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Trump's State of Delusion

Amidst the nauseating spectacle of Trump's State of the Union address on Tuesday night, perhaps the most remarkable feature was the inability of the ruling class—not only Trump, but also the Democratic opposition and the media commentary—to deal seriously with any of the myriad crises engulfing American and world capitalism.

The State of the Union address was, as originally conceived, intended as an occasion for the president to outline to Congress and the American people the overall economic, social and geo-political situation facing the country. However, over the past four decades, and particularly since the Reagan White House, the event has become an increasingly hollow charade, full of bombast and empty boasting, incapable of acknowledging the mounting crisis of American capitalism.

This period has seen an accelerating decline in the global economic position of the United States. The American ruling class has sought, particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, to offset its decline by military means. But more than a quarter-century of unending war—in the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, and North Africa—has produced only a series of debacles.

The United States finds itself increasingly isolated in the Middle East, challenged economically by a rising China, and estranged from its traditional allies in Europe. Last month, the new National Defense Strategy suddenly announced that the official justification over the past 17 years for war and the buildup of police state powers at home,

the global “war on terror,” has been supplanted by the preparation for “great power conflicts,” i.e., a new world war.

Within the borders of the United States, the decay of social conditions, combined with the consolidation of a new financial aristocracy and unprecedented levels of economic inequality, have brought class tensions to the breaking point. The entire political establishment is discredited in the eyes of the broad mass of the working class. Disgust with capitalism and interest in socialism are growing.

And amidst the general ruling class euphoria over massive tax cuts for the rich and an ever-rising stock market, more sober observers are warning of a financial crash even more traumatic than the collapse that occurred ten years ago.

The extreme crisis and instability of bourgeois rule in the US is manifested in the political warfare that continues to rock Washington, with sections of the ruling class and the state openly discussing removing Trump from office either through impeachment, invocation of the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, or forced resignation.

None of this could be hinted at, let alone seriously addressed, in Trump’s speech. Instead, Trump presented a fairytale narrative of a resurgent America and a happy and grateful population. This was the backdrop for a pledge to double down on the policies of militarism, Wall Street plunder and repression that have brought the country to the brink of a social explosion.

Trump’s attempt to project at the onset of his remarks a tone of optimism and confidence in the American people actually pointed to the opposite. He praised the American “heroes” who responded to the series of disasters over the past year—hurricanes, wildfires, floods, mass shootings—all of which exposed in different forms the disastrous state of American capitalism. There was no mention of the fact that half a million people in Puerto Rico remain without power more than four months after Hurricane Maria.

Trump’s fictional America provided the framework for advancing the fascist policies of the financial oligarchy he embodies: preparation for nuclear war against Iran, North Korea, Russia, China; anti-immigrant racism and economic nationalism; an expansion of police powers and repression, symbolized by his order to keep the Guantanamo camp open and send more alleged terrorists there to be tortured and imprisoned indefinitely.

The Democratic “opposition” is no more able to address the real issues confronting the American people. They are constrained by the fact that their main social base—Wall Street—enthusiastically supports Trump’s economic policies. The state forces they serve,

beginning with the CIA, oppose Trump from the standpoint that he is insufficiently aggressive in the confrontation with Russia.

They can offer no policies to address the social crisis and promote instead a combination of right-wing identity politics and anti-Russian war fever, recalling the demagoguery of the Joe McCarthy witch-hunts of the 1940s and 1950s. At the same time, they push anti-democratic campaigns such as the #MeToo sex hysteria and the crackdown on free speech on the Internet mounted under the fraudulent cover of combating Russian-inspired “fake news.”

For the past year, the Democratic Party has devoted all its efforts to suppressing mass opposition to Trump and diverting it along reactionary and militaristic channels.

As for the corporate-controlled media, its generally laudatory response to Trump’s speech was as delusional as the president’s remarks. The *Washington Post* editorial board gushed that Trump’s performance showed him to be “a consummate showman, and his stagecraft was top notch.” One of its articles carried a headline calling the speech “high-minded.” The *New York Times*’ Ross Douthat called Trump’s semi-fascistic tirades an attempt by the president to “pitch himself as a centrist dealmaker.”

The inability of the ruling class to address the reality of the situation it confronts is itself an expression of its perplexity and disarray. The real “state of the union” is one of historic and systemic crisis. It is the manifestation in the center of world capitalism of a global crisis that confronts mankind with the alternatives of socialism or barbarism, i.e., nuclear war and fascist dictatorship. The same crisis that is driving the capitalist class to world war is propelling the working class into revolutionary struggle.