

Mueller testimony: Another debacle for the Democrats' anti-Russia campaign

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Congressional testimony yesterday by former FBI Director and Special Counsel Robert Mueller was the occasion for a hysterical media campaign orchestrated by the Democratic Party. The proceedings, which lasted seven hours, consisted of two consecutive appearances by Mueller, first before the House Judiciary Committee and then the House Intelligence Committee, both of which are controlled by the Democrats.

The hearings, transparent exercises in political theater, were a debacle for the Democratic Party. Their purpose was to renew the Democrats' discredited campaign over alleged "collusion" between Trump's election campaign and the Russian government, which suffered a major blow when Mueller's years-long investigation failed to return any incriminating evidence, outside of the possibility of obstruction by the administration of the investigation itself.

It was a reactionary diversion, an attempt to distract public opinion from the collaboration of the Democratic Party with Trump's agenda, including his murderous pogrom against immigrants, his assertion of quasi-dictatorial presidential powers, his record spending on the military and his preparations for war against Iran, Russia and China, including the use of nuclear weapons.

The right-wing basis of the Democrats' opposition to Trump was underscored by their use of the hearing to promote the bipartisan witch hunt against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. The courageous journalist and class war prisoner is currently in a British prison awaiting extradition to the United States on trumped-up espionage charges for the "crime" of exposing American war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mueller presented as fact the unfounded allegations that a trove of emails from the Democratic National Committee and the Hillary Clinton campaign were

given to WikiLeaks by Russian operatives, a charge that both WikiLeaks and the Russian government have denied. These emails exposed Clinton's schemes to rig the Democratic primaries in her favor and her secret speeches to Wall Street bankers.

Mueller declared, in response to Trump's public statements referencing the content of this material: "Problematic is an understatement in terms of what it displays in terms of giving some hope or some boost to what is and should be illegal activity." In other words, publication of newsworthy material damaging to sections of the political establishment should be considered "illegal activity."

The Democrats, with the encouragement and support of Mueller himself, have attempted to save face by declaring that his report "failed to exonerate" Trump for obstruction of justice, a point that was emphasized repeatedly in yesterday's testimony. The aim of the concocted allegations of Russian "meddling" is to pressure Trump into adopting a more aggressive posture against Moscow and to blackguard political opposition as the work of a "hostile foreign power."

The hearing came only one day after Democrats reached a budget deal that effectively grants Trump a free hand to carry out his policies for the rest of his term. It also comes weeks after congressional Democrats voted to spend billions on Trump's militarization of the Mexican border and the administration's incarceration of tens of thousands of immigrants in concentration camps, and days after they approved a record Pentagon budget well in excess of \$700 billion.

A massive television screen on the back wall of the committee chambers broadcast the most provocative quotes from Mueller's report, including vulgarities about the investigation allegedly uttered by Trump.

Democratic congressmen launched a social media campaign encouraging Twitter users to re-post excerpts from the report. Meanwhile, coverage of the hearings dominated the news cycle, effectively pushing out all other issues from the major news outlets.

The wall-to-wall coverage was out of all proportion to the content of Mueller's testimony itself. No new information or allegations were presented, and Mueller declared at the outset that he would restrict his answers to statements already contained in his report. Mueller refused to answer more than 200 questions over the course of the two hearings.

The testimony from the former FBI director demonstrated the dominance of the police-intelligence apparatus over American political life, where it is emerging as the arbiter of conflicts within the political establishment and the policeman of social opposition. Mueller set the framework for his own testimony and answered only those questions he wished to answer. This went unchallenged from the Democrats, who praised Mueller in the most groveling terms as an American hero and defender of democracy.

In one ominous exchange, Democrat Sylvia Garcia asked Mueller, "What if I had made a false statement to an investigator on your team? Could I go to jail for up to five years?" "Yes," Mueller replied, adding, "Although, it's Congress, so—" before trailing off. The exchange, which raised the prospect of the federal police agency throwing Congress in jail, prompted a round of laughter.

In another exchange, Mueller suggested that political candidates who publicize leaked material could be held criminally liable. Democrat Jim Himes asked, "We have an election coming up in 2020, director. If a campaign receives an offer of dirt from a foreign individual or government, generally speaking, should that campaign report those contacts [to the police]?" Mueller responded laconically, "Should be [sic]. Can be, depending on the circumstances, a crime."

Mueller presented the danger of "Russian interference" as an ongoing threat to American democracy. "It wasn't a single attempt," he said. "They're doing it as we sit here. And they expect to do it during the next campaign." Mueller, who retired from the FBI six years ago, did not bother to explain how he could possibly know this.

This did not prevent his statement from being taken

as the gospel truth by the pliant corporate press, with Jeff Bezos' *Washington Post* declaring in a banner headline on its website: "Russian interference threatens 2020 election, Mueller warns."

Mueller went on to add that the interference of "hostile foreign powers" was now likely the "new normal," indicating that the ruling class intends to use this indefinitely as a catch-all justification for political repression, in the same manner as the supposed threat of terrorism was used to justify attacks on democratic rights after September 11.

"The first line of defense really is the ability of the various agencies who have some piece of this to not only share explanation, but share expertise, to share targets, to use the full resources that we have, to address this problem," Mueller declared. In other words, the remaining restrictions on the ability of the intelligence agencies to spy on the American and world public must be removed.

The Russia investigation has failed to attract any significant support. A recent *Washington Post-ABC* poll found that the results of the investigation would "not factor into the vote" for 46 percent of Americans. Meanwhile, the investigation itself is facing increasing skepticism, with only 37 percent in a recent *Politico* poll believing that Mueller's investigation had been carried out "fairly," compared to 42 percent who thought it was carried out "unfairly." The biggest swing when compared to a previous poll in April occurred among Democratic voters.



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