

European politicians and media downplay coup in the United States

Peter Schwarz
8 January 2021

Leading European politicians and newspaper editorialists condemned the fascist coup in the United States. They are responding with a combination of concern and nervousness following the storming of the Capitol building by supporters of US President Donald Trump.

The central focus of their concerns is not the threat to American democracy, but rather the fear that its advanced decomposition, laid so bare on January 6, could strengthen the opposition to similar developments in Europe, where authoritarian and fascist tendencies are also extremely well developed.

In Germany, right-wing extremist networks with strong support from the highest echelons of the state are spreading throughout the army, police, and intelligence agencies, and the far-right Alternative for Germany sets the political tone in the federal and state parliaments. In France, President Macron, who is distinguished from Trump only by his more elegant manners, cracked down brutally against the Yellow Vest protesters and has passed increasingly stringent censorship and security laws. In Poland and Hungary, authoritarian regimes are bringing the judiciary and media under state control.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier addressed these parallels in their remarks on the events in the United States. It would be a sign of self-satisfaction to point the finger at the US alone, Maas wrote in a guest commentary for *Der Spiegel*. “Here with us too, in Halle, Hanau, on the steps of the Reichstag building, we have had to experience how agitation and insurrectionary words can be transformed into hate-filled acts.” Steinmeier also compared the storming of the Capitol with the events in Berlin in August, when far-right coronavirus deniers stormed the steps of the Reichstag building.

Almost all of the European comments sought to downplay the extent of the conspiracy in the United

States. While they criticised President Trump, who was voted out of office, and the right-wing mob he incited, they remain silent on the role of the state apparatus and the Republican Party.

But without acknowledging their role, it is impossible to understand the extent of the right-wing conspiracy and the danger it poses. In the perspective “The Fascist Coup of January 6,” the WSWP explained the central role played by the Republican majority in the Senate and sections of the state apparatus in preparing the coup, and warned that it would happen again, even though the first attempt had not accomplished its goal.

The Republican senators and congressmen delayed recognising the election results, and thus supported Trump’s lie that the election was stolen. Even after the storming of the Capitol building, 138 Republicans voted against the confirmation of the election result in Pennsylvania to try and block Biden’s victory. Without support from the security apparatus, the right-wing mob would not have managed to force its way into one of the most strongly guarded buildings in the world.

This context is totally ignored by the European comments from politicians and the media. They portray the events as though American democracy is in the best of health, and that merely Trump and his immediate entourage were responsible for the coup plot. Like President-elect Biden, they appeal for unity with the Republicans—i.e., the coup plotters.

This was expressed clearly in a comment by the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* entitled “The loss of control at the Capitol is a warning signal, but not the decline of American democracy.” “The scenes from the Capitol are a scandal,” stated the mouthpiece of the Swiss banks. “But they do not primarily reflect the condition of the US, but the condition of its president.”

A similar line was taken by Italy’s *la Repubblica*, which wrote, “American democracy has proven that it still has

defensive forces to resist the authoritarian impulses of a president.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron argued along similar lines. Macron, who spoke on the events in Washington late Wednesday evening, said, “What happened today in Washington, D.C. is not America, certainly not. We believe in the strength of our democracies, we believe in the strength of American democracy.”

Merkel told a press conference Thursday that the pictures from the United States made her “angry as well as sad.” She was very disappointed “that President Trump has not recognised his defeat since November, and again yesterday.” The deliberately encouraged doubts about the election result “prepared the atmosphere that made the events during the night possible.”

“But the words of President-elect Joe Biden,” Merkel continued, “make me absolutely sure that this democracy will prove much stronger than the attackers and vandals...in less than two weeks, the United States will, as it must, open a new chapter of its democracy.”

In a pathetic speech, Biden had pleaded with the leading coup plotter Trump to give a televised address to the people, and avoided uttering a single word that could have been interpreted as a call to his supporters to mobilise. He thus made clear that he is far more fearful of a movement from below than he is of any coup plots by Trump and his supporters. In the final analysis, the Republicans and Democrats represent the same interests of a tiny layer of billionaires and millionaires.

Germany’s Social Democrat Foreign Minister also set great store in Biden and reconciliation with the putschists. “Every Republican with a modest degree of responsibility should now at last contradict Trump,” wrote Maas in *Der Spiegel*. Biden’s “call for mutual respect and reconciliation were the well-chosen words of a president. And the confirmation of the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris by the US Congress was the best, democratic answer to those who created chaos and unrest in Washington yesterday.”

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose Brexit strategy was based on a close alliance with the United States under Trump, struck a similar tone, but was more concise. “Disgraceful scenes in U.S. Congress. The United States stands for democracy around the world and it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power,” he wrote on Twitter.

The *Times* of London also invoked the stability of American democracy. Judges had rejected his legal

challenges to overturn the election results, and officials in his own party had resisted him. “This is not a democracy about to fall,” concluded the *Times*.

Only a handful of newspapers published more thoughtful commentaries. The Warsaw-based *Rzeczpospolita* pointed to the real divisions in American society. “We only know such pictures usually from African countries where heads of state and government refuse to accept their democratically elected successors,” the newspaper remarked. “This was a spectacular outburst of frustration that has been growing in the United States for decades. A gigantic polarisation of society is taking place, with ever greater numbers of people no longer able to make ends meet, while a few can barely still count their billions. The pandemic has intensified this drama.”

The *Financial Times* (*FT*) warned that the danger has not passed. “Nobody should feign surprise,” it wrote. Trump had long made his plans known. “The most pressing question now is what Mr Trump might try to do in his remaining two weeks in office. Senior military in the Pentagon have discussed at length how they would respond if Mr Trump tried to declare martial law, using the 1807 Insurrection Act. Some around Mr Trump, including Michael Flynn, his former national security adviser, have been urging him to invoke it,” the paper added. “The concern about what Mr Trump can still attempt to do is not academic. In spite of what happened on Wednesday, Mr Trump still commands the personal loyalty of many people in uniform. One reason why the mob so easily breached Congress is because many of the Capitol Hill police officers were clearly in sympathy.”

Trump also continues to enjoy support from leading Republicans, the *FT* continued, including “Ted Cruz, the Texan senator, Josh Hawley, the Missouri senator, and more than 100 of their colleagues in both houses.”

The working class will draw different lessons from the coup in the United States than the bourgeois commentators, and will begin to take up a struggle against a social system that only has fascism, war, poverty, and death by the coronavirus to offer.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact