

Jacobin's Bhaskar Sunkara on Trump's January 6 coup: "Nothing to see here!"

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On Wednesday, President Donald Trump instigated a fascist coup aimed at halting the congressional session at which Trump's defeat in the 2020 presidential election was being certified. In response, leading members of *Jacobin* magazine, which is associated with the Democratic Socialists of America, responded with a campaign to downplay the significance of what was happening.

The lead was given by *Jacobin* founder and editor Bhaskar Sunkara who tweeted near 6 p.m. on Wednesday: "What's the advantage of saying 'this is a coup'? I just don't understand the advantage in finding the most extreme labels for bad things."

What was happening prior to Sunkara's warning against placing "extreme labels" on the day's events? Between 1 and 2 p.m., thousands of Trump's supporters swarmed the Capitol building, following a speech by Trump insisting that "you'll never take back our country with weakness." With the complicity of the police, they entered the building around 2 p.m., taking over office buildings and the Senate chamber. Photos showed insurrectionists dressed in camo armed with guns and zip ties, which would have been used to secure hostages.

Jacobin responded with a coordinated campaign to insist that nothing particularly remarkable was happening. Leading staff writer Branko Marcetic tweeted at 4:58 p.m.: "The events in DC are certainly alarming, but it's also worth bearing in mind this is not the first time a capitol building has been stormed (or whatever term you want to use) by armed protesters, and it didn't mean the end of American democracy then either."

Marcetic's tweet assuring everyone that American democracy was safe and sound came just 40 minutes after President Trump released a video praising the

fascist protesters as "very special people." Only about 15 minutes after Marcetic's tweet, videos released on social media showed far-right rioters charging the media.

Less than a half-hour later, at 5:52 p.m., Sunkara tweeted his indifference to the events. He followed up his initial tweet cited above with another outlining his assessment of the events: "I've seen the stability of US republican institutions in the face of a right-wing mob and a party whose leader is committed to their delegitimation so far."

Sunkara's tweet was followed by another from Julia Dampouse, *Jacobin* magazine's reading groups coordinator and European editor. She wrote at 6:42 p.m., "Calling this a coup is like calling the CHAZ in Seattle a coup because Kshama Sawant let people into city hall. Get a grip."

That is, in response to the fascist insurrection in Washington DC, an event that will go down in history as a significant political turning point, *Jacobin*'s European editor tells concerned workers and youth to "get a grip," its founder and chief editor insists on the "stability of US republican institutions," and one of its leading staffers declares that nothing extraordinary is happening.

As the *Jacobin* writers were opposing the notion that a coup was underway, the Democratic Party itself was silent. For hours after the insurrection began, there were no statements from major Democratic Party officials denouncing the conspiracy or calling for popular resistance to the coup. When Biden finally appeared before the public, it was only to issue an appeal to Trump, the leader of the conspiracy, to "step up" and call it off.

Throughout Trump's coup plotting—prior to and after the election—the Democrats have worked to cover up

the far-reaching assault on democratic rights. As a party of Wall Street and the military, its principal fear has been that an exposure of the conspiracy would spark mass opposition from below that could not be controlled.

Jacobin and the Democratic Socialists of America, functioning as a faction of the Democratic Party, played their assigned role.

On Thursday morning, the day after Sunkara, Damphouse and Marcetic's tweets, *Jacobin* published an article by David Sirota, a longtime Democratic Party operative and former speechwriter for Bernie Sanders, titled, "The Insurrection was Predictable." The article is an exercise in political cover-up.

Sirota begins by claiming that *Jacobin* had previously warned about "the growing threat of a coup attempt, wondering why it wasn't being taken more seriously by Democrats and the media. We were scoffed at and eye-rolled, as if such things could never happen in America. Nobody is scoffing or eye-rolling anymore, after Wednesday's events at the US Capitol."

Sirota fails to mention that the primary "eye-rolling" is coming from none other than the editor and founder of the very magazine for which he is writing!

As for the claim that *Jacobin* has been at the forefront of warning about the growing threat of a coup attempt, nothing could be further from the truth. Of the three links provided by Sirota as proof of the so-called "warnings" from the magazine, only one is actually a *Jacobin* article.

On the contrary, over the course of the past year, *Jacobin* has published a series of articles downplaying the threat to democratic rights. On April 17, Daniel Finn wrote that calling Trump a "protofascist" was "melodramatic hyperbole."

Later in the year, when fascist plots to kidnap and kill governors Gretchen Whitmer and Ralph Northam emerged, *Jacobin* waited two weeks to respond. When it finally did address the situation, the article, by Branko Marcetic, argued that the Michigan plot was "exaggerated," the media was engaged in "sensationalism," and far-right violence "remains a statistically minor threat to life."

As recently as December 2, *Jacobin* declared, in another article by Daniel Finn, that Trump's "would-be coup" had ended "with a feeble surrender," and that Trump's "bark proved to be much worse than his bite."

Jacobin's denial of the scale of the crisis, its insistence on the "stability of US republican institutions" is bound up with its organic hostility to revolution. *Jacobin's* politics—and this is the politics of the Democratic Socialists of America as a whole—is based on the claim that social reform will be achieved within the framework of the Democratic Party and the capitalist system.

Sirota's column, which acknowledges the reality of a coup, on its face conflicts with the initial response of Sunkara. The conclusion, however, is the same. Sirota proclaims that the way to undermine the strength of Trump is to pressure the Democrats to implement social reforms, which they will not do.

Those who make up the editorial board of *Jacobin*, speaking for privileged sections of the upper-middle class, are characterized by their complacency, opportunism and unseriousness. Everything they write is aimed at containing the growing social opposition from below.



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