Former Justice Department chief testifies on Trump attempted coup

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Over the weekend, the former top officials in the Department of Justice (DOJ) testified behind closed doors before the Senate Judiciary Committee for over 11 hours on former President Donald Trump's unconstitutional and illegal efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

Trump threatened to fire the two officials and elevate a personal loyalist who would lend the authority of the main federal law enforcement agency to his bogus claims of election fraud. These threats and their significance were reported on and analyzed last week in the WSWS (See Trump Justice official sought to assist election coup).

According to the *New York Times*, former Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen met with investigators from the DOJ Inspector General's office on Friday and then for six hours Saturday with the Senate panel, which is investigating the role of the DOJ in the events leading up to the assault on the Capitol on January 6.

Rosen's deputy, Richard Donoghue, also testified before the Judiciary Committee, answering questions for five hours, according to other media reports.

Rosen assumed the position as chief of the DOJ when Attorney General William Barr resigned, effective December 23. He discovered that the acting head of the DOJ's civil division, Jeffrey Clark, was working with Trump behind his back in an attempt to oust Rosen and use the department to pressure state legislatures in key battleground states into overturning the election and award their state's electoral votes to Trump.

While a full account of Rosen's testimony is not yet available, according to the *Times*, he described five different "encounters" with Clark between December 23 and January 3. One such encounter was in late December, when Rosen confronted Clark about meeting with Trump behind his back to discuss ways in which the DOJ could be used to further Trump's "big lie" about the election being stolen.

Rosen testified that Clark admitted he had been plotting with Trump, and that he would cease to do so in the future. But Rosen claimed that Clark "continued to press colleagues to make statements about the election that they found to be untrue."

Rosen testified that even after instructing Clark to cease discussing with Trump plans to get rid of him, Clark continued to carry on plotting with the White House about different ways the DOJ could be used to lend credence to Trump's bogus claims of election fraud, which had already been refuted by Barr earlier in December, before his resignation, and in dozens of court cases.

CNN reported that during the testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Rosen and Donoghue named Trump ally, Pennsylvania Representative Scott Perry, as the person who was coordinating with Clark and Trump to overturn the election. Last January 25, Perry acknowledged that he had introduced Clark to Trump. Perry is one of Trump's most vociferous "stop the steal" supporters, and acted January 6 as the objector to the certification of his own state's electoral votes, which Biden won by a wide margin. He was also one of 147 Republicans who voted against certifying the electoral votes of Arizona and Pennsylvania even after the Capitol had been attacked by Trump supporters.

While the testimony has yet to be published, and what has emerged so far is just the tip of the iceberg, the initial reports show, contrary to Democratic Party claims, that it was not just Trump acting alone to overturn the election, but significant sections of the Republican Party in coordination with elements of the state.

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Even the Democrats, who have done everything in their power to downplay the significance of January 6, from the truncated impeachment proceedings to their incessant calls for "unity" with their "Republican colleagues," were forced to acknowledge how close the shell of bourgeois democracy came to breaking earlier this year.

Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-Connecticut) called Rosen's account "dramatic evidence of how intent Trump was in overthrowing the election." He added that he was "struck by how close the country came to total catastrophe."

During a Sunday interview on CNN's "State of the Union" program, Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, told host Dana Bash that Rosen "told us a lot, seven hours of testimony."

Durbin said, "What was going on in the Department of Justice was frightening from a constitution point of view. To think that Bill Barr left, resigned after he announced he didn't see irregularities in the election, and then his replacement was under extraordinary pressure—the President of the United States, even to the point where they were talking about replacing him, that pressure was on."

Durbin told Bash that the most shocking part of Rosen's testimony was "Just how directly personally involved the president was, the pressure he was putting on Jeffrey Rosen. It was real, very real, and it was very specific"

Durbin added that Rosen testified: "He was being asked by the White House, the leadership in the White House, to meet with certain people who had these wild, bizarre theories of why the election wasn't valid. And he refused to do it."

Bash pressed Durbin on whether Trump's actions constituted an attempted coup, and Durbin sought to avoid a direct response. The exchange went as follows:

BASH: Is what you're seeing and what you're describing an attempted coup?

DURBIN: Well, it was—they were going through the ordinary process. It isn't as if the president was removing the attorney general and making pronouncements, which would happen in a coup, I suppose, by classic definition. But it was leading up to that, that kind of process.

BASH: And last question on this. Have you spoken to the current attorney general, Merrick Garland? And do you think that there's potential for criminal charges?

DURBIN: I don't know the answer to that. I think we're—it's too early in the investigation.

Despite Durbin's evasions, the word "coup" is being increasingly used, even in the corporate media, to describe Trump's actions during the weeks leading up to the January 6 attack by his fascist followers on the Capitol, where they sought to shut down the certification of votes in the Electoral College which showed Biden's victory and Trump's defeat.

Bash asked Durbin to divulge more details about the hearing, but Durbin refused. He also cast doubt over whether the committee could subpoena Clark or other officials who coordinated with Trump, citing Republican opposition on the evenly divided committee. He would not even commit to holding a public hearing on the matter, instead only promising that "ultimately, there will be a report."

If it is anything like the "bipartisan" Senate report released last month by the Homeland Security and Rules committees, it will completely exonerate the role of Republican senators, including Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley and Tommy Tuberville, along with a majority of the Republican House, who opposed certification of Biden's election victory. It was silent as well as on the state Republican attorneys general who brought a suit seeking Supreme Court intervention, and those like Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell who covered for Trump's plan to overturn the election by claiming he was only exercising his legal rights to present evidence of "vote fraud" and other irregularities to courts in various states. Most ludicrous of all, the report did not attribute the slightest responsibility for the January 6 attack to the coup plotter in chief, then-President Donald Trump.

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