

Why won't the Democrats fight Trump?

Andre Damon
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One day after US President Donald Trump declared that he would not accept a peaceful transfer of power in the event he loses the upcoming presidential election, the president doubled down on his attempts to transform the election into a coup d'état.

On Thursday, Trump reaffirmed his earlier threat to ignore the results of the election, declaring, "We want to make sure that the election is honest, and I'm not sure that it can be."

Trump sees the Supreme Court as a central arena of political struggle, which is the principal motivation behind his effort to ram through a replacement for Ruth Bader Ginsburg before November 3. He is expected to announce his pick over the weekend.

Trump's efforts to prepare an electoral coup are a clear statement of intent on what he would do if he managed to hold onto power, which he would take as a mandate to transform the United States into a presidential dictatorship.

But the response from Trump's nominal political opponents is a combination of fecklessness and prostration. Far from calling for Trump's immediate removal from office or the convocation of a congressional investigation into Trump's coup plots, the Democrats have offered nothing but pathetic moral appeals to Trump and the Republicans, while dropping all opposition to his efforts to pack the court ahead of the election.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi practically begged Trump, asking, "Why don't you just try for a moment to honor your oath of office to the Constitution of the United States." Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, for his part, directed his appeal to the Republican Party. "At this perilous moment," he said, "every Republican in this chamber should stand up."

Pelosi and Schumer know full well that neither Trump nor his Republican co-conspirators are going to have a change of heart as a result of their moral exhortations. Such statements constitute an abandonment of any effort to oppose Trump's preparations to launch an Election Day putsch.

The only speech-length response from any Democrat yesterday came from Senator Bernie Sanders, whose primary concern was to ensure that none of his supporters concluded that Trump's coup attempts required a political struggle outside the framework of the Democratic Party.

"Last night Donald Trump went even further down the path of authoritarianism by being the first president in the history of this country to refuse to commit to a peaceful transition of power if he loses the election," Sanders said.

But in response to what is clearly a breakdown of the entire electoral system, Sanders' only recourse was to exhort his supporters to subordinate all social demands to the election of Biden.

"First, it is absolutely imperative that we have, by far, the largest voter turnout in American history and that people vote as early as possible," Sanders said. "As someone who is strongly supporting Joe Biden, let's be clear: A landslide victory for Biden will make it virtually impossible for Trump to deny the results and is our best means for defending democracy."

To even put the issue in this way is to concede to Trump. The legitimate winner of the presidential election does not need to win by a "landslide." He just needs to win by one vote in the Electoral College. Under the narrow electoral framework set out by Sanders, Trump is free to interpret anything short of a "landslide" for Biden as an excuse to halt the counting of ballots and claim himself the victor.

Sanders' speech was a continuation of his central strategy of divorcing the election from all social questions. As Sanders made clear, the fight for "an agenda that works for all, and not just a few" must wait until the "day after we elect Joe Biden as president."

In this vein, Sanders opened his speech by noting Trump's disastrous response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the "grotesque level of income and wealth inequality." However, he said: "Today, I'm not going to talk about any" of those issues, as if the struggle against dictatorship could somehow be divorced from the struggle against the policies supported by the would-be dictator.

This line is developed in varying forms by the publications and organizations that operate in and around the Democratic Party. *Jacobin* magazine, affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America, published an article headlined “To Fight Trump’s Rising Authoritarianism, Dems Must Drop Their Learned Helplessness,” as if the Democrats are not opposing Trump simply because they are following a mistaken policy.

No, the Democrats’ failure to oppose Trump is dictated by the class interests they represent. The Democratic Party is a party of Wall Street, in alliance with sections of the affluent upper-middle class and sections of the military-intelligence apparatus.

The Democrats are determined above all to prevent the intervention of the broad mass of the population in opposition to Trump, which would challenge the interests of the financial oligarchy and the geopolitical imperatives of American imperialism.

When it comes to mobilizing the police and National Guard to beat and arrest protesters, Democratic governors and mayors are vicious. But when it comes to opposing Trump, the Democrats are suddenly powerless.

The financial oligarchy does not fear Trump. But they do fear that in opposing him, they may set into motion social and political forces that they cannot control. From the beginning, the central aim of the Democratic Party has been to suppress and demobilize mass popular opposition to Trump and channel it into support for militarism and the intelligence agencies.

In June 2017, the Socialist Equality Party Political Committee published the statement “Palace coup or class struggle: The political crisis in Washington and the strategy of the working class,” which warned:

The working class must oppose this government and seek its removal. But this task must not be entrusted to Trump’s factional opponents in the ruling class. The working class cannot remain a bystander in the fight between Trump and the Democrats. Rather, it must develop its struggle against Trump under its own banner and with its own program.

The ensuing period has only confirmed this analysis. Last year, following the collapse of the Democrats’ Russia narrative, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote:

Trump is kept in office largely through the Democratic Party. From the start, the Democrats’ efforts to foment a palace coup have been aimed at demobilizing and disarming the mass opposition that exists to the Trump administration.

If Trump appears strong, it is only because of the fecklessness and cowardice of his opponents. But Trump remains broadly despised in the working class, which rightly sees him as responsible for a homicidal policy that has led to the deaths of over 200,000 people.

While still politically undeveloped, the level of class conflict in the United States has risen immensely during the last two years. The industrial strikes in 2019 marked a break in the long period during which class conflict was entirely suppressed.

This year saw the largest mass protests in American history, in thousands of cities and towns, in response to a wave of police killings throughout the country. These demonstrations were accompanied by strikes and social struggles by workers determined to resist the ruling class’s homicidal back-to-work campaign.

The turn by the ruling elite toward authoritarianism is its response to working class resistance. Trump’s actions are a decisive turning point. Regardless of the outcome of the election, the tendency toward dictatorship will continue.

No one should underestimate the danger posed by Trump’s efforts to prepare a coup. He is rapidly seeking to consolidate all the levers of state power in his own hands in order to impose a dictatorship in the United States, which would have devastating consequences for the ability of the working class to organize resistance.

That is why it is all the more urgent for workers and young people to take action now! Preparations must be made for a political general strike by the entire US working class, in solidarity with all workers of the world, and based on the demand for a socialist transformation of society.



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