

As more Democrats call for impeachment inquiry

Former White House counsel refuses to testify before House committee

Barry Grey
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The confrontation between the Trump White House and congressional Democrats intensified on Tuesday as former White House counsel Don McGahn, at the direction of President Trump and the Justice Department, defied a subpoena and refused to appear before the House Judiciary Committee.

The committee is seeking documents and testimony relating to McGahn's interactions with Trump during the nearly two-year investigation of Special Counsel Robert Mueller into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 elections, as well as possible collusion with Moscow by the Trump campaign and obstruction of justice.

McGahn figures prominently in Mueller's report, a redacted version of which was released by Attorney General William Barr last month. The report cites his testimony to FBI investigators that Trump ordered him to have Mueller fired in June of 2017, and that when he failed to carry out the directive, Trump had White House officials tell McGahn to deny press reports about the incident.

The Judiciary Committee is the body that would oversee impeachment hearings and make a recommendation to the full House of Representatives, should such action be initiated by the congressional Democratic leadership, which up to now has adamantly opposed opening an impeachment inquiry.

McGahn's rebuff to the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives was the latest in a series of actions by the White House effectively rejecting the constitutionally mandated oversight power of Congress over the executive branch and the principle of separate but equal branches of government. Earlier this month, the Judiciary Committee voted to cite Barr for contempt of Congress for defying a subpoena to turn over an unredacted version of the Mueller report as well as the underlying evidence compiled by Mueller's team. Barr then boycotted a hearing where he had been ordered to appear and give testimony.

Since the Democrats took control of the House in January,

the administration has refused to comply with subpoenas for documents and testimony on subjects ranging from the Mueller report to foreign policy, immigration and environmental policy decisions, Trump's tax returns and financial records, and other topics. In effect, the White House is refusing to recognize the outcome of the 2018 midterm elections, which gave the Democrats a majority in the House.

On Monday, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., upheld a House Oversight Committee subpoena to Trump's accounting firm for financial records of Trump business entities. The White House informed the court shortly thereafter that it had filed an appeal.

This unprecedented assertion of unchecked presidential powers includes Trump's declaration last February of a national emergency on the US-Mexican border, invoked to enable the White House to unilaterally appropriate Pentagon funds, which had been denied by Congress, to extend Trump's border wall.

Earlier this month, Trump re-tweeted a suggestion by an ultra-right supporter that he extend his term of office by an additional two years, canceling the 2020 elections. Last week, the *Washington Post* reported that the administration was considering carrying out a nationwide sweep to arrest 10,000 immigrants, a move that would require mobilizing thousands of police and troops and imposing de facto martial law in major cities.

The Democrats are warning about a "constitutional crisis" and the threat of dictatorship, but they refuse to seriously oppose Trump's authoritarian moves. House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler of New York ended Tuesday's hearing after 23 minutes, having denounced McGahn's defiance as "the latest act of obstruction from the White House that includes its blanket refusal to cooperate with this committee." He added that McGahn's absence was an example of "this administration's disdain for law."

However, he did not move for a vote to cite McGahn for

contempt, suggesting that such a vote would likely be held early next month.

The fecklessness of the Democrats is bound up with the reactionary basis of their opposition to Trump. The Mueller report itself is the product of the anti-Russia witch hunt launched by the Democrats during the 2016 election campaign, based on the concocted and unsubstantiated claim that Russia was massively intervening in the elections to swing the outcome to Trump, who was a stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin. On this war-mongering basis, combined with the promotion of identity politics, Democrat Hillary Clinton ran as the candidate of the military/intelligence establishment and Wall Street.

The McCarthyite-style anti-Russia campaign has remained at the center of the Democrats' opposition to Trump ever since—not Trump's police state attacks on immigrants, his pro-corporate tax cuts and deregulation or his chauvinist "America First" policies of militarism and trade war.

To the extent that they oppose Trump's appeals to far-right and fascist forces and his efforts to establish a personalist authoritarian regime, they do so on the basis of full-throated support for the FBI, the CIA and the military. They are no less fearful than Trump and the Republicans of the rising wave of working class struggles against social inequality and the growing popular hostility to capitalism and interest in socialism.

The Democratic leadership is intimidated by the prospect of Trump responding to a serious challenge to his authoritarian actions by calling for an extra-constitutional mobilization of his far-right supporters, which would then trigger mass counterdemonstrations by workers and young people and a potential challenge to the capitalist system as a whole.

That is why House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and her top lieutenants continue to oppose any move toward impeachment, even as increasing numbers of congressional Democrats, including members of the House leadership and Judiciary Committee members, are urging the initial step of launching an impeachment inquiry. Within this group, there is growing concern that the party as a whole is being discredited by the cowardice and duplicity of its response to Trump's anti-democratic offensive.

According to press reports, two internal meetings of House Democrats on Monday night, following McGahn's announcement that he would boycott Tuesday's hearing, saw heated disputes over the impeachment question. The *Washington Post* reported that at a meeting in Pelosi's office, at least five members of her leadership team pressed her to launch an impeachment inquiry. These included four members of the Judiciary Committee. Several hours later, Judiciary Committee Chairman Nadler met with Pelosi and

argued in favor of starting an inquiry.

Pelosi shot down these proposals. But at a meeting of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, Representative Steve Cohen of Tennessee stood up and demanded Trump's impeachment. Pelosi reportedly replied, "This isn't about politics at all. It's about patriotism."

Earlier this month, Pelosi declared her opposition to impeachment on the grounds of national unity. She said: "We are one...that oneness that keeps us together as a nation is a compelling imperative for me and the House Democratic leadership. Impeachment is a very divisive course of action to take."

On Tuesday, with more House Democrats calling for an impeachment inquiry, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said Trump was "conducting one of the biggest cover-ups of any administration in the history of the United States," and then added on impeachment, "I don't think we're there at this point in time."

Pelosi has called a meeting for Wednesday morning of the House Democratic caucus to discuss the issue.

In Trump, the working class faces an implacable and dangerous enemy. But it cannot mobilize a struggle against him and defend its democratic and social rights by relying on or attempting to pressure the Democratic Party.

Even in the event that Trump were to be removed by means of impeachment in the House and conviction in the Senate, the result would be an administration of the no less reactionary vice president, Mike Pence. And to the extent that the Democrats were in the forefront of such a transition, the result would be a more belligerent and reckless policy toward Russia and no change in the growth of social inequality or attacks on democratic rights.



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