

The New York Times calls for indictment of Trump—and covers up the roots of the crisis of American democracy

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Readers of the *New York Times* opened the Sunday newspaper to find a lengthy editorial devoted to the argument that Donald Trump should be prosecuted, while stating at the same time that such a prosecution could lead to civil war.

The editorial, “Donald Trump Is Not Above the Law,” calls on the US Department of Justice and Attorney General Merrick Garland to bring an indictment against the ex-president for his efforts “to subvert the Constitution and overturn the will of the American people.”

It continues: “The president, defeated at the polls in 2020, tried to enlist federal law enforcement authorities, state officials and administrators of the nation’s electoral system in a furious effort to remain in power. When all else failed, he roused an armed mob that stormed the Capitol and threatened lawmakers.”

It has taken 19 months for the *Times* editors to acknowledge the reality that was pointed out by the *World Socialist Web Site* within hours of the attempted coup of January 6, 2021: Then-President Trump was seeking through violent methods to overthrow the US government and maintain himself in office.

If one takes seriously even half of what the editorial asserts, the American political system is on the verge of disintegration. What it does not say and cannot say, however, constitutes an indictment of the *Times* itself and the entire response of the Democratic Party to Trump’s coup.

The *Times* would have its readers believe that a nearly successful fascistic (a word it does not use) insurrection can be attributed merely to the depraved personality of Donald Trump. However, if Trump’s prosecution would produce widespread civil unrest, as the *Times* suggests, then the issue goes far beyond one man. There must be

powerful social forces at work.

Entirely absent from the editorial is any analysis of the social and political conflicts, intensifying over the past 30 years, that have led to the collapse of American democracy. If they cannot point to the real, underlying causes of this historic event, it is because to do so would mean drawing political conclusions that are entirely unacceptable to the American ruling class, for which the *Times* speaks.

What are the essential factors underlying the collapse of bourgeois democratic forms of rule in the United States?

Economic inequality has developed to the point that it is impossible for American capitalism to reconcile the profit system and the amassing of untold wealth in the hands of a tiny financial oligarchy with the remaining trappings of Constitutional legality and democratic forms of rule. The economic crisis now features a noxious combination of runaway inflation and the first signs of a global slump, with mushrooming corporate and bank debt, and a systematic attack on the living standards of the working class.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has killed more than 20 million people so far, including more than one million people in the United States. This massive death toll is the direct product of the decision by the ruling class to subordinate human life to private profit.

Most ominously of all, the major imperialist powers, particularly the United States, are resorting to military conflict on a scale not seen since the Second World War. They are now threatening a direct conflict with Russia and China, both nuclear-armed powers, raising the prospect of a nuclear World War III.

The *Times* can make no reference to any of this. Moreover, its depiction of the events of January 6 themselves constitutes a whitewash and cover-up.

It notes in passing Trump's efforts to "enlist officials from the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security and Defense to persuade officials in certain states to swing the election to him." Thus it avoids the question of the response of these officials to Trump's appeals. What role did these departments, and particularly the military, play in Trump's coup plots? What did top generals and civilian Pentagon officials do on January 6? What was the cause of the 199-minute delay in deploying the D.C. National Guard to defend the Capitol against an armed mob?

Similarly, the *Times* makes no mention of the widespread support for Trump's bogus "stolen election" claims within the leadership of the Republican Party, including most members of Congress, who voted not to certify the Electoral College vote even after the attackers had been cleared from the Capitol. Instead, they cite "high-ranking Republican officials" who testified against Trump before the House committee investigating the January 6 coup. The editorial is thus aligned with President Biden's appeals to his "Republican colleagues" to work with his administration, after these "colleagues" supported efforts to overturn an election Biden won by seven million votes.

The events of January 6, 2021 did not arise in a vacuum. They are the outcome of a protracted crisis of American democracy. Critical nodal points include the theft of the 2000 election, the police state measures instituted after the September 11, 2001 attacks, under Bush and then Obama, and the current rampage against democratic rights that is being spearheaded by a cabal of fascists and theocrats on the Supreme Court.

Nor is January 6 an outlier in world events. There has been an upsurge of attacks on democracy and shifts towards dictatorship all over the world: in Brazil, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and most recently in Australia, where it has been revealed that in 2021 then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison secretly assumed control of five major ministries to consolidate quasi-dictatorial power in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Europe, Trump sympathizers are about to take the helm of government in both Italy and Great Britain.

The editorial contains a number of references to the Civil War era, flatly declaring that Trump has gone further than any president since then in threatening constitutional government and the rule of law. But the American Civil War arose, not out of the personalities of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln, but out of an "irrepressible conflict" between two social orders--slave labor and free labor. What is the social conflict that

underlies the present eruption of civil strife in America? The *Times* is silent.

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion, reading its editorial, that the *Times* is less motivated by a concern over the fate of American democracy than by fear that a return to power by Trump and the Republicans could cut across the ongoing escalation of the US proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, as well as triggering massive social conflicts in the United States that would threaten the capitalist system itself.

The *Times* worries that if the Justice Department takes action against Trump, he will mobilize his right-wing followers against it and cause "civil unrest." But neither the editorial nor the Democratic Party makes any appeal for popular action to resist such attacks. On the contrary, the Democratic wing of the financial aristocracy, which includes the well-heeled editors of the *Times*, is far more afraid of the consequences of such an appeal than it is of anything Trump might do.

While the *Times* calls for the indictment of Trump, the fact is that the entire policy of the Democratic Party for which it speaks is strengthening the tendencies toward authoritarianism and dictatorship. Most importantly, the central policy of the Biden administration—war against Russia and the preparation of war against China—necessarily involves increasingly repressive methods against the working class at home.

The defense of democracy is entirely bound up with the entry of the working class into American political life as an independent force. But such a mobilization cannot be limited purely to the questions of formal democracy and the defense of Constitutional norms. It poses directly the assertion of the social rights of the working class, the defense of jobs, decent living standards and social services such as health care and education. These can only be secured by the working class fighting for an anticapitalist and socialist program.



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