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White House in turmoil as special counsel expands Russia probe

By Barry Grey

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Amid reports that Special Counsel Robert Mueller is expanding his investigation into alleged Russian interference in the US elections and collusion by the Trump campaign, the intensifying conflict within the American ruling class and state is bringing long-simmering conflicts within the Trump administration to the boiling point.

The internal crisis erupted Friday with the resignation of White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer. This followed by one day the resignation of the chief spokesman for President Donald Trump's outside legal team, Mark Corallo, and the demotion of the lead attorney, Marc Kasowitz.

These developments came after Trump's extraordinary interview with the *New York Times*, in which the president denounced his own attorney general, Jeff Sessions, for recusing himself in the Russia probe, and criticized the deputy attorney general and acting head of the FBI. Trump went on to accuse Mueller of conflicts of interest and attack his decision to investigate his business dealings as well as those of family members and close associates as a "violation" of the special counsel's mandate.

Washington insiders suggested that Trump was seeking to create a justification for firing Mueller, prompting the *Los Angeles Times* to editorialize in favor of impeachment should that occur.

Spicer's resignation was triggered by Trump's appointment of Anthony Scaramucci, a multimillionaire Wall Street hedge fund operator, former Goldman Sachs and Lehman Brothers banker and Fox News commentator, as White House communications director. Spicer, who had been filling that role since the resignation last May of Mike Dubke, vehemently opposed Scaramucci's appointment, according to multiple media reports. In this he was joined by White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus and chief White House political adviser Stephen Bannon.

Aligned against them and pushing for Scaramucci's appointment were Trump's daughter, Ivanka, and her husband, Jared Kushner, generally regarded as Trump's top White House aide.

Priebus, the former chairman of the Republican National Committee, had a long association with Spicer, who served as the RNC's spokesman. He brought Spicer into the White House. While Priebus declared his support for Scaramucci following the announcement of his appointment, Priebus's own position is increasingly problematic and his departure is widely considered only a matter of time.

With the elevation by Trump of a fellow member of the Wall Street kleptocracy to head White House communications, the billionaire president is increasingly narrowing his circle to fellow oligarchs and close family and distancing himself from the Republican Party establishment.

This appears to coincide with a decision to adopt a more aggressive posture toward Mueller. Mark Corralo, the legal spokesman who resigned on Thursday, was known to have opposed public criticism of the special counsel.

Both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* escalated the factional warfare against the White House on Friday with front-page reports, citing anonymous administration sources, of efforts by Trump lawyers to document conflicts of interest within Mueller's team of prosecutors. The *Post* reported that Trump is making inquiries about his powers to pardon potential targets of the investigation, including himself.

These actions are in response to aggressive moves by Mueller to expand his probe. On Thursday, Bloomberg News reported that Mueller's team is looking into Trump business operations going back a number of years and has subpoenaed banks for Trump's financial records. Media reports say Trump is particularly agitated over the likelihood that Mueller will obtain his tax returns, which the president has refused to release to the public.

Parallel investigations by congressional committees are also expanding. On Monday, Kushner is scheduled to be interviewed in private by the Senate Intelligence Committee on the meeting held in June of 2016 involving him, Donald Trump Jr., then-Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and a Russian lawyer with ties to the Kremlin as well as other prominent Russians. The Senate Judiciary Committee has summoned Trump Jr. and Manafort to testify in a public session next Wednesday to discuss the meeting, and the Republican chairman, Charles Grassley, has said he will subpoena them if they balk at appearing.

It was also reported Friday that Mueller instructed the White House and the Trump campaign members who attended the June 2016 meeting to preserve all records relating to it.

It is increasingly unlikely that the factional battle within the ruling class will end in a peaceful compromise. There are powerful sections of the corporate-financial elite who would like to see Trump removed, but are not sure how to do it and fearful of the implications. At the same time, the longer the impasse drags on, the greater the dangers.

At some point, the political crisis will trigger an implosion of the massively inflated financial markets, plunging US and world capitalism into an even deeper crisis than that of September 2008. And the longer the political warfare in Washington continues, the greater the danger that it will provide an opening for the pent-up anger and frustration of the working class to explode into mass struggle.

This is a crisis of class rule without historical precedent. It unfolds against the backdrop, and is fueled by, intensifying economic, social and geopolitical crises. American and world capitalism remains mired in economic stagnation, intensifying the descent into trade war and, ultimately, military conflict among the major powers. Militarism and war are on rise in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and the American military is operating without any civilian restraint. Class tensions are rising in parallel with relentless austerity and growing social inequality.

American global hegemony is breaking down. Large sections of the ruling elite are appalled and frightened by the growing isolation of the United States in the affairs of world imperialism, as demonstrated at the recent G20 summit in Germany.

And at the summit of the state, the White House is occupied by an outright gangster, the product and embodiment of the degraded and criminal state of American bourgeois political culture. In Trump, the ruling class confronts a nightmare of its own making—a Frankenstein's monster—a would-be Bonaparte who has brought into the White House the mafia methods he employs in his business operations.

Scaramucci summed up the outlook of the oligarchy both he and Trump represent when on Friday, at his first White House press briefing, he wished Spicer well and said, "I hope he goes on to make a tremendous amount of money."

Nor is there the slightest progressive or democratic content to the anti-Trump opposition of the Democratic Party and major media outlets, in alliance with the intelligence agencies. The Democrats are not conducting a struggle against Trump's brutal social attacks or his onslaught on immigrants and democratic rights. They are entirely focused on their hysterical campaign against Russia, attacking Trump for refusing to prioritize and intensify the warmongering drive against Moscow initiated by the Obama administration. They demand an escalation of the war for regime change in Syria and the military confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia in Eastern Europe.

At the same time, Trump's ruling-class opponents are concerned over the new administration's open and unabashed corruption, fearing that Trump is subordinating the basic geopolitical interests of American imperialism to his own business interests and those of his family.

It is imperative that the working class take advantage of the political crisis to intervene independently in defense of its own interests—for jobs, health care, education, immigrant and democratic rights, and peace—against both factions of the ruling elite. It must not allow its opposition to Trump to be channeled behind the Democratic Party.

There is a real danger that Trump will respond to the isolation of his administration by escalating the ongoing wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan or initiating new ones to channel political and social opposition against a foreign “enemy” and undercut his ruling-class opponents.

Without a revival of working-class struggle on the basis of a socialist program in opposition to the entire economic and political system, the outcome of the crisis, whoever is president, will be a further shift to dictatorial methods of rule and an expansion of militarism and war.

The conditions for such a struggle are rapidly maturing. The urgent task of the day is to consciously prepare that movement by building the Socialist Equality Party as the new political leadership of the working class.