

Obama speech escalates factional warfare against Trump

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In a speech Friday at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, former President Barack Obama publicly joined the escalating offensive against President Trump being mounted by sections of the ruling class and the state. The speech, directed at channeling both popular and ruling class opposition to the Trump administration behind the Democrats in the fall midterm elections, marked Obama's first direct attack on his successor.

Obama's speech came as the culmination of a series of extraordinary events over the past two weeks that have brought the acute political crisis in the US to a new and explosive level of intensity.

First came the week-long spectacle of bipartisan hypocrisy and political reaction occasioned by the death of Republican Senator John McCain, one of the most ferocious war-mongers in the US political establishment. Democrats sought to outdo the Republicans in eulogizing McCain as an "American hero" and model statesman.

Within two days of McCain's burial, the media was ablaze with revelations from the forthcoming book on the Trump White House by *Washington Post* editor Bob Woodward. Woodward, citing anonymous interviews with high-ranking Trump officials, paints a picture of turmoil and dysfunction in which figures such as Defense Secretary James Mattis and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly call Trump an idiot. Woodward recounts incidents of Trump administration officials countermanding orders from the president, a situation Woodward characterizes as an "administrative coup d'état."

This was followed by the *New York Times*' publication of an op-ed piece by an anonymous "senior official" in the Trump administration describing the activities of an internal "resistance" to Trump within the White House. The piece cited discussions among Trump aides about seeking his removal on the grounds of mental incompetence, as stipulated in the 25th Amendment to the

US Constitution. It made clear that the "resistance," promoted by the *Times* and the Democrats, supports Trump's tax cuts for the rich, removal of corporate regulations and increase in military spending. It attacks Trump for his "softness" toward Russia and North Korea and his overall impulsiveness, unpredictability and recklessness.

Obama's speech was along similar lines. He presented an absurdly potted history of American progress on the basis of the "free market," with, he acknowledged, some imperfections—such as the wars in Vietnam and Iraq (which killed millions of people). His administration was supposedly part of this march of progress.

He cited as evidence of his own progressive record the extra-judicial murder of Osama bin-Laden and his engineering of the "recovery" from the 2008 financial crisis. He reiterated his theme of 2016 that "things were great" in America by the time he left office.

"And by the time I left office, household income was near its all-time high, and the uninsured rate hit an all-time low, poverty rates were falling. I mention this just so when you hear how great the economy is doing right now, let's just remember when this recovery started."

Obama made no attempt explain why, despite his tireless efforts on behalf of ordinary Americans, the Democratic Party lost control of both houses of Congress during his administration and disgust with the Democratic Party was so intense that the billionaire conman and semi-fascist Trump was able to pose as a friend of working people and win the 2016 election.

The reality, of course, is that Obama presided over the funneling of trillions of dollars to Wall Street to rescue the financial oligarchy, carrying out the greatest redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top in history. This was paid for by wage cuts and the destruction of decent-paying jobs, replaced by poverty-wage, part-time and temporary employment, the gutting

of health benefits for millions of workers under “Obamacare,” pension cuts, the closure of thousands of public schools and layoff of tens of thousands of teachers, and a general lowering of the living standards of the working class.

Trump’s attacks on democratic rights were prepared by Obama’s brutal policy of deportations, his continuation of indefinite detention and the Guantanamo torture camp, his support for mass domestic spying and his program of drone assassinations, including of US citizens. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were continued and new wars were launched in Libya and Syria.

According to Obama, however, Trump was a radical departure from this wave of “progress,” a “symptom” of the “politics of fear and resentment.” It was the “powerful and privileged” pushing back. Obama criticized Trump for “cutting taxes on the wealthy, unwinding regulations and shrinking the safety net,” focusing however on the swelling of the deficit.

He did not try to reconcile this account with his own reaction to the 2016 elections, which he called an “intramural scrimmage” between two sides of the “same team.”

Obama saved his most biting criticism for Trump’s supposed softness toward Russia, appealing in the process to the tradition of cold war anti-communism.

“They’re undermining our alliances,” he declared, “cozying up to Russia. What happened to the Republican Party? Its central organizing principle in foreign policy was the fight against communism, and now they’re cozying up to the former head of the KBG.”

Alluding to the concocted narrative of “Russian meddling” in US elections, Obama denounced Trump and congressional Republicans for “actively blocking legislation that would defend our elections from Russian attack.”

The central focus of Obama’s speech was an appeal to disaffected Republicans and conservatives to vote for the Democratic Party in the fall. He went out of his way to denounce Trump for attacking the Justice Department, which is spearheading the witch hunt against immigrants, and the FBI.

He declared: “But I am here to tell you that even if you don’t agree with me or Democrats on policy, even if you believe in more libertarian economic theories, even if you are an evangelical and our position of certain social issues is a bridge too far, even if you think my assessment of immigration is mistaken and the Democrats aren’t serious enough about immigration enforcement, I’m here to tell

you that you should still be concerned with our current course and should still want to see a restoration of honesty and decency and lawfulness in our government. It should not be Democratic or Republican.”

In making this right-wing appeal, Obama took a swipe at the Sanders wing of the Democratic Party. “I’ll be honest,” he said, “sometimes I get into arguments with progressive friends about what the current political moment requires. There are well-meaning folks passionate about social justice who think things have gotten so bad, the lines have been so starkly drawn, that we have to fight fire with fire... I don’t agree with that.”

These events have underscored two basic facts: there is absolutely nothing progressive or democratic in either of the warring camps, and the methods being employed by Trump’s ruling class opponents, spearheaded by the Democratic Party, are themselves deeply undemocratic. They are the methods of a palace coup.

In so far as the resolution of the political crisis gripping the US capitalist class is left in the hands of the warring factions within the ruling elite and its state apparatus, the outcome will be a further turn to the right, intensified attacks on democratic rights—the Democrats are already spearheading the drive for internet censorship—more brutal austerity and an escalation of war internationally.

There is another opposition to Trump that is entirely separate from and opposed to that of the Democrats and their military-intelligence and Wall Street allies. That is the growing opposition of the working class, expressed in the ongoing wave of teachers’ strikes, mass opposition among UPS workers to the union’s sellout contract, and mounting anger among Amazon and other low-paid, super-exploited workers. This is, moreover, part of a resurgence of class struggle internationally. This opposition must be mobilized independently of both big business parties and on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program.



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