Democrats' impeachment cover-up leaves coup-plotter Trump emboldened

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The US Senate voted Saturday to acquit President Donald Trump for "incitement of insurrection" in connection with the attempted coup of January 6, 2021.

The verdict marks a milestone in the breakdown of American democracy. A president sought to overthrow the separation of powers and install himself as dictator, and Congress refused to take the most basic action to hold him accountable.

By voting to acquit, 43 Republican senators gave aid and comfort to a fascist coup attempt. Their votes showed what they would have done had Trump succeeded: they would have endorsed and supported the overthrow of the Constitution.

Trump's "legal" defense was a combination of incompetent sophistry and raving hysterics, making the fascist argument that his insurrection was the outcome of—or even the appropriate response to—left-wing demonstrations against police violence. Trump lawyer Michael Van der Veen declared that the Capitol riot was "pre-planned by fringe left" groups.

Emerging from the impeachment trial emboldened, Trump stands secure in his position as the head of the Republican Party. "Donald Trump is the most vibrant member of the Republican Party," Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, a close Trump ally, gloated on Fox News Sunday. "The Trump movement is alive and well."

This outcome was aided by the Democrats, who sabotaged Trump's prosecution. The Democrats purposely protected Trump's co-conspirators. This includes the 147 Republican House and Senate members who voted against the certification of Joe Biden's election victory, along with those who provided the political framework for the January 6 insurrection with charges of a "rigged" election. It also includes those forces within the state who secretly worked with Trump to orchestrate a stand-down of federal forces on January 6.

Throughout the trial, the Democrats begged and pleaded with the same Republicans who encouraged and took part in Trump's drive to overturn the election.

The Democratic impeachment managers never once addressed themselves to the American people or sought to explain the political strategy behind the insurrection. They did not once mention what was happening inside the Capitol while Trump was inciting the mob--the objection by one congressman and senator after another to the electoral vote totals certified by the states in an election Trump lost by over seven million votes.

The only reference to the Republicans' objections during the entire trial was a video played by the Democratic impeachment managers of the rioters ransacking the desks of members of the Senate, in which one of the insurrectionists declared that Republican Senator Ted Cruz was "with us" because he backed Trump's efforts to overturn the election.

The Democrats also deliberately excluded any discussion of why the rioters were allowed to overrun the Capitol without any opposition from the tens of thousands of National Guard and federal military forces stationed in and just outside Washington. The day after the riot, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan said that his request to deploy the Maryland National Guard to Washington to support the Capitol police was held up for 90 minutes by the acting secretary of defense, who had been installed by Trump after the November 3 election. It was only the secretary of the Army who gave the authorization to release the Guard.

Yet there was no investigation of which elements in the military chain of command facilitated the stand-down and whether this was done at the orders of Trump.

Even as they limited their case to Trump's actions alone, the impeachment managers kneecapped the prosecution on even the extremely limited, legalistic grounds for impeachment they had set out.

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On Friday night, Washington Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler, a Republican, released a statement making clear that Trump actively supported the insurrectionists in a phone conversation with Republican House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy. According to Herrera Beutler, when McCarthy pleaded with Trump to stop the attack, Trump openly sided with the insurrectionists, saying, "Well, Kevin, I guess these people are more upset about the election than you are."

With the Democrats in control of the Senate, not only Herrera Beutler, but dozens of other people with first-hand knowledge of Trump's attempt to overturn the election and the stand-down of federal forces could have been subpoenaed and forced to testify under oath.

But despite winning a vote to bring Herrera Beutler and possibly other witnesses to testify, the Democrats abruptly backtracked, hastily bringing the trial to an end less than 24 hours after Herrera Beutler's statement.

The record of Trump's first impeachment—centered around the Democrats' differences with Trump over foreign policy—spanned thousands of pages. The impeachment process unfolded over a period of three months, including many witnesses called before the House committees considering the charges.

But after the greatest assault on constitutional government in the country's history, the Democrats devoted less than a week to the Senate trial, on the grounds that the impeachment was a distraction from other legislative priorities. This claim was proven to be a complete fraud when the Senate adjourned for a week immediately following the impeachment vote, and senators left town for the recess.

It is worth comparing the way in which the second impeachment of Trump was conducted with the investigation of the Watergate scandal under the Nixon administration. The Senate hearings that began in February 1973, chaired by Democratic Senator Sam Ervin, led not only to Nixon's forced resignation in the face of virtually certain impeachment, but also to the exposure of FBI and CIA involvement and the criminal conviction of nearly two dozen people. And all that was triggered by a single burglary carried out by five people, in which no one was injured, let alone killed.

The Iran-Contra hearings in 1987 also had significant consequences. The investigation revealed that the Reagan administration flagrantly violated the Boland Amendment, passed by Congress to prohibit US government assistance to the Nicaraguan Contras. It also exposed the existence of the Rex 84 plan for the mass detention of "subversive" elements.

The Democrats' deliberate sabotage of their own case in the second Trump impeachment was widely noted by legal observers. "If the House was going to impeach, it should have framed the case to make it as difficult as possible for the Senate to acquit," wrote Michael W. McConnell, a constitutional professor at Harvard Law School.

"It is abundantly clear," he noted, that Trump "sought to intimidate members of Congress and other officials to block Mr. Biden's election, and that he failed in his duty to do what he could to end the violence once it started. Those would be ample grounds for conviction."

But any investigation of the Republicans' efforts to overturn the election and the stand-down of federal forces would have implicated precisely the forces the Democrats were most concerned with protecting.

Following the impeachment vote, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made clear the Democrats' motivation for protecting Trump's Republican co-conspirators. "We need a strong Republican Party," Pelosi said, echoing an earlier declaration by Biden.

The Democrats protected Trump's Republican co-conspirators because they need this wretched band of fascists as a constituency for the right-wing, pro-business policies supported by both parties, in the face of mounting working class opposition.

In choosing between the interests of the ruling elite and democratic forms of government, the Democrats will side with the needs of America's plutocracy every time. The Democrats have proven once again that they have no interest in defending constitutional forms of government in the United States. The defense of democratic rights must and will be carried out through the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of an anti-capitalist, socialist program.

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