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Who Believes in the Deep State?

Jeff Stein

2018

President Donald Trump has embraced the conspiracy theory that his supposedly popularly elected administration is being undermined by the career bureaucrats in the CIA, FBI and NSC who are part of a “state within a state,” the so-called “Deep State.” Trump was introduced to the theory by his former political strategist, Steve Bannon, the Machiavelli of the “alt-Right” and until recently the head of the Mercer family’s Breitbart News website. According to the theory, the Deep State does not want Trump to make peace with Vladimir Putin’s regime in Russia, and has been spreading “fake news” and leaks trying to prove that Trump is a pawn of Putin. The goal is supposedly to either control Trump or failing that, drive Trump from power.

The idea of a shadow government that makes the real decisions contrary to the will of the people and their elected representatives is not a new one invented by Bannon. In various forms the idea of a group of kingmakers hidden behind the apparent ruler is as old as the state itself. But more recently the “Deep State” idea was used to refer to the power of

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Retrieved on 28th January 2021 from syndicalist.us
From Anarcho-Syndicalist Review #73, Spring 2018

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

military establishments in third world countries, particularly in the Middle East, to stymie efforts to create democracies or stage coups when democratically elected governments try to rein in the generals. It is neither a left-wing nor right-wing concept, since it has been used by those on all sides of the political spectrum. Glenn Greenwald, investigative journalist and co-founder of the Intercept, has cautioned his readers not to trust the “Deep State” by relying on the FBI and other national security agencies to provide us the real information about Russian interference in the defeat of their ally, Hillary Clinton, lest we inadvertently increase the “Deep State’s power.” Similar remarks have been made by Noam Chomsky.

But is there really such a thing as a “Deep State,” a conspiratorial shadow government that threatens the ability of Americans to choose their leaders? Yes, but it is not who Bannon and Greenwald say it is. As well as the State bureaucracy, the “Deep State” is the ruling class: the unelected elite of billionaire capitalists that holds the most power in the United States. It is the ruling class that decides who will be the candidates in the presidential election from both capitalist parties. But the ruling class is not all of one mind and has conflicting interests. There is a constant struggle for power between capitalist factions, which explains the two-party system. One faction of the ruling class has decided to ignore Trump’s background as a money launderer for Putin and the Russian oligarchs, as long as Trump is willing to serve their interests. This faction has been called various things, the “libertarians”, the “conservatives,” the “capitalist fundamentalists,” the “cowboys” (due to the preponderance of oil and energy-mining as their source of wealth).

The other side of this “Deep State” family feud are the “Yankees” (due to their reliance on Wall Street finance), but also dubbed the “neo-liberals,” the “liberal elite” or just “liberals.” There is no doubt that some of the resistance to Trump and his new regime comes from hold-overs of the Obama-Clinton

bureaucracy, but to credit the bureaucracy with a power completely independent of their capitalist masters is a real stretch whether the credit comes from the likes of Greenwald or Bannon. This is not to mention that many in the FBI, CIA and other security agencies have more right-wing sympathies and were appointed by the previous cowboy President George W. Bush. If there is a conspiracy against Trump, it is a conspiracy of the “outs” versus the “ins” of the ruling class, between the two factions of “the Deep State” with the working class being used as vote fodder to support one side or the other.

This is not to suggest working people should remain neutral. The policies of Trump are certainly draconian and need to be directly resisted as long as his regime lasts. However the corporate globalization policies of the neo-liberals are not being reversed by Trump, and will certainly continue in his wake. Both factions have invoked an anti-labor, anti-working class program over the last forty years. To end these policies will require a new labor movement which is not a pawn of the ruling class Deep State or any of its factions.