

Trump arraignment: A degraded political spectacle that covers up his real crimes

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The arraignment of ex-president Donald Trump Tuesday in a Manhattan court confirms the analysis made by the *World Socialist Web Site* that the charges against Trump are a political diversion by the Democratic Party, using a sex scandal to cover up the far more serious offenses committed by Trump, which culminated in his coup attempt of January 6, 2021.

The indictment released by the Manhattan prosecutor's office alleges 34 separate felony counts, three each for 11 separate payments to Trump's former attorney and fixer Michael Cohen. Cohen actually made the \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actress Stormy Daniels to ensure that she would not go public on the eve of the 2016 election with her account of a sexual encounter with Trump in 2006.

Cohen was reimbursed for the \$130,000 in the course of 2017, as well as \$50,000 for another unspecified action on Trump's behalf, together with \$180,000 to cover the tax payment he would have to make since he reported the payments as income, and a \$60,000 bonus. The total came to \$420,000, payable in monthly installments.

The case presented in the indictment is extraordinarily weak and convoluted from a legal standpoint. Factually, there is no doubt about what Trump did, and this will be detailed by Cohen and other witnesses, and verified by checks, invoices and vouchers. Each document is treated as a separate felony in the indictment.

But paying someone to remain silent about a sexual encounter, or buying someone's story in order *not* to publish it, is not illegal. Nor is lying about one's personal conduct in the course of an election campaign. If every politician who lied about such matters were prosecuted, the jails would overflow.

Moreover, as a matter of principle, the criminalization

of private sexual conduct is fundamentally reactionary, as are sex scandals in general, including the current furor over the payment of what the media now calls "hush money." It is a fact of American life that sex-related allegations are frequently made, and that those accused may make the practical calculation that it is cheaper to pay the plaintiff, whether the charges are true or false, rather than incur the exorbitant cost of a legal defense, to say nothing of the negative publicity.

In the most famous previous case involving an American president, Bill Clinton's lawyers offered to pay Paula Jones \$700,000 to settle her lawsuit over her allegations of improper behavior. Her right-wing Republican lawyers rejected the money because they were using the lawsuit to lay a perjury trap for Clinton that ultimately led to his impeachment. Clinton could not be charged for offering to settle the Jones lawsuit, because that was not a crime. Only when he was forced to testify under oath, and lied about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky, could the trap be sprung.

In the case of Trump, the Democratic Party, in the person of Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, has now adopted the same methods, and they are no more progressive because their target is Trump rather than Clinton. The attempt to bootstrap felonies out of a series of misdemeanor charges, years after the statute of limitations expired, is just as questionable as the tactics used against Clinton.

It is quite possible that the Democrats or their media supporters will reprise the filthy methods of the Kenneth Starr "report" in the Clinton case, and produce a pornographic account of Trump's relations with adult film actress Stormy Daniels and Playboy model Karen McDougal. This would represent another effort to pollute public consciousness. At the same time, it would appeal to an important section of the Democratic

Party base, which is more concerned with matters of gender and sex than with Trump's attempt to overthrow the US Constitution on January 6 and remain in the White House despite losing the 2020 election.

On the Republican side of this spectacle, the arraignment was yet another occasion for Trump and his entourage to conduct themselves like the gangsters they are. Donald Trump Jr. posted a picture on social media of the daughter of Judge Juan Merchan. Trump himself declared in all-capital letters that the judge "HATES ME." He posted a picture of the judge's wife, claiming that she, too, hated him. He also posted a picture of himself wielding a baseball bat, side by side with a photo of prosecutor Bragg. These are transparent efforts to incite violence, on the model of the savage attack on Paul Pelosi, husband of leading House Democrat Nancy Pelosi.

The judge overseeing Trump's arraignment, Juan Merchan, mildly remonstrated both sides in the case to avoid language that would tend to inflame or incite, but Trump repeated his vituperations against the judge and his family in his remarks Tuesday evening at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

Trump has already made use of the charges to line up support among congressional Republicans and even among his rivals for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. He takes advantage of the Democrats' focus on charges that he sought to rig the 2016 presidential election—first through the fraudulent Mueller investigation of alleged Russian interference, now through charges over Trump's payment to Stormy Daniels—to divert attention from his own responsibility for the attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 election through the violent assault on the Capitol by his supporters.

There is absolutely nothing progressive or democratic in the cynical willingness of the Democrats to use the most reactionary methods to carry out their conflict with Trump, which largely revolves around foreign policy, particularly the war against Russia in Ukraine. The two cases that are being brought forward by Democratic-backed prosecutors in New York and Washington are the Stormy Daniels payoff and Trump's removal of classified documents from the White House to his estate in Mar-a-Lago after he left office.

These two prosecutions dovetail with the concerns of

two of the main political bases of the Democratic Party. The sex scandal appeals to the identity-politics warriors, while the document retention case speaks to the concerns of the military-intelligence apparatus.

The third major component of the Democratic "coalition," Wall Street, received its own tribute from Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg. He declared at his press conference that his office took the falsifying of business records very seriously because of New York City's central role in the world financial system.

One laughs out loud at this paean to the honesty of the nest of vipers on Wall Street. Every facet of capitalist corruption, falsification and outright robbery is concentrated in the borough of Manhattan. It was the home of Bernie Madoff, Michael Milken and many other billion-dollar fraudsters, and of even bigger swindlers who walk free because, paraphrasing the words of Obama Attorney General Eric Holder, they are "too big to jail."

Trump's response to the arraignment was to double down on his fascist appeals. He repeated his denunciation of the "Soros-backed" prosecutor, a reference to the Jewish billionaire who has supported Democratic Party candidates, and an open appeal to anti-semitism. He suggested that Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith, who oversees both the documents case and the January 6 investigation, had once had a "different name," another appeal to xenophobia and bigotry.

These are the two alternatives presented by the corporate-controlled two-party system: a Republican Party heading rapidly towards fascism, and a Democratic Party which is focused on the imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine and escalating tensions with China, in both cases risking the eruption of a nuclear world war.



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