

The January 6 hearings and the ongoing plot against democracy

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The House January 6 committee hearings are bringing to light evidence that makes it unmistakably clear that Donald Trump attempted to carry out a coup to overturn the results of the 2020 election and remain in power as dictator.

There is nothing ordinary or routine about these hearings, which relate to events that are without historical precedent: The president of the United States launched a conspiracy with neo-Nazi groups, Supreme Court justices and 147 Republican congressmen to overturn the Constitution through brute force.

During its third hearing, held on Thursday—in the middle of the workday so as to ensure minimal viewership—the committee presented evidence that Trump and top Trump lawyer John Eastman knew their scheme to force Vice President Mike Pence to reject slates of electors from states won by Biden was unconstitutional. Once Pence, who had until that point supported Trump’s baseless claims of election fraud, communicated that he would certify the results, Trump and his co-conspirators turned violently against him.

The hearing revealed that after Trump began publicly attacking Pence, his supporters came within 40 feet of capturing the vice president. A far-right militant-turned-confidential witness testified that armed fascists intended to kill the vice president and other leaders, including Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Retired conservative federal Judge John Michael Luttig told the committee Thursday that Trump and “his allies and supporters are a clear and present danger to American democracy.”

In the starkest language yet, Luttig said the plot was not a thing of the past but an ongoing conspiracy to establish a dictatorship:

To this very day, the former president, his allies and supporters pledge that in the presidential election of 2024—if the former president or his anointed

successor as the Republican Party presidential candidate were to lose that election—that they would attempt to overturn that 2024 election in the same way that they attempted to overturn the 2020 election, but succeed in 2024 where they failed in 2020.

The committee also revealed information that proves Republican justices on the Supreme Court played a critical role in the coup attempt, though the committee itself took pains to claim the court’s institutional integrity remained intact.

In the lead-up to January 6, John Eastman had back-channel contact with prominent figures in the Supreme Court and became aware that at least two of the nine justices were inclined to support pseudo-legal efforts to halt the constitutionally mandated certification of the Electoral College.

Before Thursday’s hearing, information came to light showing that Eastman’s contact was Virginia Thomas, Justice Clarence Thomas’s wife. Eastman had formerly clerked for Thomas and was a part of the Thomas political circle. Only the politically naïve can believe that Virginia Thomas was acting without her husband’s knowledge or involvement.

In text messages revealed by the house committee, Virginia Thomas urged Trump Chief of Staff Mark Meadows to send Trump’s political opponents “to Guantanamo Bay” for torture on the grounds that they were blocking the plot. This apparently included Pence, about whom Thomas had expressed “disgust” to Meadows after Pence’s announcement that he would not block the certification of the Electoral College.

Virginia Thomas also encouraged Meadows to bring forward Trump’s far-right lawyer, Sidney Powell, and allow her to play a more prominent role in the operation.

On January 6, Powell filed what is called an “emergency application” to the Supreme Court on behalf of Texas

Republican and Trump ally Louie Gohmert and a number of far-right state politicians. The emergency application argued that Pence was violating the Constitution by failing to invoke the “dispute-resolution process” in the Electoral Count Act. They claimed that this law states that if there are challenges to electoral slates, the vice president has the constitutional authority to resolve the dispute by determining which slate is correct. Because of the procedural rules associated with such “emergency applications,” one justice, Republican Samuel Alito, had the power to grant or deny without bringing the matter before the full court.

The emergency application was filed sometime from the late morning to the mid-afternoon, when the mob was ransacking Congress. It was officially docketed by the Supreme Court at 3:51 p.m., during the 199 minutes in which the Defense Department had delayed the deployment of the National Guard to clear the insurrectionists.

Alito did not immediately reject the emergency application, even though it was a flagrantly unconstitutional request to overturn the results of the 2020 election. Nor did Alito report the filing to the media, and it passed without being brought to the attention of the public. He kept the emergency application in his pocket, pending the outcome of the events on Capitol Hill.

The Democratic Party was well aware of the filing and made no effort to inform the public that one right-wing justice was on the verge of providing a pseudo-legal fig leaf for Trump’s coup. It was because of the emergency application—which Alito had not yet rejected—that Pelosi was forced to reconvene Congress at 8:00 p.m. on the night of January 6, in order to certify the results before Alito could grant the application. It was not until 1:00 p.m. on January 7 that Alito issued an unsigned order rejecting Powell’s filing, at which point the application had been rendered moot by the previous night’s certification.

The Democrats did nothing on January 6 to thwart Trump’s ongoing coup for fear that any action would have triggered mass opposition in the population. This month’s hearings have featured only Republican “heroes,” partly because of Democratic efforts to preserve the Republican Party but also because there simply were no Democratic ones. In this sense, the hearings are not only about what Trump *did* but also about what the Democrats *did not* do.

Mike Pence’s attorney Greg Jacobs testified Thursday that had Trump succeeded, the issue of power “might well then have to be decided in the streets.” Not if the Democrats had their say. While there would have been mass popular outrage over the overturning of an election, the Democratic Party would have done everything it could to prevent such demonstrations and to instead seek a negotiated settlement with Trump that would have kept him in power.

The Democrats’ feckless initial response set the tone. In the name of bipartisanship with Biden’s “Republican colleagues,” the administration has allowed the chief coup plotters to remain free, has kept in Congress over 100 Republican members of Congress who voted against certifying the election, and has opposed growing calls to impeach Clarence Thomas from the Supreme Court despite his role in the coup. In response to the scandal, Justice Sonia Sotomayor even issued a public note—rare for justices—praising Thomas as “a man who cares deeply about the court as an institution.”

History makes urgently clear that the Democratic Party’s broader strategy is creating conditions in which would-be Führers thrive. Inflation is through the roof after years of Quantitative Easing and corporate bailouts. Americans’ debt loads and borrowing costs are increasing rapidly. The Democratic Party tells Americans that \$50 billion is needed to arm the Ukrainian military while it slashes the social programs and unemployment benefits upon which millions rely to survive. And the coronavirus pandemic tears through millions of families, as the administration tells them that the pandemic is over.

Indeed, 48 hours before Thursday’s hearing, Trump-backed candidates defeated more moderate opponents in critical Republican primaries across the country, including in a race for Secretary of State in Nevada, the officer who will be responsible for certifying the swing state’s election results in 2024. The far right appears well positioned to occupy a prominent position in the functioning of many state governments as well as in Congress.

Trump and his co-conspirators are learning from their mistakes and plotting their next moves. The hearings are revealing that the coup of January 6, 2021 failed but not because of a lack of institutional support from within the military, the courts, and the Republican Party, and not because of opposition from the Democrats. It failed because of the inexperience and bad luck of those carrying it out.

A movement is developing in the working class against intolerable social conditions, rising prices and widespread hatred of the entire political establishment. The emerging social power of the working class is the only force which can lead the fight against inequality, dictatorship and fascism. It can do so by attacking their common source: the capitalist system.



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