

The January 6 hearing: What took 18 months?

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A series of public hearings of the House Select Committee on the January 6, 2021 coup began on Thursday evening.

In his opening statement for the hearings, Representative Bennie Thompson (Democrat from Mississippi) stated bluntly, “January 6 was the culmination of an attempted coup, a brazen attempt... to overthrow the government.” The “conspiracy to thwart the will of the people,” Thompson continued, “is not over... Two and a half centuries of constitutional democracy are at risk.”

That such a statement is made in a congressional hearing is testimony to the fact that American bourgeois democracy is at death’s door.

In her opening statement, the vice chair of the committee, Republican Liz Cheney, reviewed the timeline of the events leading up to January 6. This included Trump’s repeated and unfounded statements that the election had been stolen, his efforts to pressure election officials to create false slates of electors, and his demand that Vice President Mike Pence return the certification of electors back to the states, where they would decide the election for Trump.

More information will no doubt come out in the coming weeks as the hearings continue. Certain points, however, must be made.

First, while the hearing added to the overwhelming evidence that Trump has sought to carry out a coup, install himself as dictator and overthrow the Constitution, the main elements of the narrative presented Thursday night were known on, and even before, January 6.

The questions that inevitably follow are: Why has it taken 18 months for the hearing to be held? And why, if Trump engaged in “an attempted coup,” has he not been arrested?

Second, the hearings are framed to place almost all responsibility on Trump himself, together with low-level fascist foot soldiers in the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, covering up the support for the coup within the state apparatus and dominant sections of the Republican Party. This was particularly evident in the remarks of Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, who was given the dominant role in the hearing. Cheney presented the coup as a product of Trump’s ambition to remain in power, which was supposedly carried out in opposition to almost all of his advisers.

Left out of the account of the events leading up to and on January 6 was any reference to the virtual stand-down of the Capitol Police, the involvement of factions of the military and intelligence apparatus, the role of the entire leadership of the Republican Party in legitimizing Trump’s lies, and the fact that two-thirds of House Republicans voted not to certify the Electoral College results, even after the Capitol had been cleared and the congressional joint session had been resumed.

Third, the hearing was preceded by two acts by Biden’s Justice Department aimed at setting the tone for the hearings: the indictment of members of the Proud Boys for “seditious conspiracy” and the decision not to indict top Trump aides Mark Meadows and Dan Scavino.

Much of the first day of the hearings focused on the role of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, even though they are nothing more than bit players in a much larger conspiracy. The aim is to divert attention from the role of dominant factions of the Republican Party, which Biden and the Democratic congressional leadership never tire of referring to as their “colleagues.”

The decision not to indict Meadows and Scavino,

who clearly played a central role in the coup, is part of the efforts of the Biden administration to prevent any broader examination of the role of the Republican Party in aiding and abetting the coup.

Fourth, in viewing the hearings, one is struck by the fact that the Democratic Party seemed completely unprepared for the attempted coup. The Capitol building was left almost entirely undefended before the onslaught of the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and other forces mobilized by Trump.

The events of January 6, however, were not only foreseeable, they were foreseen. More than a month before the election, in a Perspective column posted October 1, 2020, the WSWS wrote that “the White House is the political nerve center of a far-advanced conspiracy to establish a presidential dictatorship and suppress constitutionally guaranteed democratic rights.”

On September 24, 2020, the WSWS wrote: “The United States presidential campaign is being transformed into a coup d’état by Donald Trump, who has declared that he will not accept the results of any vote that goes against him.”

The statement added: “Trump is not running an election campaign. He is setting into motion a plot to establish a presidential dictatorship.”

The WSWS continued these warnings up to the very eve of the election. Twelve hours before the January 6 insurrection, the WSWS warned of the “ongoing effort by President Donald Trump to stage a coup d’état, nullify the results of the election and establish a presidential dictatorship.”

The response of the Democratic Party, prior to, during and after the coup, has been determined by the fact that it is far more terrified of exposing the conspiracies to overturn the Constitution than the conspiracies themselves. Its perpetual fear is that any exposure of the rot of American democracy will encourage opposition from below.

The constant refrain of Biden, Pelosi and other leading Democrats in the aftermath of the January 6 coup attempt was the declaration, “We need a strong Republican Party.” Biden and the Democrats needed a “strong” Republican Party to carry out the White House’s policies: the systematic dismantling of any remaining measures to stop the spread of COVID and the preparation for “great-power conflict,” which has

now erupted in the US war with Russia over Ukraine.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Trump sought to overturn the Constitution, Biden has never called for his indictment. He has, rather, declared that he would be “very fortunate” to run against Trump in 2024. Meanwhile, Trump declared this week that January 6 represents “the greatest movement in the history of our country to Make America Great Again,” and the Republicans are in a position to take control of Congress in the 2022 elections.

Finally, there is a deliberate effort in everything written and said by the political establishment and media to avoid any examination of the actual social, political and historical context of the coup and the fascistic transformation of the Republican Party.

January 6 is presented as an “aberration,” and Trump as some sort of horrible intruder in the Garden of Eden of American democracy. In fact, the January 6 coup is the culmination of a protracted crisis of democratic forms of rule in the United States, rooted in unending war and the extreme growth of social inequality.

The defense of democratic rights in the United States cannot be left to the Democrats and the sclerotic US political establishment. It requires the mobilization of the working class on the basis of opposition to the capitalist system that is the root of social inequality and dictatorship.



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