

New York grand jury votes to indict Trump

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A grand jury in Manhattan voted Thursday to indict former President Donald Trump for charges stemming from the payment of hush money to adult film actress Stormy Daniels in 2016. The payments were actually made, on the eve of the presidential election, by Trump's attorney and political "fixer" Michael Cohen, whom Trump then reimbursed after the election.

The case against Trump is the first indictment of a former president after leaving office, although it does not involve any of the multiple crimes Trump committed while he was president. These include the separation of immigrant children from their parents during his repeated border crackdowns; the use of US military assets like drone-fired missiles to carry out assassinations; and the conspiracy by Trump and his close aides to overturn the results of the 2020 elections and establish a dictatorship, culminating in the January 6, 2021 attack on Capitol Hill.

The case against Trump is not a genuine effort to bring him to justice for his crimes against immigrants, against the American people as a whole, or against those around the world who were targeted for deadly violence by American imperialism during his presidency. Nor is it aimed at exposing his plans to overturn the 2020 election and establish a presidential dictatorship.

There are, in fact, no issues of democratic principles involved in the indictment. On the contrary, the entire case, based as it is on private sexual conduct and Trump's efforts to cover it up, is a substitute for a real accounting for Trump's myriad crimes, while also appealing to the Democratic Party's base in privileged sections of the middle class.

At the same time, the indictment is another expression of the deep crisis of the entire political system and the bitter conflicts within the state.

The details of the case also reveal something about the ruling class and its representatives. That a figure

such as Trump could rise to the level of president of the United States can not be explained simply on the basis of his own history. It expresses the extreme degradation of American capitalism.

Daniels allegedly sought payment to remain silent about a brief sexual relationship with Trump 10 years earlier in 2006. Trump denied the affair but authorized the payment, according to Cohen, to avoid unfavorable publicity in the final week of the election campaign.

Cohen served more than a year in prison for his role in the payoff scheme, and he will be the main witness against Trump if the case goes to trial. Daniels might also testify.

Any trial would not simply be Cohen's word against Trump's. Cohen received a total of \$420,000 in monthly installments of \$35,000 throughout 2017, which covered the taxes on the \$130,000 plus a \$60,000 bonus. In return, he was to file bogus invoices for legal services.

Due to grand jury secrecy rules, the exact charges against Trump are not yet known, but they presumably go beyond merely filing false business records by claiming the payments to Cohen were legal expenses rather than reimbursement for the \$130,000 in hush money.

This would only be a misdemeanor under New York law, and since nearly seven years have passed, it would be beyond the statute of limitations. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is believed to have presented felony charges against Trump, in which the misdemeanor charge of falsifying records is compounded into a felony by Trump's intention of covering up a separate crime, an illegal donation to Trump's campaign (the money for the payoff of Daniels).

Trump is expected to fly to New York City and surrender to the authorities on a date his lawyers will negotiate with Bragg.

Trump is currently in Florida, at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis immediately announced that he would not extradite Trump to New York, condemning the indictment as political retaliation by a Democratic Party official.

DeSantis is expected to challenge Trump for the Republican presidential nomination, although he has not yet declared his intentions officially. An indictment, or even a conviction, does not bar Trump from continuing his candidacy, and he has led in polls of prospective Republican primary voters. Most declared and prospective Republican candidates immediately condemned the Manhattan proceeding and indicated their support for Trump against it.

In tweets posted nearly two weeks ago, Trump had predicted that he would be indicted on March 21, but that day came and went with no action by the grand jury or the Manhattan prosecutor. Trump and top aides were said to be surprised at the indictment Thursday, after reports that the grand jury would recess for the Easter break and take no action until after that.

Susan Necheles and Joseph Tacopina, the lawyers who represent Trump in the Daniels case, issued a statement confirming that he had been indicted and would surrender and be booked in Manhattan. The Secret Service was said to be in discussions with the New York Police Department on security arrangements for that event.

Trump posted a statement on his own social media site, Truth Social, calling the indictment “Political Persecution and Election Interference at the highest level in history.” He claimed that his Democratic opponents had “done the unthinkable - indicting a completely innocent person in an act of blatant Election Interference... Never before in our Nation’s history has this been done.”

Similar statements were issued by Ronna McDaniel, the chairwoman of the Republican Party, Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, Republican House Majority Leader Steve Scalise and other prominent Republicans in Congress.



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