

Senate Republicans block watered-down Democratic voting rights bill

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22 June 2021

In a key procedural vote Tuesday, all 50 Senate Republicans voted to block debate on a Democratic bill aimed at countering the nationwide drive by Republican-controlled state governments to suppress the votes of working class and minority voters.

All 50 Senate Democrats voted to open debate on the “For the People Act,” or S.1., knowing in advance that they would not only fail to obtain the 10 Republican votes needed to end a filibuster, but would likely be met with unanimous Republican opposition.

The vote reflected in a concentrated manner the dynamic within the capitalist political establishment in the aftermath of then-President Donald Trump’s attempted coup on January 6. The Republican Party has continued to line up behind the would-be dictator and promote the baseless lie of massive voter fraud and a “stolen election” used to whip up the fascistic mob that overran the US Capitol. It has doubled down on Trump’s attacks on voting rights and his fascistic denunciations of socialism and “left-wing extremism.”

The Democrats, in control of both houses of Congress and the White House, have demonstrated their fecklessness and duplicity. Once again, they have exposed the falsity of all claims that this party of Wall Street and the military can be pressured into defending democratic rights.

In the run-up to the vote, Biden and the entire Democratic leadership shamelessly courted West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin, who stands on the far-right of the Democratic Senate caucus. Two weeks ago, Manchin announced that he would not support S.1. Invoking Biden’s own insistence on the need for “unity” with Trump’s Republican accomplices, he rejected any measure to defend the right to vote that could not win Republican support.

Last week, Manchin put forward a “compromise” voting overhaul proposal as a basis for lending support to the Democratic legislation. His plan included provisions in the leadership’s bill to expand early voting, institute automatic voter registration and, in general, make it easier for traditional Democratic voters to cast ballots. It also incorporated, in a somewhat different form, a ban on

partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts.

It included as well anti-democratic provisions in both S.1. and the Democratic House version passed earlier this year.

For example, both the leadership bill and Manchin’s version would require online platforms with at least 50 million users to create a database of all requests for political advertisements, including a copy of the ad and the purchaser.

The bill would also require political committees to notify the FBI of any connections with foreign political parties and require the FBI to submit an annual report to Congress on the connections between political committees and foreign contacts. This section could be used to justify federal surveillance of any political organization with foreign contacts, including socialist or anti-war groups that coordinate with co-thinkers internationally.

This is in line with the overwhelming concern of the Democratic Party, which is to shore up the capitalist two-party political monopoly and prevent left-wing and socialist parties independent of the two parties of Wall Street from gaining ballot access.

At the same time, Manchin incorporated voter suppression measures supported by the Republicans. He called for a national requirement for all voters to show voter ID. He included provisions allowing state and local election authorities to use federal records to purge voter rolls. He dropped a provision in the leadership bill ensuring voting rights for felons and proposed restrictions on absentee and mail-in voting.

He also proposed changes in the separate John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, whose main purpose is to restore the critical enforcement section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that was struck down in the 2013 Supreme Court ruling, *Shelby County v. Holder*. The invalidated section required former Jim Crow states, many of which are today implementing draconian voter suppression laws, to pre-clear any changes in voting procedures with the federal government. In his “compromise” proposal, Manchin called for restrictions that would weaken the Justice Department’s pre-clearance enforcement powers.

Other right-wing additions in Manchin's plan include amending the Federal Election Campaign Act to require candidates to disclose foreign contracts, and prohibiting "false information about elections to hinder or discourage voting," a provision so broadly drawn as to potentially apply to socialist critics of the capitalist two-party system and its anti-democratic ballot access laws.

Having issued his demands, Manchin refused to commit himself to voting with his party on Tuesday to open debate until he was satisfied his proposals would be accepted. The result was a flood of endorsements from the Biden White House on down for his anti-democratic olive branches to the Trumpite GOP.

Evidently, the Democrats were desperate to obtain a unanimous vote of their caucus in the deluded hope that this would increase pressure on a section of Republicans and/or convince Manchin and others on the party's right, including Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema and Montana Senator Jon Tester, to drop their opposition to weakening or eliminating the Senate's filibuster rule.

Biden and company no doubt hoped as well that a unanimous vote of Democrats would somehow mask the emptiness of their democratic pretensions.

Georgia's Stacey Abrams, hailed by the Democrats and much of the corporate media as the champion of voting rights, immediately declared her support for Manchin's proposal. She told CNN last week the notion that progressives oppose voter ID is "one of the fallacies of Republican talking points." She added, "No one has ever objected to having to prove who you are to vote."

Raphael Warnock, one of two Georgia Democrats elected to the Senate in runoff contests in early January, giving the Democrats a narrow majority, said last Thursday that he had "never been opposed to voter ID, and in fact, I don't know anybody who believes people shouldn't have to prove that they are who they say they are."

Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley, a chief author of S.1., told reporters, "I've been so impressed by the work that Senator Manchin has put into this the last couple of weeks. He is deeply engaged."

Biden met with the West Virginia reactionary in the White House on Monday, after which his press secretary, Jen Psaki, said the president was "certainly is appreciative" of Manchin's efforts and saw his proposal as "a step forward."

The Republican leadership responded contemptuously to the Democratic bluster. Missouri Senator Roy Blunt replied to Abram's endorsement of Manchin's "compromise" by saying it made the proposal "the Stacey Abrams substitute, not the Joe Manchin substitute."

Blunt, the ranking Republican on the Senate Rules Committee, has been lavishly praised by Democratic Chair

Amy Klobuchar for signing onto a bipartisan report on the January 6 coup attempt issued by her committee. The report omitted any reference to Trump's role and refrained from describing the mob attack on Congress as an "insurrection."

On Monday, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell took to the Senate floor and denounced Manchin's proposal, saying it retained the "rotten core" of the leadership bill. Saying his caucus would give the measure "no quarter," he called it a "radical proposal," designed to "rig the rules of American elections permanently in Democrats' favor."

He and other Republican senators have denounced the bill for violating the principle of state control of election procedures. This echoes the "states' rights" justifications used by Southern Democrats during the Jim Crow era to defend the denial, enforced by KKK terror, of voting rights to African Americans.

In reality, there are no provisions in either the original S.1. or the Manchin substitute that address provisions in voter suppression bills that have been passed in Georgia, Iowa and Florida, and introduced in 45 other Republican-controlled states, which legalize steps Trump demanded of state and local election officials to throw out valid votes and overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

These include empowering state legislatures to purge local election boards in heavily working-class urban areas and overturn certified vote tallies.



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