

Amid trial of former campaign chairman, Trump urges attorney general to end Russia probe “right now”

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2 August 2018

The political warfare in Washington reached a new and even more explosive stage Wednesday with a series of early morning tweets by President Donald Trump denouncing Special Counsel Robert Mueller and declaring that Attorney General Jeff Sessions “should stop this Rigged Witch Hunt right now.”

“Bob Mueller is totally conflicted, and his 17 Angry Democrats that are doing his dirty work are a disgrace to the USA!” Trump wrote.

The tweets included an attack on the criminal trial of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, which entered its second day on Wednesday, as a “hoax.” Manafort is one of five former Trump aides indicted by Mueller and the only one to refuse a plea deal and proceed to a trial, currently underway in the US District Court in Alexandria, Virginia.

Manafort was thrown into jail when his house arrest was revoked last month. He also faces a separate trial next month in Washington, D.C., on charges brought by Mueller’s prosecutors. The charges in the two trials involve bank fraud, money laundering, tax evasion and failing to register as a lobbyist for a foreign government. They concern activities that predate Manafort’s five-month stint as adviser and then chairman of Trump’s 2016 campaign and do not directly relate to alleged Russian interference in the election and Trump campaign collusion.

However, they indirectly tie Trump to the Putin regime and Russia because they focus on Manafort’s role as a political consultant and lobbyist for Viktor Yanukovich, the pro-Russian Ukraine president who was ousted in 2014 in a US-backed and fascist-led putsch.

Former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Mueller is heading up the investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and possible collusion by the Trump campaign, as well as obstruction of justice. The intelligence agencies have presented no serious evidence to back up their charges of Russian “meddling,”

which the Democratic Party and most of the corporate media have been relentlessly promoting as the spearhead of a ferocious conflict within the American capitalist state and the ruling class.

This is a struggle between reactionary factions that are equally committed to escalating war abroad and intensified attacks on the social and democratic rights of the working class at home. It centers on differences over US imperialist foreign policy, with the Democrats and the bulk of the national security apparatus lined up against Trump’s efforts to ratchet down hostilities with Russia in order to focus first on attacking Iran and China. The Democrats, who speak for factions that consider the removal of Russia as an obstacle to US hegemony in Eurasia an urgent priority, have made the defense of Mueller and anti-Russia hysteria the center of their opposition to the Trump administration, labeling Trump himself as a Putin stooge or outright traitor.

The Manafort trial is one of several recent developments pointing to an escalation by Mueller of his campaign against Trump. ABC News reported Wednesday evening that Trump learned on Tuesday that Mueller had rejected his legal team’s terms for Trump to be interviewed by the special counsel. Trump’s team had insisted that Trump not be questioned on issues relating to obstruction of justice. Mueller replied that Trump would have to submit to such questions and, in addition, agree to provide written answers as well as appear in person.

This reportedly triggered an outburst of denunciations from Trump, leading to the barrage of tweets Wednesday morning.

In addition, recent days have seen widespread media reports that Trump’s former personal lawyer and “fixer,” Michael Cohen, secretly recorded conversations with Trump that are now in the hands of US prosecutors, who raided Cohen’s office and residences in April as part of an investigation initiated at the behest of Mueller.

One of these tapes reportedly indicates that, contrary to

denials by Trump and his associates, he had foreknowledge of the June, 2016 Trump Tower meeting between his top aides and a number of Russians who had promised to provide “dirt” on Trump’s Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton. That meeting was attended by Manafort, Donald Trump, Jr. and Trump’s son-in-law and close adviser, Jared Kushner.

These reports come amid mounting media speculation that Cohen, who has intimate knowledge of Trump’s personal business dealings, is about to “flip” and agree to cooperate with Mueller against his former boss.

A further indication of increased pressure from Mueller is the report last week that Trump Organization Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg has been subpoenaed by US attorneys in New York to testify before the grand jury probing Cohen.

Following Trump’s morning Twitter barrage, his lawyers and press secretary sought to walk back the suggestion that Trump was ordering Sessions to fire Mueller or Mueller’s immediate superior, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, as the first step in terminating the Mueller probe.

Sessions recused himself from the Russia investigation last year after it emerged that he had lied to Congress about holding meetings with Russian officials while he was playing a prominent role in Trump’s presidential campaign. At a conference in Arkansas on Wednesday, Sessions sought to make light of Trump’s morning tweets.

Trump attorney and spokesman regarding the Mueller investigation, Rudy Giuliani, told the *Washington Post*: “I think it’s very well established the president uses tweets to express his opinion. He very carefully used the word ‘should.’” Giuliani also gave a TV interview in which he said, “He [Trump] didn’t direct him [Sessions] to do it and he’s not going to direct him to do it.”

Another Trump lawyer, Jay Sekulow, told the *Post*, “The president has issued no order or direction to the Department of Justice on this.”

At a White House press briefing Wednesday afternoon, Trump Press Secretary Sarah Sanders repeatedly denied that the tweet was an order for Sessions to act. “It’s not an order, it’s the president’s opinion,” she told reporters.

However, leading Democrats seized on Trump’s tweets to defend Mueller and the FBI and accuse the president of obstruction of justice. Adam Schiff, the ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, said: “The president of the United States just called on his attorney general to put an end to an investigation in which the president, his family and campaign may be implicated. This is an attempt to obstruct justice hiding in plain sight. America must never accept it.”

Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said, “It seems even more vivid and serious evidence of criminal intent to

obstruct justice ...”

Former Obama chief strategist David Axelrod tweeted: “He wasn’t just ‘expressing his opinion’ ... We are moving toward a full Constitutional crisis.”

It is critical that the working class intervene independently into the political crisis in Washington to advance its own interests in opposition to both reactionary ruling class factions and both parties of the US financial elite. The Democrats—including phony “lefts” such as Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—in no way represent a “democratic” or “progressive” opposition to the fascistic Trump. The Democratic Party is hostile to and fearful of the social anger and anti-war sentiment of masses of workers and young people. It appeals to the CIA, FBI, Pentagon and Wall Street in its conflict with Trump.

For all the ferocity of the political warfare within the ruling class and its state apparatus, there is a basic agreement on moving toward authoritarian forms of rule and imposing Internet censorship to deal with popular opposition to war, austerity and social inequality.

Impeaching Trump would only bring to power his vice president Mike Pence, a no less vicious enemy of the working class and warmonger, although perhaps more polished in his service to the ruling elite. Left to its own devices, the ruling class will use the crisis to shift the entire political system even further to the right.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the maximum mobilization and unity of the working class, both in the US and internationally, to halt the drive to world war and dictatorship and the ever greater impoverishment of the masses by fighting for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of workers’ democracy and socialism.



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