

Democrats seek to whitewash Republican Party role in January 6 coup

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In the first full day of arguments in the Senate trial of Donald Trump, House impeachment managers presented irrefutable and graphic evidence of the former president's central role in preparing and organizing the January 6 political coup. Trump stands exposed as a political criminal who caused the death of five people that day, and narrowly failed to trigger a much larger bloodbath.

The presentation documented in detail the case laid out in general terms the previous day: Trump sowed doubts about the legitimacy of the election beforehand, then denied the results after vote-counting showed him losing decisively to Joe Biden, and finally targeted January 6, the date of the formal congressional counting of the Electoral College votes, as his last chance to hold on to power.

There was never-before-seen video showing Vice President Mike Pence and his entire family escorted from a Capitol hiding place by Secret Service agents to make their escape, of Senator Mitt Romney redirected away from the oncoming mob by a Capitol policeman, and of Senator Chuck Schumer hastily reversing course, along with his security detail, to avoid attack. The House managers played an audiotape of Speaker Nancy Pelosi's frightened staffers whispering on a cellphone as they hid under a table in a locked conference room, while the mob raged outside.

The mass of harrowing details, now viewed by millions of people, as both broadcast and cable news networks provide nonstop coverage, will no doubt have an impact on public opinion. But the political framework in which this evidence is presented is of decisive significance. As developed by the House Democrats, and reinforced by the corporate media, it entirely covers up the essential character of the events of January 6.

In the telling of the Democrats, January 6 was a purely personal effort by Donald Trump to prevent the counting of electoral votes that would seal his defeat in the presidential election. He organized the rally of his supporters outside the White House, incited them to march on Congress and "fight" for his victory, and then sat back and watched approvingly as they stormed into the Capitol and put a stop to the counting of electoral votes. The entire responsibility for the events of that day rests on Trump and Trump alone.

The Democrats do not approach January 6 as a political event. The Republican Party as an institution does not figure in it, and, in fact, it is treated as a co-equal victim along with the Democrats.

The Democrats said nothing about the Republican congressmen

and senators, more than 150 in all, who voted—only hours after the events in the Capitol!—to follow Trump's lead and reject the electoral votes of states won by Biden. The Democrats would have been perfectly within their rights to demand the exclusion of Senators Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley from the Senate jury on the grounds that they are accomplices and co-conspirators with Trump. And what about Senator Tommy Tuberville, whom Trump telephoned on the afternoon of January 6 to discuss further delaying the certification, even while the mob was inside the Capitol seeking to block certification altogether?

The vast majority of Republicans, both in the House and the Senate, defended Trump's refusal to concede the election even after vote counting had been completed and all legal challenges to the results had been disposed of. They lent legitimacy to his bogus claims of a stolen election, and thus helped fuel the campaign that produced the events of January 6.

The case presented by the Democratic managers was reduced to a pathetic moral appeal, directed to Senate Republicans, urging them to convict Trump and make him ineligible to run again for president in 2024. Even if this appeal were to succeed, barring Trump from a future campaign is a minor issue compared to the emergence of a powerful fascist tendency in American politics, which now dominates the Republican Party.

The Democrats know full well that if the coup had succeeded in its aims, Trump would have seized on the crisis as the basis for staying in office indefinitely, establishing a presidential dictatorship. The Republican Party would have endorsed such an outcome, regardless of the will of the voters who decisively rejected Trump's reelection bid.

The Democrats avoid all such issues. Even the language they use is revealing. The coup is never referred to as a coup. The goal of establishing Trump as an authoritarian ruler is never acknowledged. Even the role of fascist groups as the spearhead of the attackers—unavoidable given the detailed recounting of the actions of the Proud Boys, the Oathkeepers and other fascist groups—is downplayed. As lead impeachment manager Jamie Raskin declared in his opening remarks Wednesday: "It makes no difference what the ideological content of the mob was." Actually, the "ideological content" is of critical importance: Trump was seeking to retain power through the mobilization of a fascist-led mob, because he sought to establish himself as a fascist ruler.

The Democrats even echoed the language of the pro-Trump mob in their own presentations, as one impeachment manager after

another lamented the failure of “our commander-in-chief” to answer the pleas of congressmen and senators trapped in the Capitol by the mob. Trump is not and never has been the “commander-in-chief,” full stop.

That term as defined in the US Constitution establishes the role of the military as subordinate to civilian authority: the highest civilian official, the elected president, serves as “commander-in-chief” over the US military. The president is not “commander-in-chief” of Congress, or other elected officials, state and local, let alone the American people as a whole. Such usage would make the president a king or absolute ruler, and would actually serve to legitimize the claims of the January 6 mob that they were attacking Congress on the orders of the president, “their” commander-in-chief.

The Democratic effort to cover up for Trump’s co-conspirators extends not only to the Republican Party, but also to officials in the executive branch, and especially the military. The presentations by the House managers gave a nearly day-by-day timeline of Trump’s efforts to stay in office over the past six months, but they avoided one action entirely: Trump’s firing of Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, who had opposed mobilizing troops against the wave of protests that followed the police murder of George Floyd last May, and his replacement by Christopher Miller, a retired Special Forces colonel, and other Trump loyalists, who were suddenly slotted into the Pentagon in the wake of the election. This was an effort to ensure control of the armed forces in the event of a political crisis like that threatened by the events of January 6.

This two-faced approach—damning Trump while whitewashing the Republicans—undercut even the most effective presentations by the House Democrats. In one example, Representative Stacey Plaskett, delegate from the Virgin Islands, detailed Trump’s role in preparing the January 6 march, even to determining the date of the protest and its line of march to the US Capitol. She noted the plans circulating online to turn the march into an outright assault on the Capitol, which were being monitored by the White House social media operation and Trump personally. She quoted from social media messages calling for the establishment of the “MAGA militia” and declaring that an “actual tactical victory like storming and occupying the Capitol” was necessary in order to “have the effect that we want.”

But this account begs the question: if Trump and the White House were monitoring these social media pronouncements, were not the FBI and other law enforcement and intelligence agencies doing the same? Given that the preparations for an assault on the Capitol were so public, even reported in the corporate media, how is it possible that nothing was done to stop it? Why were the Capitol police so unprepared? Why were no additional forces alerted and deployed to help defend the Capitol against the threatened attack?

If the Democratic Party had any real commitment to the defense of democracy, the Biden administration would be justified in investigating and prosecuting Trump, his Republican abettors and enablers in Congress, and numerous officials in the military-intelligence apparatus, as well as their financial backers, for criminal conspiracy to overthrow the Constitution.

But they sought to do exactly the opposite. At several points in the eight-hour proceedings on Wednesday, the Democratic case against Trump sounded like an infomercial for Vice President Mike Pence. Democratic impeachment manager Joaquin Castro declared, “The vice president... is a man who upholds his oath, his faith, his duty, and most of all upholds his duty to the Constitution. And Mike Pence is not a traitor to his country.”

This absurd praise—directed at a right-wing bigot and Christian fundamentalist who has stood behind Trump in countless crimes—is aimed at building up Pence as the alternative within the Republican Party to Trump. What the Democrats want above all is a “responsible” Republican party with which they can collaborate, giving them the means to carry out the right-wing political program demanded by Wall Street as it confronts growing social opposition from below.

Establishing the complicity of the Republican Party in an attempted fascist coup would destroy it. Biden has already made clear that his political priority is maintaining the Republican Party as a “strong” opposition, setting policy through “bipartisan” collaboration. He even claims not to be paying attention to the Senate trial, although it involves the most serious threat to democracy in the history of the United States.

The Democratic Party’s conduct of the impeachment trial expresses the class interests it represents. As a party of Wall Street and the military and intelligence agencies, the Democrats are opposed to any real exposure of the social and political forces behind the January 6 coup.

Exposing in detail the role of Donald Trump is only the first step in an investigation into the events of January 6. But if the Democratic Party has its way, it will also be the last step. The working class must oppose and reject such a political whitewash of a deadly dangerous threat to its democratic rights. Trump aimed to establish an authoritarian dictatorship, and he had many accomplices and co-conspirators. Every one of them must be exposed and brought to justice.



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