

Jacobin magazine downplays Democrats' impeachment debacle

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On February 13, the US Senate voted to acquit former President Donald Trump for “incitement of insurrection” in connection with the attempted coup of January 6, marking a new milestone in the breakdown of American democracy.

Jacobin magazine, affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has had next to nothing to say about the impeachment debacle and even less to say about the coup attempt and the ongoing threat of right-wing violence.

One article appeared on its site on the topic of impeachment on January 9, the day that impeachment proceedings began in the House of Representatives: “What Trump’s Impeachment Could Mean.” The article did not even mention the January 6 coup attempt.

For more than a month, *Jacobin* did not publish a single article on the impeachment crisis, despite the fact that it was the most significant political development not only in the United States but around the world.

Finally, on February 17, four days after the Senate trial ended, Luke Savage penned a short article summing up the attitude of *Jacobin* to the whole affair. Titled “Why the Democrats Tied Themselves in Knots During Donald Trump’s Impeachment Trial,” the article served to downplay the duplicitous role played by the Democrats during the trial in covering up the crimes of Trump and his enablers.

Following the same basic line as the previous article, Savage did not mention the events of January 6 or the threat of fascism. The words “fascism,” “democracy,” “socialism” and “capitalism” did not appear at all. Former President Donald Trump was mentioned only in passing in the last paragraph.

The basic political content of the article is summed up in the opening sentence: “The Democrats’ confused

and inept handling of the final state of the impeachment trial revealed the contradiction at the heart of the party’s politics: whether it’s trying to represent bold change or simply a return to the pre-Trump status quo.”

Savage’s characterization of the Democrats’ conduct of the Senate trial as “confused” minimizes its pernicious and reactionary character. Any serious analysis of the impeachment would reveal that the Democratic Party made a conscious decision, originating with the Biden White House, to limit the exposure to Trump and cover up the responsibility of elements within the military and the police, and, above all, the Republican Party for the January 6 attack on the US Capitol.

This involved deliberately protecting Trump’s co-conspirators, including the 147 Republican House and Senate members who voted against the certification of Biden’s election victory. No effort was made by the Democrats to expose the role played by their “Republican colleagues,” from Senators Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley, who provided the direct political cover for the insurrection, to Vice President Mike Pence and former Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who facilitated Trump’s lie about a stolen election.

Not once during the trial did the Democrats seek to explain the political strategy behind the insurrection. They 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 Democrats’ conduct of the trial conformed to Biden’s feckless pleas for bipartisanship and unity summed up in the declarations of both Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the need for a “strong Republican Party.” Any serious damage to the

Republican Party would hamper the ruling class as a whole in carrying out its right-wing policies directed against the working class, beginning with the reopening of schools amidst the pandemic.

In pursuit of these policies, the Democrats are quite prepared to work with a party that is becoming an incubator for fascist forces.

For Savage and *Jacobin*, however, none of these events really matter because “the episode will probably be soon forgotten.” Brushing aside the political content of the impeachment, Savage asserts that the real question is whether the Democrats are going to change their ways and allow for some semblance of reform or return to the pre-Trump status quo. This complacent formulation assumes that the ruling class is committed to upholding the constitutional framework, that there is no danger of fascism or dictatorship, and that there is neither a possibility nor a need for socialist revolution.

Savage concludes by restating what he wrote at the beginning: that the Democrats are driven by “two impulses” that will continue to clash under the Biden administration. “For the past four years, the back-to-brunch quest for normalcy of the Democratic mainstream has sat awkwardly alongside rhetoric about a country in the throes of multiple, exceptional crises—two dissonant political narratives that show no sign of abating as the new political era begins.”

The inevitable conclusion is that opponents of the bipartisan policies of mass death in the pandemic, austerity and militarism should strive to push the Democrats to the left.

At every stage of the crisis, *Jacobin* has insisted that there is no real crisis of American democracy, while covering up for the role of the Democrats. The lead was given by *Jacobin*'s founder and editor Bhaskar Sunkara, who, as the coup was still unfolding, tweeted that there was “no advantage” to calling the events a coup and insisted on “the stability of US republican institutions.”

The response of the Democrats to Trump's coup is bound up with the class interests that this party represents. It is a party of Wall Street and the military, which is fearful above all of the growth of opposition in the working class. In the aftermath of the impeachment, its mantra is “look forward, not backward,” as it collaborates with the Republican Party in enforcing the demands of the ruling elite, above all in relation to the

pandemic.

Jacobin too wants to move on, continuing its role as helpful advisor and “critic” of the Democratic Party establishment, with its DSA co-thinkers increasingly occupying well-paid positions within the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy. Hence its dismissal of the significance of the January 6 fascistic insurrection aimed at overturning the election and keeping Trump in office with dictatorial powers.

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 and undermining the growth of social opposition from below.



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