conceptions that its “answer” is to censor the Internet and suppress social divisions at home, while advocating war with the world’s second greatest nuclear-armed power.

The old forms of rule, the entire 230-year-old constitutional framework, is disintegrating under the impact of the growth of the social inequality, the division of American society between a tiny wealthy elite at the top, which controls both parties.

It is impossible to separate the character of the Trump administration from the system that has produced it: capitalism. The social force that must be mobilized against it is the working class. The year has already seen a powerful growth of class struggle, in the United States and internationally. The urgent task is to introduce into this developing objective movement a socialist consciousness and a socialist political leadership.



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