US House passes rules package dictated by Republican far right

Barry Grey
10 January 2023

On Monday night, the US House of Representatives passed the package of rules dictated by the most right-wing, fascistic elements in the Republican conference in the course of the 15 ballots and five days it took to elect California Representative Kevin McCarthy as House Speaker.

With a narrow majority of 222-213 in the House, the Republicans can afford only four defections to get measures passed, and there was some speculation that there would be a sufficient number of GOP holdouts, combined with a party-line "no" vote by the Democrats, to block the rules package. In the event, only one Republican voted against the proposal and one other failed to show up for the vote.

Tony Gonzales, from Uvalde, Texas, voted "no." He did so on the grounds that side agreements reached behind closed doors in talks between McCarthy and the 20 Republican holdouts during the Speaker election to cap federal discretionary spending at 2022 levels could mean a significant cut in military spending. In fact, according to *Roll Call*, negotiators have given assurances that the spending cut—$130 billion, or 8 percent—would be in social programs and the military would be largely spared.

Texas Representative Dan Crenshaw did not vote. He had been seeking the chairmanship of the Homeland Security Committee, but was passed over in favor of Mark Green of Tennessee, a Freedom Caucus member, in another concession to the most right-wing forces in the Republican House conference.

Passage of rules for the operation of the House in the new, 118th Congress was required before any legislation could be initiated. Normally a routine procedure, this time, as with the Speaker election itself, it became the means by which members of the House Freedom Caucus effected a further lurch to the right of not just the Republican Party, but the entire two-party system of American capitalism.

For the most part, the changes in House rules adopted Monday had been agreed by the House Republicans prior to the election for House Speaker. The most prominent alteration, demanded by the holdouts, was a reduction in the number of House members required to trigger a vote at any time to remove the Speaker from five to one. This, of course, makes McCarthy—himself a Donald Trump acolyte who voted against certifying the 2020 election and was supported by Trump for House Speaker—little more than the Freedom Caucus fascists' cat's paw.

Prior to the vote on the rules package, there were some grumblings by Republicans about the side agreements accompanying the rules that have not been revealed, even to the House members themselves. Nancy Mace of South Carolina, one of the grumblers, threatened to vote "no" and wrote in a letter to her constituents: "Some sort of deal was hashed out for the majority of the 20 to vote for McCarthy for speaker, but this deal was crafted in private, behind closed doors." She pointed to the obvious hypocrisy and cynicism of lawmakers claiming to be bringing "transparency" and open debate to the House while refusing to reveal what members were really agreeing to. Nevertheless, she voted for the rules.

The basic thrust of the rules changes is to slash federal spending on social programs, block tax increases on the wealthy, and make it easier to block federal government funding and any increase in the debt limit. They also include a provision to establish a select subcommittee, under the House Judiciary Committee, to investigate the Justice Department and other federal agencies that are conducting probes of Trump and the January 6, 2021 coup attempt. Among

© World Socialist Web Site

other things, this subcommittee on "the weaponization of the federal government," to be headed by Freedom Caucus co-founder and House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan, will likely seek to end the prosecution of the fascist insurrectionists who stormed the Capitol.

The rules package restores the so-called "Holman Rule," which allows House members to use spending bills to defund specific programs and fire federal officials or reduce their pay. It also includes provisions aimed at gutting the House Ethics Committee.

It strips House staffers of the ability to join unions, reversing a resolution adopted when the Democrats controlled the House last May granting nearly 9,100 House employees collective bargaining rights. The rules include language saying that the resolution will not have force or effect during the 118th Congress.

It is widely reported that the side deals to the rules package include giving House Freedom Caucus members three positions on the House Rules Committee—a representation on the critical body that is far greater than their proportion of the House Republican conference, and even more out of proportion to their level of support within the population.

Following passage of the rules package, the first piece of legislation passed by the House was a measure to rescind an $80 billion increase in the budget for the Internal Revenue Service passed last year as part of the Biden administration's so-called "Inflation Reduction Act." The IRS budget increase is to be used to hire 87,000 new full-time IRS staff and modernize the agency's technology systems.

The bill passed on a straight party-line vote of 221-210, with all Republicans voting in favor. In response to the vote, a Treasury Department spokeswoman said: "The IRS audits nearly 80 percent fewer millionaires than a decade ago, and this legislation would deny the agency much-needed resources to hire top talent to go after the $163 billion in taxes avoided by the top 1 percent annually."

This and similar bills will almost certainly be blocked by the Democratic-controlled Senate. However, the far-right Republican majority in the House will use the threat of a government shutdown triggered by the failure to authorize a budget for the next fiscal year, a default on US government debt obligations resulting from a failure to raise the debt limit when it comes due this summer, or a cut in spending for the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine to secure a deal with the Biden administration and the Democratic Party to slash spending for health care, education, housing and other vital social needs.

It will use congressional "investigations" to incite far-right and fascistic forces against immigrants and striking workers and promote the "stolen election" lie.

For their part, Biden and the Democrats are stepping up their pleas for bipartisan unity with the Republicans and making clear that their main differences with Trump, as from the outset of the Trump years, concern foreign policy, above all the US imperialist drive against Russia.

When the *Wall Street Journal* published a disapproving editorial on Monday ("Defense is Now a Republican Target") in response to Jim Jordan's statement in a TV interview that military spending had to be "on the table" when it came to slashing government outlays, the White House circulated the piece.

Appearing Tuesday on the "Morning Joe" interview program on MSNBC, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, known unofficially as "the senator from Wall Street," attempted to draw a sharp distinction between what he called "mainstream Republicans" and the "MAGA fringe." This, of course, ignores the virtually unanimous votes of the Republicans to pass the reactionary rules package and slash IRS funding so as to allow the rich to continue paying little or nothing in taxes.

"If there's interest in working with us, we will work with them," he declared.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site