

Trump found liable in sexual assault case

Patrick Martin
10 May 2023

In a verdict returned Tuesday after less than three hours of deliberation, a New York jury found ex-President Donald Trump liable for sexual abuse and defamation of E. Jean Carroll nearly 30 years ago. The jury ordered him to pay \$5 million in damages to the now-retired magazine columnist.

Carroll accused Trump of raping her in a changing room at Bergdorf Goodman, one of Manhattan's leading department stores. She described the attack to several friends at the time, but did not report it to the police or make it public in any way. Two of those friends testified at the trial.

Judge Lewis Kaplan instructed the jury as to three possible forms of battery on which they could convict Trump if they found the preponderance of evidence favored Ms. Carroll: rape, sexual abuse and forcible touching. The jury chose the second charge, which involves forcible sexual touching, with six men and three women approving that unanimously.

Carroll's lawsuit was only possible, given the long period of time since the event, because of a recently passed New York state law, the Adult Survivors Act, which gave those subjected to sexual assault as adults a one-year window to file suits over offenses for which the statute of limitations has expired. The law does not permit criminal charges to be brought against alleged perpetrators, so Trump faces no criminal liability.

The verdict was not surprising because of Trump's decision not to put on a defense case. His defense attorneys carried out aggressive cross-examination of Carroll and other witnesses for the plaintiff, but they called no witnesses of their own to rebut her claims.

Meanwhile, Trump kept up a steady flow of vitriolic comments on social media, which he continued after the jury returned its verdict, claiming that he did not even know who Carroll was and had no recollection of any encounter with her.

He made a similar blanket denial in a sworn

deposition taken by Carroll's attorney. Portions of the deposition, made public recently, featured a typically disgusting comment by Trump reaffirming the position he took in the notorious "Access Hollywood" tape, released during the 2016 election campaign, in which he boasted of his ability, as a "star," to grab women by their genitals without any consequences.

While the corporate media has focused entirely on the salacious details of the lawsuit, and some columnists, particularly at the *New York Times*, have sought to use it to revive the flagging #MeToo campaign, the case has a wider significance. It is serving as a weapon for the Democratic Party and its media allies in the vicious struggle within the US ruling class that has steadily intensified ever since Trump first won the Republican presidential nomination in 2016.

The Democrats have consistently refused to conduct a struggle against Trump for mass social and political crimes ranging from attacks on immigrants, as in the separation of children from their parents, to the attempted political coup of January 6, 2021, when he sought to overturn the outcome of the 2020 election, mobilizing his fascist supporters in a violent assault on Congress. More than two years after the attack on the Capitol, the chief instigators still walk free and face no criminal charges.

That said, there is no argument about the reality of Trump's crude and brutal treatment of women. This is underscored by the speed with which the jury brought back a unanimous verdict, including one juror whom Carroll's lawyers tried unsuccessfully to disqualify because he regularly listens to ultra-right podcasts.

But sex scandals are not the method for a genuine struggle against Trump and his effort to build a fascist movement in America. They are invariably the hallmark of a right-wing effort to stampede the population and pollute public consciousness with the most degraded and disgusting material.

It is noteworthy in this context that one of those who reportedly influenced Carroll to initiate her lawsuit was the attorney George Conway, one of the group of right-wing lawyers who leveraged the Paula Jones lawsuit to construct a perjury trap for President Bill Clinton, leading to his impeachment in 1998 for lying about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

Conway has turned against Trump after initially supporting him, but the method of legal provocation lives on, turned against the Republican ex-president rather than the Democratic president.

Sexual assault is not what motivates the struggle in the ruling class, which focuses entirely on issues of foreign policy. From 2016 on, the Democrats have attacked Trump for allegedly being too soft on Russia, going so far as to instigate the Mueller special counsel investigation into charges that Trump was acting in collusion with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A year after the Mueller probe ended in failure, the first impeachment of Trump was approved by the House of Representatives, under Democratic control, over his temporarily blocking arms shipments to Ukraine in the summer of 2019, an action that undermined the bipartisan policy of building up the Ukrainian military for an impending war with Russia.

With the outbreak of the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, after the imperialist powers successfully provoked a Russian invasion, the whole foreign policy of Washington depends on the prosecution of this war to ultimate success. This is openly defined by think tank strategists and media commentators as the destruction of the Russian military, the ouster of Putin, and the break-up of Russia into multiple successor states, easily manipulated by the West.

Trump has expressed considerable skepticism and even outright opposition to the war, from a right-wing nationalist standpoint. At the same time, he promises to build up the American military and use it aggressively, perhaps directly and immediately, against China, which is also the ultimate target of the Democrats and Biden.

Whatever the outcome of the internecine warfare within the ruling elite, it will not be determined by the facts of one or another sexual or financial transgression by the former president.

Trump seeks to return to power by mobilizing a fascist movement and overthrowing what remains of democratic forms of rule in America, as he

demonstrated in the attack on Congress on January 6, 2021.

His opponents in the Democratic Party—and a dwindling section of the Republican Party—disagree with Trump's methods but share his basic goal: the defense of American capitalism, both at home and abroad.

Rather than representing some sort of advance for women's rights or democratic rights, the verdict in the E. Jean Carroll lawsuit is another skirmish in this ongoing conflict.

The working class must resolutely oppose both factions of the ruling class—Trump and his fascist acolytes on the one side and the Democrats on the other, who remain the preferred party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus.

In that context, it is worth pointing out that President Joe Biden is traveling to New York City one day after the verdict against Trump. After making remarks on the debt ceiling crisis at a public event in the suburbs, he will go to Manhattan for two fundraisers with Wall Street backers, seeking to raise millions more for his reelection campaign.

As for Trump, he will likely raise more in campaign contributions over the next few days than the entire \$5 million awarded by the jury to Ms. Carroll.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact