

# Coup d'état in Washington: Trump declares war on the Constitution

**Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (US)**

**2 June 2020**

In an act unprecedented in American history, Donald Trump has repudiated the Constitution and is attempting to establish a presidential dictatorship, supported by the military, police and far-right fascistic militia acting under his command. The Socialist Equality Party appeals to the working class and all those committed to the defense of democratic rights to oppose this criminal action.

Speaking on national television, Trump proclaimed: “I am your president of law and order... Our nation has been gripped by professional anarchists, arsonists, looters, criminals, Antifa and others.”

Trump’s fascistic rant came only minutes after he ordered massively armed military police to launch a violent attack on citizens engaged in a lawful and peaceful assembly outside the White House to protest the police murder of George Floyd.

The cowardly and vicious assault by military forces on unarmed citizens exercising their First Amendment rights in Washington DC will live in infamy as the beginning of a coup d'état by a criminal administration.

“These are not acts of peaceful protests,” Trump said, “These are acts of domestic terror.”

Trump is enraged by the most significant display of multi-racial, multi-ethnic unity of workers and young people in opposition to racist police violence in the history of the United States.

Trump declared that he will deploy the military, in violation of the Constitution, to suppress protests. Referring to a conference call with governors that he held earlier in the day, Trump said that “a number of state and local governments have failed to take necessary action,” and that he had “strongly recommended” that they “deploy the National Guard in sufficient numbers so that we dominate the streets.”

He then issued the following criminal threat: “If a city or state refuses to take the actions that are necessary to defend the life and property of their residents, then I will deploy the US military and quickly solve the problem for them.”

Trump also announced he was using the nation’s capital as a staging ground for a national military deployment: “I am also taking swift and decisive action to protect our great capital, Washington DC. As we speak, I am dispatching thousands and thousands of heavily armed soldiers, military personnel and law

enforcement to stop the rioting.”

Trump declared that protesters “will be arrested, detained and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. I want the organizers of this terror to be on notice that you will face severe criminal penalties and lengthy sentences in jail. This includes Antifa and others who are leading instigators of this violence. One law and order is what it is. One law, we have one beautiful law.”

These are the threats of a would-be tin-pot military dictator. Trump provided no legal or constitutional basis for his unprecedented actions. His invocation of the 1807 Insurrection Act is historically fraudulent and legally invalid. The Act does not allow him to deploy the military in cases where the governors of the states refuse to request intervention.

In his earlier call with state governors, Trump demanded that they violently suppress protests against police violence. “This is a movement, and if you don’t put it down it will get worse and worse. You have to dominate, and if you don’t dominate you are wasting your time. They are going to run all over you, and you’ll look like a bunch of jerks.”

Trump called the governors “weak” for failing to mobilize tens of thousands of national guardsmen against the demonstrators, saying they must “wipe them [the protesters] out.”

To oversee the domestic deployment of the military, Trump announced that he was appointing General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to be in charge of the government response. Trump did not explain on what legal basis he made this decision, which violates the Posse Comitatus prohibition on the domestic use of the military.

In the call with governors, Attorney General William Barr also explained that federal prosecution of demonstrators had been placed under the Joint Terrorist Task Force, a multi-department military-intelligence agency in charge of prosecuting combatants captured in the wars in the Middle East and Central Asia. Trump demanded that the Department of Justice “put ‘em in jail for 10 years.”

The president’s congressional ally, Florida Republican Matt Gaetz, called for widespread assassination of political opponents: “Now that we clearly see Antifa as terrorists, can we hunt them down like we do those in the Middle East?”

A turning point in American history has been reached.

Trump's efforts to establish a personal dictatorship on the basis of military rule is the product of a protracted crisis of American democracy, under the impact of extreme social inequality and endless war.

The defeat of Trump's attempted coup d'état depends on the intervention of the working class, which must take the lead in the defense of democratic rights.

No serious opposition to Trump's actions can be expected from the Democratic Party. It has responded to Trump's proclamation with characteristic fecklessness. The favored response of Democrats to Trump's illegal actions is that "the president is not being helpful" by inflaming social tensions. As if "being helpful" was part of Trump's political agenda!

After Trump's conference call with governors, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker meekly called for Trump's removal at the ballot box in November, while former presidential candidate Hilary Clinton urged the population to "vote." But Trump may not plan on holding an election at all. If an election is held, it may be under conditions of martial law, with massive intimidation by the military, police and right-wing paramilitaries. Such were the conditions under which the Nazis presided over the last legal election in Germany in March 1933, six weeks after Hitler had become chancellor.

For the past three-and-a-half years, the Democrats have worked to suppress mass opposition to the Trump regime and direct it behind their own reactionary anti-Russia campaign, channeling the demands of dominant sections of the military and intelligence agencies. The Democrats are no less terrified than Trump of the emergence of a mass movement of the working class.

Trump's authoritarian moves cannot be separated from the broader crisis facing the entire ruling class. With the support of both parties, the corporate and financial oligarchy has utilized the coronavirus pandemic to hand trillions of dollars to itself. It is now implementing a homicidal back-to-work policy that will ensure a massive expansion of cases and deaths.

Already more than 100,000 people in the US have died from the pandemic, while more than 30 million workers are unemployed. The pandemic has triggered growing opposition within the working class to social inequality, of which the mass protests against the murder of George Floyd are an initial expression.

If demonstrations over the killing of George Floyd are illegal, how will the government respond to strikes and demonstrations of tens of millions of workers that threaten the survival of capitalism? It was the growth of the class struggle that Trump had in mind when he told the governors that protests movements must be suppressed before they get "worse and worse."

There can be no greater mistake than believing that Trump's threats are not for real, that the crisis will quietly fade away, and that everything will return to normal. In fact, this crisis is just getting started.

American democracy has exhausted itself. It cannot be reconstituted on the basis of the existing capitalist social structure.

Trump's threats must be countered by a massive movement of the working class. It is clear that the fight against police brutality, inequality and authoritarianism is inseparable from a fight by the working class against the government. As the WSWs wrote in its June 1 statement, "Trump incites violent police rampage against protesters":

The working class—upon which the functioning of society depends—has the power to stop the assault on democratic rights, create a massive political movement to drive Trump from power, break the back of the corporate-financial oligarchy and begin the restructuring of economic life on a socialist basis.

Moreover, the power of the working class in the United States is vastly augmented by the opposition of the international working class to the Trump administration, which is seen as the unvarnished expression of the brutality of American capitalism. During the past week, there have been mass protests around the world over the murder of George Floyd. Trump's attempt to establish a dictatorship in the United States will vastly expand the scope of international working class protests.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality have immense confidence in the power of the American working class. We will continue to provide working people with the information, analysis and perspective they require in developing a strategy to defeat Trump's bid for dictatorship and advancing the fight for socialism.



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