

Republicans block investigation into January 6 attack

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The US House of Representatives passed a resolution Wednesday calling for the establishment of a bipartisan commission to investigate the January 6 attack on Congress. The bill passed the House by a vote of 252 to 175, but Republican Senate Leader Mitch McConnell and other top Republicans declared their determination to block the passage of the bill in the upper chamber.

At least 10 Republican senators would have to join the 50 Democrats to overcome a filibuster against the bill, and only a handful have indicated they would support the bill after ex-President Donald Trump—the instigator of the January 6 coup attempt—demanded that congressional Republicans block the proposal.

It was Trump who invited the fascist mob to Washington on January 6 for a rally outside the White House, then gave a speech urging them to march on the Capitol and fight for him. At the Capitol, they broke through police lines that had been deliberately weakened and stormed into the building seeking to halt the congressional certification of the Electoral College votes that gave Democrat Joe Biden a sizable victory.

The pro-Trump attackers chanted in support of hanging Mike Pence, Trump's vice president, because he was presiding over the joint session of Congress. They voiced their desire to kill House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other Democrats. The violence of the attack was such that 140 Capitol police were injured.

These events took place only 135 days ago, but already there is a concerted effort to bury them, to dismiss their significance, even to purge them from the collective memory of the American public. This was epitomized by the Republican House backbencher, Andrew Clyde, who declared that what transpired on January 6 was nothing more than a “normal tourist visit.” (There are photos from that day of Clyde joining other representatives in desperately barricading the House chamber against the attacking mob.)

The Democratic-led effort to establish a bipartisan commission to investigate the January 6 attack is not, however, a genuine effort to expose the forces involved in the attempted coup d'état. That is demonstrated by the constant invocation of the 9/11 Commission, by Speaker Pelosi and other leading Democrats, as the model for the probe they wish to conduct.

The 9/11 Commission was an official whitewash of the events of September 11, 2001, which deliberately concealed the connections between US intelligence agencies and the Al Qaeda hijackers, who were permitted to enter the United States, enroll in flight schools, and prepare their coordinated assault, even as the CIA and FBI tracked their movements and did nothing to interfere.

The mindless excuse of “failure to connect the dots” was advanced to disguise the reality that the military-intelligence apparatus allowed the attacks to go forward because this served a definite strategic goal: creating a political climate in the United States in which the projection of American military power into the Middle East and Central Asia could be carried out, through the invasions first of Afghanistan and then Iraq.

If anything, the proposed January 6 Commission will be an even greater exercise in political cover-up, since the party that incited the attack—with baseless claims that the 2020 presidential election had been stolen—would be given equal say in the conduct of the investigation. It is as though, in the aftermath of a multimillion-dollar bank robbery, when the gunmen were brought to trial, the getaway driver and the lookouts were seated in the jury!

As usual in the operation of the American two-party system, the Democrats pleaded endlessly with the Republicans, made one concession after another, only to have the Republicans arrogantly denounce the final result of the negotiations as insufficient. Thus, Pelosi conceded equal numbers on the commission, although the Democrats have majorities in both houses of Congress, and no subpoenas to be issued without Republican approval.

But after Friday's announced agreement between the Democratic chairman of the House Government Oversight Committee and the Republican ranking member, who had been delegated by Pelosi and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy to work out the deal, the Republicans reneged on it in a matter of days.

As late as Monday, May 17, the House and Senate Minority Whips, Representative Steve Scalise and Senator John Thune, indicated that the Republicans were not seeking to block the establishment of a bipartisan commission. On Tuesday, however, came the intervention of ex-President Trump, who

issued a statement denouncing the proposed commission and demanding, by name, that McCarthy and McConnell shut down all discussion of it.

McCarthy, evidently tipped off in advance from Mar-a-Lago, had already issued a statement Tuesday morning declaring his opposition. McConnell was still professing himself “undecided” about whether to back the commission and “willing to listen” to the proposal. But on Wednesday, hours after Trump’s statement was made public, McConnell announced himself flatly opposed to what he called “the House Democrats’ slanted and unbalanced proposal.”

The Democratic response during the debate on the House floor was to attack the Republicans from the right. Ohio Democrat Tim Ryan denounced the Republican position as “a slap in the face to every rank-and-file cop in the United States” because they opposed a bipartisan investigation of people “hitting the Capitol Police with lead pipes across the head.” He added, for good measure, that abandoning bipartisanship undermined the position of the United States “if we’re gonna take on China.”

Such comments are not only reactionary, they are a diversion from the central issue posed by the January 6 events. The fascist attack on Congress was an attempt to overturn the 2020 election, in which 81 million people voted for Biden, and to keep Donald Trump in the White House as a dictator in all but name.

While spearheaded by fascist groups like the Proud Boys, the attack was only possible because of a systematic stand-down by the massive military and police apparatus that surrounds the seat of the American government, including tens of thousands of National Guard and Army troops. One of the most critical aspects of the coup attempt was the deliberate delay in the deployment of these forces to the Capitol, despite appeals by congressional leaders and even Vice President Mike Pence that they be mobilized.

A critical role was played by Trump’s appointees at the Pentagon, acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller and Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy, who controlled the activities of the D.C. National Guard and for three hours and 19 minutes (199 minutes) rebuffed pleas from the Guard commander, General William Walker, that he be allowed to send his troops to rescue those besieged in the Capitol.

In a statement published March 5, 2021, the WSWS explained:

The events of January 6 were far from a surprise. For months prior to the insurrection, there was an ongoing political crisis during which the president of the United States made clear that he would not accept the peaceful transfer of power. The intelligence agencies and military were well aware of the plans and threats targeting the date of January 6, in particular.

Rather, a decision was made not to act as a definite political strategy was implemented. For more than three hours, the fascistic groups had virtual free rein over the Capitol building. The militarily trained elements within the rioters knew that they were being given time to seek out hostages among the Senators and Representatives.

In that event, Trump would have declared a state of emergency, shut down Congress, delayed indefinitely the certification of Biden’s victory, and opened negotiations that would have resulted, in one form or another, in a Democratic capitulation to the continuation of his presidency. The military only stepped in and secured the Capitol after it became clear that the attack had failed to achieve its objectives and Trump had publicly called it off.

The WSWS statement drew the following conclusion:

No investigation carried out under the auspices of the Democratic Party will serve to expose the forces involved in the conspiracy. As a party of Wall Street and the military itself, the Democrats are terrified of the political and social consequences of the revelations.

The one hundred and ninety-nine minutes of January 6 are a warning. As serious as the event was itself, no less significant is the response. Democratic rights cannot be entrusted to any faction of the ruling class or its political representatives. The working class cannot be left unprepared for the next stage. It must organize itself independently, on the basis of its own program, in opposition to the capitalist system.

The impending demise of the Democrats’ political fig leaf of a bipartisan commission into January 6 only further vindicates this assessment.



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