



This Week in Fascism:

The Parade of Ghouls, Clashes at the Top and the Challenge Grows Sharper: We Must Prevent the Trump-Pence Regime from Ruling

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Basic Summary: Donald Trump has not yet become president, but he is setting terms and advancing toward his goal. The fascism that Trump-Pence portends is not here, but the train is coming into the station—unless people act. There have been conflicts at the top, sometimes erupting with intensity, but these die down and the normalization continues. The one thing that could break the deadlock—huge mass outpourings from all over society—remains dammed up; despite repeated sparks of struggle throughout the week, the eruption of the kind of *mass* upsurge we need has not yet happened.

There is still time, but there is not much time; the next several days, obviously, will be decisive. The key? Confronting the reality of what this would mean; and joining with those now boldly acting to STOP it.

Getting the Ghouls Approved

Beginning on Tuesday, the Trump-Pence ghouls who will occupy the cabinet and other key posts began their parade through the Senate for confirmation. This included Jeff Sessions, the one person in the last 50 years turned down for a federal judgeship because of his racism, now nominated for attorney general; Rex Tillerson, the head of Exxon now up for secretary of state; General John F. Kelly, the nominee for

secretary of homeland security; General James Mattis, nominated as secretary of defense; and Mike Pompeo, nominated to be director of the CIA. Despite important struggle waged by protesters in disrupting the Sessions hearings, and despite some heated exchanges, most of these nominations seem on track for confirmation. To get a sense of just how reactionary these nominees are, go here.

Much was made in the press of the differences expressed with Trump by different nominees on different issues. Trump's stated positions on torture, on the character of Russia, on the importance of a wall on the Mexican border, on registering Muslims in the U.S. and banning travel of Muslims into the U.S., and whether grabbing women by their genitals constituted sexual assault(!) were at times mildly demurred from by the nominees. In the main this was a matter of telling the senators what they wanted to hear, or needed for political cover, in order to get these nominees through the Senate, which has the ability to hold up or even vote down a nominee, and to create a situation in which voting the nominee down would seem "unreasonable."

The real differences that may exist between Trump and some appointees on particular issues will not deter Trump from enforcing what he wants to do—cabinet members will either go along with this (and their previous opposition will be used to show how "reasonable" the Trump position must be)¹ or else they will be removed. In addition, the key policy positions of national security adviser and chief strategist, now held by the hard-core fascists Mike Flynn and Steve Bannon, are not subject to Senate approval.

The open racist Jeff Sessions—whose positions include *upholding* mass incarceration and severe mandatory minimum sentences for drug possession, *removing* any legal safeguards for any undocumented immigrant from deportation, opposition to federal law providing protection to abortion clinics, and opposition to any attempts by the federal government to even make a show of intervening with especially egregiously brutal police departments, almost none of which he was even questioned on—will almost certainly be confirmed. While

disruptions from the audience by Carl Dix and other Refuse Fascism members, Code Pink, Democracy Spring, and nearly a dozen students from Howard University in the NAACP broke the suffocating and normalizing business as usual of these hearings, Sessions was barely challenged by most of the Democrats on any of his outrageous, reactionary, and racist positions. (In contrast to the tepid questions of other Democrats, at the end of the second day of hearings, three Black congressmen, Representatives John Lewis and Cedric Richmond, and Sen. Cory Booker, testified in opposition to Sessions and called out his barely disguised racism.) Indeed, the arch-reactionary senator Ted Cruz congratulated the Democrats on their “admirable restraint.”

Can anyone deny that Trump has made real progress in consolidating his fascist machine in all this? And can anyone deny the urgent need for resistance to prevent this from going further?

The Fight Over Russia

Oddly enough, it was Rex Tillerson, the comparatively “mainstream” nominee for secretary of state, who may face the most significant opposition. And this is because of the big fight within the power structure that did go on this week, which was over Trump’s orientation and policy toward Russia and Tillerson’s history of ties to Russia, and Putin in particular, in his capacity as head of Exxon.

Over the past few weeks, the various U.S. intelligence agencies, along with the Obama administration, asserted that Russia attempted to intervene in the U.S. elections (through hacking the computers of the Democratic Party) and that this intervention was designed to favor Trump. While these allegations cannot be accepted at face value, at minimum they show that there are significant sections of the U.S. ruling class that want to prevent Trump from changing the U.S. policy toward Russia (and with that, other important positions as well), using these allegations as a crowbar to pry him away from his flirtation with Putin.

Trump for his part has not only until very recently absolutely refused to accept these conclusions, he has called into question the reliability and honesty of the intelligence agencies themselves. While both sides of this dispute—Trump on the one hand and his opponents on the other—are fighting over how best to effect U.S. domination and plunder of the entire planet, and in that sense this dispute “does not matter” to those who want a truly better world free of *any* of that kind of domination, in a deeper sense this dispute matters a great deal. Each faction in this dispute has a great deal at stake in winning out, and this is why all along commentators have remarked on how “extraordinary” and “unprecedented” it is for these disputes to play out in public. (For more on this, see “Trump, Russia, and Hacking Elections: The Ruling Class Shitstorm, the Battle in the Streets, and What Humanity Needs *Right Now*.”)

On Tuesday, January 10, this went to another level when CNN leaked the news that the intelligence agencies had told both Trump and Obama that there were credible sources who said that the Russians had information on Trump that could be used to blackmail him, and that there had been contacts between forces around Trump and Russian intelligence as recently as this summer. CNN noted that these reports had not been verified, but maintained that it was nevertheless newsworthy since Trump and Obama had been briefed on them. BuzzFeed followed this by leaking one particularly salacious but unconfirmed allegation contained in the briefing report.

Did Trump then go on the defensive? Quite the contrary; he accused the intelligence agencies of leaking the report and compared them to Nazi Germany (not for the real crimes of these agencies, but because they had the temerity to even write down these allegations about Trump!). By week’s end, even though Trump had half-conceded at his news conference that Russia had done the hacking of the Democratic Party, he still maintained his generally favorable orientation toward Putin and Russia. Other forces in the ruling class—in this case principally Republicans—were continuing to seek ways to force Trump to change his views. On Sunday, Trump’s team of Pence and Reince Priebus came out to defend Trump on this, while the

outgoing CIA director criticized Trump. So this particular contradiction remains very sharp. But note well: At this point Trump shows very little sign of changing his position (indeed he is now “floating out” withdrawing the sanctions put on Russia for its hacking).

Again, can anyone deny that Trump has made real progress in consolidating his fascist machine in all this? And can anyone deny the urgent need for resistance to prevent this from going further?

Trump Attacks the Press

On Wednesday, the day after the leak erupted, Trump took the occasion of his first press conference in six months to launch an all-out attack against BuzzFeed and CNN. This reached a peak of intensity when CNN newscaster Jim Acosta attempted to ask a question and Trump continually denied him from the podium a right to speak or question. Then, after several rounds of this, Trump’s press aide threatened Acosta with ejection if he persisted.²

Trump not only succeeded in humiliating and silencing Acosta, he did something worse: he made the rest of the press go along with it. Not a single reporter came to Acosta’s defense on the spot, when what should have happened was a mass refusal to proceed with the press conference until Acosta got to raise his question. In some ways, it was *this* instance in which Trump’s fascist agenda was most advanced during the whole week. So, again: Can anyone deny that Trump has made real progress in consolidating his fascist machine in all this? And can anyone deny the urgent need for resistance to prevent this from going further?

The Democrats: John Lewis’ Dissent and the Shameful Capitulation of Obama and Sanders

On Friday, John Lewis, a longtime congressional representative from Georgia and a former Freedom Rider and leader of the civil rights movement (Lewis was leading those attacked on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma in 1965, a

major moment in that movement and in the history of this country), entered into the fray. Actually, he had already testified against Sessions, one of the few witnesses who actually exposed the racist meaning behind Sessions' call for "law and order" (and in a violation of congressional protocol, Lewis was put last among the witnesses, when all but one of the Republican senators had insultingly left the room).

But now Lewis went another round and stated that, due to Russia's alleged meddling in the elections, he did not view Trump as the legitimate president and would not attend his inauguration. Trump then hit back at Lewis—not for raising the alleged Russian connection, but for the conditions of the masses of Black people in Lewis' district, claiming that Lewis (who, after all, nearly lost his life at Selma) was just "talk, talk, talk." Trump also called the Black community of Atlanta "crime-infested"—reminiscent of Nazi language and imagery used in attacking Jews.

This asinine, unprincipled, and utterly racist attack by Trump began to turn the dispute over Trump's legitimacy from one focused on Russia's alleged hacking to one in which that issue became melded to a degree with Trump's position toward Black people—a position which would lead anyone with an ounce of justice to find Trump illegitimate. Trump's deep-dyed racism goes back decades. It reached low points in his call for the execution of five Black and Latino juveniles in New York (including Yusef Salaam, an initiator of refusefascism.org) in 1991, then his continued insistence up to today that they should be in prison *despite their exoneration after serving years in prison*, his insistence on "law and order above all" during his campaign, which is just a racist codeword for totally unleashing the police, and his flirtation during and after the campaign with the Klan and with neo-Nazi groups (along with his appointment into high positions of Bannon, Sessions, DeVos (nominee for secretary of education), and others who, like them, richly deserve the "title" of racist pig), now implicitly came into play as grounds for illegitimacy, even if beneath the surface. Even with all this, even with the racism just dripping from Trump and his attacks on Lewis, the Trump hyenas insisted that Lewis was

“dividing the country” and needed to unite it. (As for that latter bullshit, right now this society urgently *needs* to be divided and divided out sharply, between those who are installing fascism and/or conciliating or collaborating with it, and those who are fighting it.)

By Sunday, two dozen house members had joined Lewis’ boycott of the inauguration—the beginning of what could be a serious fissure at the top.

Nonetheless, most leading Democrats continued their shameful dance of normalizing Trump all week long. Bernie Sanders, in a CNN town hall meeting on Monday, tut-tutted about Trump’s racism, sexism, and xenophobia, but then moved quickly to talk about “working with him where we can.” Barack Obama, in his farewell address and elsewhere, continued to prate on about the “great arc of U.S. history” and told those under his influence to continue to work within the system for change, mentioning elements of Trump’s offensive in negative ways (so as not to lose the crowd), but not calling out Trump himself, and certainly not calling for any resistance to the actual inauguration and assumption of Trump to the presidency but instead very definitely continuing to counsel against it. In short, Obama continued to emphasize the importance of the so-called “peaceful transfer of power” to Trump at a time when serious resistance of a kind not seen for many decades is urgently needed.

By Sunday, when asked about Lewis’ refusal to attend Trump’s inauguration, a top Obama aide went on TV to remind one and all that Trump was “freely elected” (as was Hitler, by the way, whose party, unlike Trump, received a plurality of votes) and suggested that Trump “reach out” to Lewis so they could iron out their differences. Meanwhile, Sanders weaseled every which way he could but refused to call Trump illegitimate, saying that those would be “just words.” Yes, they would be “words,” Bernie—consequential words, as they would imply that people should NOT allow Trump to wield the powers of the state, including the army, police, etc., and that you would be encouraging them to actually fucking DO something about the monstrosity about to go down.

It would be hard to overstate the damage done by these top Democratic politicians who have, over and over again, proven themselves to be representatives of the interests of the ruling class of capitalist-imperialists, continually normalizing Trump and refusing to call a fascist a fascist. Bob Avakian’s point that for the people at the top of the pyramid of this society, those who rule the empire, fascism is one possible solution to the problems they face, and if they have their differences with the fascists now about to take power, they will keep them “in house”; but revolution, leading to communism—OR, in this case, *even something far short of revolution, a struggle aimed at STOPPING the installation of a fascist regime, which would involve bringing masses of people into the streets and “destabilizing” their rule, is NOT acceptable to them.*

So, we ask again: Can anyone deny that Trump has made real progress in consolidating his fascist machine in all this? And can anyone deny the urgent need for resistance to prevent this from going further?

The Urgent Need to STOP This

At the same time, there have been numerous individuals and groups who have spoken out against Trump in the past week, sometimes at great risk, and there have also been the actions of Refuse Fascism, this week focused in DC. In addition to the disruption of the hearings, Refuse Fascism also ran its Call to Act as a full-page ad in the *Washington Post*, announced a major concert in New York for this week, produced some very good memes and other materials, held demonstrations in a number of cities, and most importantly took to the streets of DC, providing a concrete outlet for people and a daring plan.

Even with all this dedicated and important work, as we write this Sunday night (with the volunteers in DC in process of attempting to surround Trump Hotel), it is clear that the resistance to the installation of this fascist regime—resistance aimed at actually preventing it—has a long way to go and a short time to get there. Over and over again, people are attracted to this but then run into obstacles among those they know and

sometimes get worn down or discouraged. There is a pull away from confronting the real horrors of what this regime will mean for humanity and the necessity therefore to STOP it, and a pull to seek some lesser and easier way to resist.

The FAQ's published by Refuse Fascism actually do answer many of the questions that people have been confronting and these should be vigorously used. The FAQ's draw on the Call to Act and the Mission and Plan to make a convincing case as to how this could happen. In short, we need the intersection of a mass eruption from below with real conflicts in the power structure—conflicts brought on both by the actual differences over HOW to handle the intense contradictions they now face generally *and* by how to deal with a demand from millions that this regime not be allowed to rule.

This IS possible, on both counts. The contradictions in the power structure of society have asserted themselves in unprecedented ways during this past week, even as the Trump-Pence fascist machine has marched forward. Over and over, the question of legitimacy, or who has the right to wield the armed force of the state, has forced itself into public debate. Nearly every day of the past week this phrase was on people's lips, and while Bernie Sanders may disingenuously and shamefully dismiss this as "just words," in many ways legitimacy is the most important word in the dictionary right now. This is precisely because fascism is a very radical solution to the very deep social contradictions the ruling class faces, and one fraught with all kinds of risks—including getting the people to go along with radical new and extremely reactionary "legitimizing norms."³

What is missing right now is the sufficient numbers "from below"—from the people of all strata of this society who basically get, on one level or another, the depth of the threat we face and the need for radical, unprecedented action to stop it. That and that alone would enable things to come together to actually prevent this.

The FAQ's answer a number of things that have been brought up, and should continue to be wielded. But here we also have to say that, in particular, fear—fear of possible chaos,

particularly coming from the fascist defenders of Trump should he be denied the presidency—cannot limit our imaginations or aspirations. Nor can we allow it to cloud our objective understanding of the catastrophe that this regime will almost certainly mean for hundreds of millions here and literally billions around the world. Hoping for the best in the face of this is NOT a strategy—at least not a strategy to forestall this.

Yes, there will be resistance and “push-back” coming from the stone-to-the-bone racists and reactionaries who have grouped themselves at the core around Trump; but will it be easier to deal with this when these same forces have their champion in power, with the legal means to deploy the armed forces that HE will command, with the prison and legal system that HE will be honeycombing with his appointments, with the press turned utterly servile (as we saw in preview on Wednesday), with rights (including citizenship rights) stripped from those who dissent while at the same time having them subjected to cyber-attacks and threats and actual violence, and with what will be the legally allowed opposition cringing in fear and working to find ways to “work together”?! The question both demands to be asked and it answers itself. It will in fact be far harder, immeasurably harder—far better now to brave these forces when they do not yet have their hands on state power, than waiting for a presumably better time that in all likelihood will never come... or, if and when it does come, will happen only after terrible damage has already been done.

To speak of the great struggles of the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s once more—was it easy, back then, to take direct action to stand up against the KKK, the mobs and the sheriffs who had no compunction about dealing brutality and death to people demanding basic rights and human dignity? It’s easy to forget now how people were told, as Nina Simone put it in one of her great songs (“Mississippi Goddam”), to “go slow.” But, as Nina sang about that mentality, “that’s just the trouble.” We cannot go slow; we cannot fail to rise to what we must rise to, even with the risks.

If you let yourself face the full depth of the situation... if you understand it deep down, on any level at all... you **MUST** act on your understanding.

Humanity depends on it.

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These right-wing politicians (generally grouped within the Republican Party) can, will, and do actively mobilize this essentially fascist social base...yet, on the other side, the sections of the ruling class that are more generally represented by the Democratic Party are very reluctant to, and in fact resistant to, mobilizing...the base of people whose votes and support in the bourgeois political arena the Democrats seek to gain. This (Democratic Party) side of the ruling class generally is not desirous of—and in fact recoils at the idea of—calling that base into the streets, mobilizing them either to take on the opposing forces in the ruling class and their social base or in general to struggle for the programs that the Democratic Party itself claims to represent and actually in some measure does seek to implement....

As an amplification of the basic point here, it is important to recognize this: Within the framework of the capitalist-imperialist system, and with the underlying dynamics of this system, which fundamentally set the terms, and the confines, of “official” and “acceptable” politics, fascism—that is, the imposition of a form of dictatorship which openly relies on violence and terror to maintain the rule and the imperatives of the capitalist-imperialist system—is one possible resolution of the contradictions that this system is facing—a resolution that could, at a certain point, more or less correspond to the compelling needs of this system and its ruling class—while revolution and real socialism, aiming toward the final goal of communism, throughout the world, is also a possible resolution of these contradictions, but one that would most definitely not be acceptable to the capitalist-imperialist ruling class nor compatible with the imperatives of this system!

— Bob Avakian, *BASics* 3:11

Notes

1. For instance, Colin Powell—who was secretary of state under George W. Bush—had a reputation as more “moderate” than secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld and other key Bush-Cheney appointees; Bush turned this to his advantage by having Powell testify at the UN that Iraq’s possession of “weapons of mass destruction” was “a fact.” Of course, there were no facts backing this, as Powell well knew; but Powell’s reputation gave his assertion more credibility than it would have had coming from the other Bushites.

2. CNN (along with the other “liberal media” that Trump is generally attacking so hard right now) is a propaganda organ of the ruling class, a point deeply gone into by Bob Avakian in the filmed talk *REVOLUTION—NOTHING LESS!* Within the spectrum of the mainstream news media, however, they are in the center, upholding at least a pretense of reporting stories that are objectively verifiable. While they do (often) print utter falsehoods, in the main they cast their reporting in ways that accept the underlying framework of understanding the world that the ruling class of this country promotes through their control of education, culture, the media, etc. To take one example from BA’s talk, CNN and other mainstream broadcast commentators continually use the phrase “the good guys” in reporting on U.S. troops in conflict with other armed forces. This is NOT objective reporting, as the U.S. Army is far from being the good guys in any of the conflicts they are involved in (e.g., Iraq, where the “good guys” have been responsible directly for the literal torture and murder of tens of thousands of Iraqis, the exile of millions more, and the plunging of the country into religious civil war that has taken still more tens of thousands of lives—for absolutely no reason whatsoever other than the U.S. desire to heighten its domination and exploitation of the Middle East; also, note that “Mad Dog” Mattis, the nominee for secretary of defense who also got a free pass in the Senate confirmation hearings, lived up to his nickname thereby giving overall leadership to the practice of “night raids” in which U.S. troops would terrorize Iraqi families in the middle of the night, carrying out mayhem and often murder, under the pretext of looking for terrorists). So no, they are not “good guys,” and yes, the media is biased (as this example shows), but no, this does not justify a fascist, or anyone else, silencing and intimidating the press.

3. By the term legitimating norms, we refer to an imposed, but to an extent accepted, consensus as to how society should be ordered, what rights and duties people have, etc. With Trump these “new norms” would include the outright suppression of the press and of political expression more generally; the use of state power and armed thugs to silence dissent and to persecute people deemed “undesirable” (in this case, Muslims, immigrants generally, Black people, women, LGBT people, and others); the breakneck, totally unregulated destruction and plunder of the environment; and a more openly warlike foreign policy, including a renewed and extremely dangerous nuclear arms race.