

The impeachment trial begins as Trump escalates fascist appeals

Patrick Martin
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The Senate trial of President Donald Trump began Thursday with the ceremonial swearing-in of Chief Justice John Roberts, who will oversee the proceedings, followed by the administration of an oath to the 100 senators. But for all the invocations of history and the official formalities, Trump's impeachment and trial avoids the extreme danger to democratic rights posed by the increasingly authoritarian character of his government, with its open resort to criminal actions both at home and abroad.

Indeed, the trial begins just two weeks after Trump openly carried out an illegal state killing: murdering Gen. Qassem Suleimani, one of the most influential figures in the Iranian government in a January 3 drone strike.

Trump could have been charged with leading a criminal conspiracy to subvert the Constitution, seeking to illegally prolong his term in office, fomenting violence against political opponents, and scuttling the Bill of Rights. But the Democrats, instead, have chosen to impeach Trump for holding up military aid to Ukraine and slightly delaying the timetable of a long-running operation by the CIA to expand military operations against Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

For all the sober faces on the House Democrats who delivered the two articles of impeachment to the Senate, the impeachment campaign has taken on the character of a farce. The Democrats don't expect the Republican majority in the Senate to hold more than a perfunctory trial of the charges. This would be followed by a swift vote of acquittal, allowing Trump to declare himself vindicated and possibly strengthening his political position.

While Congress is going through the motions, Trump is holding rallies where he employs fascist demagoguery

to create a mob-like environment. On Tuesday night, on the eve of the final House vote to deliver the articles of impeachment to the Senate, Trump ranted at a rally in Wisconsin, celebrating the murder of Suleimani. Speaking like the gangster he is, Trump vilified Suleimani as "this son of a bitch."

He went on to speak of the Democrats in similar terms, describing them as "demented," "crazy," and "loony," and denouncing them as "socialists" and "traitors." This diatribe came the day after Trump retweeted a doctored photograph showing Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer dressed in Muslim attire and standing in front of an Iranian flag.

Nothing approaching language of this sort has ever been used by an American president. His words are an open incitement to violence against those he deems his enemies; and they have political consequences.

On Thursday, the FBI arrested three white supremacists, two of them ex-soldiers, who were preparing an armed assault on the Virginia state capitol, using a gun-rights rally set for next Monday—Martin Luther King Day—as a screen for their actions. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency, warning of another Charlottesville, the 2017 neo-Nazi riot in which an anti-fascist protester was murdered. Trump praised the white supremacists as "good people."

The impeachment process is itself unfolding in an atmosphere of violent threats and provocations. This week an associate of Trump's attorney and ambassador-at-large Rudy Giuliani, Lev Parnas, has come forward to reveal efforts to conduct physical and electronic surveillance of Marie Yovanovitch, then the US ambassador to Ukraine, who was viewed as an obstacle to Trump's efforts to obtain political ammunition from the Ukrainian government against Democratic

presidential hopeful Joe Biden.

The position of the Democrats is completely feckless. Even as the impeachment process gets underway, they work hand-in-hand with the White House on key questions of economic and foreign policy. Only hours before the beginning of the Senate trial Thursday, Senate Democrats voted overwhelmingly for the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement, sought by Trump to intensify trade warfare against China and Europe. House speaker Pelosi has sent Trump an invitation to appear before Congress and deliver his State of the Union address.

The Democrats continue to propound the reactionary fantasy that Trump is an agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, rather than the expression of the turn towards fascism by powerful sections of the American financial aristocracy.

They claim that they are acting to protect the “legitimacy” of the 2020 elections. But it is becoming increasingly clear that the elections will be held under conditions of threats of violence against Trump’s opponents; and there is no reason to assume that Trump will accept the outcome of the vote on November 3, should he be defeated. At his rally in Wisconsin, he repeated his threat to seek to stay in office indefinitely, regardless of the US Constitution.

It is striking that the Democrats have never explained what they intend to do if Trump is acquitted and remains in office. His assault on democratic rights will continue, and he will be emboldened to intensify his efforts to instigate the growth of a fascistic mass movement.

There is no way that the interests of the masses of working people can find expression in a conflict between the fascistic Trump and his Democratic opponents, who act as political attorneys for the CIA. For the vast majority of the population, the impeachment process is completely detached from their real political and social interests. There are many reasons for workers to oppose Trump, but his delay of the CIA’s timetable for a war in eastern Ukraine, which could trigger a confrontation with Russia, is not one of them.

The removal of the Trump administration is urgently required. But a genuine struggle against Trump requires the independent mobilization of the working class against the entire rotten structure of American

capitalism. This is what the Democrats are determined to avoid. They want a shift in certain aspects of imperialist policy, particularly toward a more consistently confrontational approach to dealings with Russia. But the Democrats and their Wall Street paymasters absolutely oppose any change in policy, either within the United States or internationally, that undermines the power of the ruling class and impinges on its wealth.

The criminal character of the Trump administration is a symptom of the putrefaction of American capitalism. The United States is stricken by the twin cancers of historically unprecedented social inequality and decades of military aggression overseas. The only cure is an independent revolutionary struggle of the working class, based on a socialist and internationalist program.



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