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## Trump's attack on the press

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4 July 2017

It is perhaps appropriate that July 4, 2017, Independence Day, should coincide with yet another degrading spectacle exposing the far-reaching rot of American democracy. The past several days have seen a marked escalation of Trump's conflict with the US media, pitting the fascistic and authoritarian president against a thoroughly corrupt and compromised establishment press.

In a speech Saturday, Trump denounced the *New York Times* and MSNBC, among others. The next day he posted on his Twitter feed an edited video of a wrestling match, created by an ultra-right supporter, showing Trump beating up an opponent labeled CNN. He told the Fourth of July "Celebrate Freedom" rally, bringing together right-wing veterans and religious groups, "The fake media is trying to silence us, but we will not let them."

The "Celebrate Freedom" event, sponsored by the Christian broadcasting group Salem Media and the First Baptist Church of Dallas, received relatively little coverage compared to the firestorm over Trump's twitter attack on MSNBC hosts Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough. It was, however, a festival of reaction and backwardness.

Trump, speaking before a gigantic American flag, proclaimed that since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, it was understood that liberty comes from God. He heaped praise

on the military and the police, declaring, “Not only has God bestowed on us the gift of freedom, he’s also given us the gift of heroes willing to give their lives to defend that freedom.”

Trump’s praise for “freedom” was combined with a robust defense of his unconstitutional and racist Muslim travel ban, recently allowed to go forward by a unanimous decision of the Supreme Court.

Trump’s diatribes over the weekend recall comments he made in February, when he denounced the media as the “enemy of the people” and reprised the fascistic “America First” themes that dominated his Inaugural Address. “We all share one home and one glorious destiny,” he proclaimed Saturday in prose recalling the rants of Mussolini. “And whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood.”

A recognition of the deeply reactionary content of Trump’s polemics does not require that one be sentimental about his immediate targets. In his attack on the “dishonest media,” Trump is seeking to capitalize on widespread and entirely justified hostility to the corporate press for the purpose of advancing a right-wing, authoritarian agenda.

Trump’s rhetoric finds a broader response insofar as the media itself has been deeply discredited and is completely alienated from the concerns of the broad mass of the population. Beyond the super-rich, the constituency of the *New York Times*, CNN and other outlets consists almost entirely of the most privileged sections of the upper-middle class.

The corporate media’s campaign against Trump has been conducted on the most right-wing basis, employing the methods of McCarthyite-style Russia-baiting, in which “news” has been replaced by the direct channeling of propaganda and lies from the intelligence agencies.

The political-media establishment has no problem with Trump killing Syrians, threatening North Korea with nuclear annihilation or engaging in gunboat diplomacy with China and Russia. Nor does it object to his persecution of immigrants, demonization of Muslims or proposals to deprive tens of millions of people of access to health care.

Moreover, it has, virtually in unison, denounced and slandered journalists and others who have sought to fulfill the responsibility of principled journalism to expose before the public the crimes and lies of the government—people such as Julian Assange, Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning.

The dilemma of the so-called “liberal” media, whose standard-bearer is the *New York Times*, is that it is obliged, as a matter of self-defense, to combine, at least nominally, defense of the First Amendment guarantee of press freedom with absolute support for imperialism and the interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy which runs the United States, and which finds its noxious personification in the figure of Donald Trump.

Thus, Charles Blow, in his column in Monday’s *New York Times* headlined “The Hijacked American Presidency,” proclaims that those who support Trump are “cowering before the belligerent, would-be king. A madman and his legislative minions are holding America hostage.”

But he then pivots to the more central theme of the White House's establishment critics—Russian aggression and Trump's complicity. He writes: "We must always remember that although individual Americans made the choice to vote affirmatively for him or actively withhold their support from his opponent, those decisions were influenced, in ways we cannot calculate, by Russian interference in our election, designed to privilege Trump."

Trump, Blow states, is in office "because a foreign power hostile to our interests wanted him installed." The president has "not only praised that foreign power, he has proven mysteriously averse to condemning it or even acknowledging its meddling."

In the *Washington Post*, columnist Colbert King was even more direct in his McCarthy-style red-baiting, comparing the hacking of the Democratic National Committee last year to the Watergate break-in, only with Russian operatives rather than former CIA agents doing the dirty work. He concludes that "the Kremlin also had its reasons for wanting Trump in White House. No American presidential candidate since Communist Party-USA boss Gus Hall has ever enjoyed greater Moscow acceptance."

The basic fraud underlying the narrative of Trump's establishment critics is the idea that Trump himself is somehow an aberration, an interloper into the pristine landscape of American democracy. In Blow's reading, his rise to power is "the most extraordinary and profound electoral mistake America has made in our lifetimes and possibly ever." This "electoral mistake" was possible, however, only due to the extraordinarily right-wing character of his opponent, Hillary Clinton.

At a deeper level, Trump is an excrescence of a diseased social system. In this sense, his election was not a "mistake." Rather, it revealed the true face of American capitalism.

The Trump administration and its establishment critics are both expressions of an underlying disease. The removal of Trump through the methods of political conspiracy, based on anti-Russian propaganda and the concealment of the real issues behind the internecine conflict, would not advance the interests of the working class. It would only substitute a more polished and professional reactionary for the current occupant of the White House.

The opposition of the working class to Trump has nothing in common with the reactionary intrigues of the rival factions within the ruling elite and its wealthy upper-middle class periphery, for which the corporate-controlled media serves as a sounding board. The working class must conduct its own struggle against the Trump administration, independently of the Democratic Party, its media accomplices and the military-intelligence apparatus, through the independent mobilization of its own class strength, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.