

Texas passes bill restricting voting rights after collapse of Democratic walkout

Alex Findijs

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The efforts of Texas Democrats to block passage of a Republican bill restricting voting rights came to an end Tuesday when the State Senate passed Senate Bill 1 (SB1). Republican Governor Greg Abbott is expected to sign the bill into law within days.

The passage of SB1 was barely noted by President Joe Biden, who only weeks before had called the attack on voting rights by Republican lawmakers the greatest threat to American democracy since the Civil War.

Leading Democrats are largely ignoring the passage of the Texas law. The Democrats have effectively abandoned their “For the People Act,” which would expand ballot access and ban partisan gerrymandering, and face little chance of passing their more narrow “John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act” in the evenly divided US Senate.

The Texas law will place extensive restrictions and potential criminal penalties on voters. Absentee voting will be highly restricted, drop boxes for mail-in ballots and drive-through voting will be banned, and early voting hours will be limited. Election officials will face criminal prosecution if they mail unsolicited absentee ballots to voters or interfere in any way with partisan poll watchers, who are granted extra rights and protections under the law.

The entire bill is designed to place as many barriers and threaten as many criminal penalties as possible in an effort to intimidate and restrict voters, especially working class and minority voters more likely to vote for Democrats. An amendment designed to exclude voters who were unaware that they were ineligible to vote from criminal prosecution was stripped from the final version of the bill, which emerged from the process of reconciling the state House and Senate versions. The so-called Mason Amendment was named after Crystal Mason, a Texas woman facing a five-year

prison sentence for illegally voting, despite not knowing that she was ineligible to vote.

Similar provisions exist in bills across the country. The Brennan Center, a voting rights advocacy group, reports that nearly 400 restrictive bills have been introduced in 48 state legislatures, with dozens making their way toward being signed into law.

The Republican assault on voting rights is a coordinated national offensive against basic democratic rights. It is bound up with the turn of the Republican Party toward fascism and the promotion of Trump’s “big lie” that he lost the 2020 election due to massive voter fraud. This was the basis on which Trump mobilized fascist forces to storm the US Capitol on January 6 in an attempt to block the certification of the Electoral College vote. Virtually the entire Republican Party continues to promote this lie as part of ongoing conspiracies to establish dictatorial rule in the US.

The entire episode of the Texas Democrats’ “resistance” has contained a large element of political theater. In reality, no section of the ruling class or either of its political parties has a commitment to the defense of democratic rights, including the right to vote and have one’s vote counted.

From the start, the flight of the Texas House Democrats from the state, which temporarily prevented a quorum and delayed passage of the anti-voting rights bill in the Texas House, was a political stunt designed to provide a “left” fig leaf to cover up the Democratic Party’s cowardice and capitulation to the Republican offensive.

At no point have the Democrats made any serious attempt to stop the Republican assault on voting rights. In July, more than 50 Texas House Democrats flew to Washington D.C. to lobby the Biden White House and the Democratic-controlled Congress to pass federal

legislation that would override the Texas bill. They were verbally hailed by the White House and Democratic leaders as modern-day civil rights heroes, while, in practice, given the cold shoulder.

Biden refused even to meet with them during their weeks-long sojourn in the nation's capital. He rejected their appeals to support a weakening of the filibuster rule in the Senate so as to enable passage of the Democrats' voting bills without Republican support.

Instead, he, along with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, made it clear their top priority was securing Republican support to pass a watered-down, pro-corporate infrastructure bill that will provide windfall profits to private contractors. This was consistent with Biden's posture of seeking bipartisan unity with the increasingly fascistic Republican Party.

The inevitable and ignominious end of the Texas Democrats' stunt occurred when three of the Democrats who had fled the state over a month ago returned last week to the state House floor, providing the Republicans the quorum needed to pass the bill.

The spinelessness of the Democrats was further exposed in their response to the passage of the bill. Texas State Representative Garnet Coleman, whose return to the chamber helped ensure passage of SB1, attempted to downplay the consequences. "[A]ll I can hope is that if those problems occur ... that we come back here in two years and fix it."

Republican Governor Abbott, a Trump acolyte who has banned masking mandates in reopened Texas schools despite cascading COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations, declared this week that SB1 would "make it easier to vote and harder to cheat," despite the absence of evidence of significant voter fraud.

When the Democrats first walked out of the state legislature in May to prevent voting on the Republican voting bill, Abbott called a special legislative session to pass it. He repeated this maneuver a few weeks later when the Democrats fled to Washington D.C., accompanied by the issuance of arrest warrants for the Democratic lawmakers for dereliction of their duties.

This debacle is another object lesson in the futility and danger of placing any confidence in the Democratic Party to defend the right to vote or any other democratic right. The political conclusion that must be drawn by workers is the need to break with these

parties of Wall Street and the military and mobilize independently on the basis of a socialist program to defend basic democratic rights.



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