

Jacobin magazine pleads with Biden and the Democrats to fight Trump

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Under conditions of unprecedented political crisis in the United States, *Jacobin* magazine, which is politically affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), is ever more openly positioning itself as both a defender and adviser to the Biden campaign.

In one of the latest articles in this vein, David Sirota and Andrew Perez (“To Fight Trump’s Rising Authoritarianism, Dems Must Drop Their Learned Helplessness”) respond to Trump’s declaration last week that he would not accept a peaceful transfer of power in the event he loses the upcoming presidential election. The authors also condemn his attempt to rush through a Supreme Court nominee that could be a major factor in deciding the next president in the event of a contested election.

In characterizing the significance of these developments, Sirota and Perez write: “This is a crime in process—specifically, a coup that will be engineered remotely by Zoom, as Republican lawmakers now plan to leave Washington without passing a pandemic relief bill and return only for votes to install a new Supreme Court justice to throw the election.”

Trump is indeed attempting to prepare an electoral coup. He is utilizing the election campaign for this purpose, including the incitement of far-right and fascistic elements and threats to invoke the Insurrection Act to deploy the military throughout the United States.

The pressing question facing workers and youth is how this descent into dictatorship and fascism can be stopped. The perspective offered by *Jacobin* magazine is to channel all opposition behind the Democratic Party.

Sirota and Perez spend a great deal of time reviewing and criticizing the response of the Democrats to Trump’s plotting. They criticize Chuck Schumer’s signal late last week that Senate Democrats would not be waging any serious opposition to Trump’s nomination, along with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s retreat on her empty

threats to shut down the government.

Perez and Sirota conclude that the feckless prostration of the Democratic Party is the product of Democrats’ “learned helplessness.” They write that the pathology of the party is “anti-opposition” and one that “embraces any capitulation—no matter how amoral—in the name of electability, living to fight another day, and good manners.”

One could hardly have a more inane analysis of American politics than that offered by *Jacobin* magazine. According to Perez and Sirota, the Democrats are cast as the Cowardly Lion in the Wizard of Oz, who laments his lack of courage. If only the Democrats had the nerve! Then Dorothy would find her way home to Kansas, and American democracy would be saved from dictatorship.

Absent from the analysis of *Jacobin* is any reference to the class interests that the Democratic Party represents. The Democratic Party is the oldest capitalist party in the US. It represents a powerful faction of Wall Street, the military and the intelligence agencies, in alliance with privileged sections of the upper-middle class.

What scares the Democratic Party most of all is not Trump, but rather the growth of social opposition from below, outside of the control of the Democratic Party.

This has determined the Democrats’ actions throughout the Trump presidency. While collaborating with Trump on key issues of domestic policy, the Democrats sought to channel mass popular opposition to the right-wing policies of the administration behind their own campaign for a more aggressive foreign policy against Russia.

They have ceded to the military and intelligence agencies—the “adults in the room”—the principal position within the state in opposing Trump, with the not-so-subtle subtext that these are the forces that would be relied on to remove Trump by force if the ruling class decides this is necessary. Among those they have praised as defenders of democracy and “moral authorities” are retired generals

James Mattis, John Kelly, and H.R. McMaster—all long-standing architects of US imperialism.

In relation to the pandemic, the Democratic Party, almost unanimously, supported the CARES Act, which sanctioned the hand-out of trillions of dollars to Wall Street and corporate America.

Since then, the Democrats have done everything in their power to facilitate the implementation of Trump's policy of "herd immunity," in which the virus is allowed to spread unabated throughout the population. This is the policy driving the reopening of schools for in-person learning, which has been pursued most ruthlessly in Democratic-controlled districts, including New York City, the largest school district in the country.

The policy of the ruling class is producing a social explosion, and the Democrats' fear is that opposition to Trump will challenge the interest of Wall Street and American imperialism. Its fecklessness is rooted in class interests.

Jacobin magazine functions as a faction of the Democratic Party meant to divert growing opposition back into the dead-end political strategy of "pressuring the Democrats to the left."

Sirota and Perez sum up this position in the final paragraphs of their article: "If opposition party lawmakers don't stop imagining a return to normalcy and brunch—and if millions of Democratic voters don't start immediately demanding that their party's leaders begin fighting to stop Trump's court pick right now—then whatever is left of American democracy is probably finished."

Jacobin cannot imagine—or, rather, it is opposed to—any solution to the crisis outside of the Democratic Party. Unless workers start immediately demanding that the Democrats begin fighting, according to Sirota and Perez, American democracy is finished. If this is the only solution, one might as well just cut to the chase and say: American democracy is finished.

The more intense the social crisis in the United States, the more *Jacobin* moves to the right. Indeed, just last week the magazine published an article promoting the policy of "herd immunity." One of the academic interviewees in the article, Martin Kulldorff, argued that schools and universities should reopen because "young, healthy people contribute to the herd immunity that will ultimately benefit all."

In a passage approvingly retweeted by *Jacobin* publisher Bhaskar Sunkara, Kulldorff declares, "The lockdown is the worst assault on the working class in half

a century" essentially adopting the line of Trump, first promoted in the *New York Times* that the "cure can't be worse than the disease." Kulldorff has praised and defended Trump's leading promoter of "herd immunity," Scott Atlas.

In terms of the class interests that *Jacobin* represents, they are privileged sections of the upper-middle class, hostile to the working class. The magazine is now preparing the arguments that, in the event that Biden assumes office following the election, will be used to pursue essentially the same policies in relationship to the pandemic as the Trump administration.

Sirota is a former spokesman for Democrats on the House Appropriations Committee, former press secretary for Bernie Sanders, and former fellow at the Center for American Progress (CAP, established by John Podesta, a member of the Clinton and Obama administrations). He is also the founding co-chairperson of the Progressive States Network. The latter was set up in 2005 by George Soros's Open Society Institute, Podesta's CAP, the AFL-CIO, the Service Employees International Union, AFSCME and the United Steelworkers to lobby state legislatures on behalf of the union bureaucracy's agenda.

After the pathetic end of the Sanders campaign, Sirota was brought on to the *Jacobin* staff to help corral Sanders supporters behind Biden. After five years of campaigning for Sanders, no meaningful analysis was to be made or lessons drawn from the experience. Instead, Sirota got to work writing dozens of articles promoting the same basic perspective contained within his latest piece: don't leave the Democratic Party!

The current political situation within the United States and around the world is dire. The lives and livelihoods of millions of workers are at stake. The Trump administration's efforts to transform the election into a coup are a political expression of the incompatibility of massive levels of social inequality and the homicidal "herd immunity" policy with what remains of democratic forms of rule.

The fight against authoritarianism and dictatorship must not be subordinated to the Democratic Party. It must be developed as an independent movement of the working class against the capitalist system.



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