

The indictment of Trump and the threat of fascism in America

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Former President Donald Trump was indicted and arraigned this week on four felony charges stemming from his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, which culminated in the mob attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

The prosecution, conviction and imprisonment of the former president for seeking to overthrow the Constitution and establish a dictatorship are fully justified. But even if Trump were to go to prison, rather than returning to the White House in 2024, that would not put an end to the growing threat of fascist violence, world war and authoritarian rule.

These dangers do not arise from the deranged ego of the billionaire real estate con man but from the insoluble historical contradictions of American and world capitalism.

The leading outlets of the corporate media are seeking to spread complacency about the Trump indictment—the third felony criminal case brought against the former president—celebrating it as proof that the political institutions of capitalist America have survived his onslaught.

The *New York Times*, which sets the trend, wrote in an editorial Wednesday that the prosecution of Trump “demonstrates, yet again, that the rule of law in America applies to everyone, even when the defendant was the country’s highest-ranking official.”

It concluded: “A former president is now being charged with extreme abuse of office and will eventually be judged by a jury. Mr. Trump tried to overturn the nation’s constitutional system and the rule of law. That system survived his attacks and will now hold him to account for that damage.”

This is an effort to drug public opinion with an overdose of grade-school illusions in American democracy, disguising both the class character of the American government and the intensification of the social, economic and political crisis of American capitalism.

To begin with, the outcome of the legal process against Trump is hardly assured, despite self-deluded exercises in gloating. MSNBC devoted an entire panel discussion to speculation about what prison arrangements could be made for Trump that would not conflict with the lifetime Secret Service protection provided for all ex-presidents.

Trump remains the Republican frontrunner, and if he wins the presidential election—entirely possible thanks to the bankrupt,

reactionary and militaristic policies of the Biden administration—he would reenter the White House and once again have control over the Department of Justice and any federal case against himself.

If Trump should fall by the wayside, there are plenty of equally vicious and anti-democratic replacements in the Republican Party. His leading challenger, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, has already mounted a frontal assault on democratic rights, public education, and efforts to mitigate the coronavirus pandemic in his own state. He boasted Wednesday that if he were to win the presidency, he would “start slitting throats on day one.” This was not just a metaphor but a grisly threat.

Nor does the reelection of President Joe Biden offer any respite from the ongoing attacks on jobs, living standards and democratic rights. Biden hails from that faction of the US ruling elite that seeks to rely on the trade unions to suppress the class struggle and enforce its attacks on working people. This corporatist program is part of the effort to subordinate American society to the imperialist war drive, now focused on the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, while the build-up continues for a war against China over Taiwan, the South China Sea or some other flashpoint.

The presentation of the case against Trump, in both the special counsel’s 45-page indictment and in the corporate media, amounts to a cover-up of the real dangers. The *Times* editorial argues, paraphrasing the indictment, that the “criminal scheme” began “on November 14, 2020, when Mr. Trump turned to Rudy Giuliani (acknowledged by his lawyer to be ‘co-conspirator 1’) to challenge the results in the swing state of Arizona, which Mr. Trump had lost.”

This is a whitewash both of Trump and his most powerful “co-conspirators,” unmentioned in the indictment—the officials in the military-intelligence apparatus on whom Trump was relying to carry out his plans to establish a dictatorial regime. As early as October 2019, Trump had declared his intention to defy any election defeat, and this became a constant drumbeat during the summer and fall of the 2020 election campaign. Even Democratic candidate Biden admitted in June 2020, as something of an aside, that his greatest fear was that Trump would refuse to accept the results of the election.

That same month, Trump made his first stab at outright dictatorship, proposing to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 against the mass protests against police violence that swept the country in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Another indicator of the danger of political violence came in October 2020, with the arrest of 14 fascist thugs, who were plotting to kidnap and murder the Democratic Governor of Michigan Gretchen Whitmer and had conducted surveillance on her vacation home, tested bombs and plotted escape routes. The group first came together in response to protests inspired by Trump earlier in the year against limited COVID-19 lockdowns. (He called on supporters to “liberate” Michigan from Whitmer’s supposed tyranny.)

In the weeks leading up to Election Day, with the polls pointing to a Biden victory, it was well known that Trump would not accept defeat. The *World Socialist Web Site* published warning after warning of the preparations for a post-election coup. One example of many such warnings came on September 24, 2020:

Trump is not running an election campaign. He is setting into motion a plot to establish a presidential dictatorship. This is a continuation of the entire conspiracy initiated with his June 1 speech threatening to invoke the Insurrection Act and deploy the military against domestic protests.

There is a staggering contrast between the ruthlessness with which Trump and his co-conspirators are implementing their plans and the fecklessness and cowardice of the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate, Joe Biden. Even as Trump is planning to stack the Supreme Court to facilitate his illegal seizure of power, the Democrats have declared that there is nothing that can be done to stop Trump’s appointment of another justice before the November election.” (Trump’s coup d’état election, by David North and Joseph Kishore)

Throughout the whole process, the Democratic Party did everything it could to cover up the significance of what was happening, even when leading members of its own party, like Whitmer, were targeted for assassination. No effort was made to alert the American people, let alone mobilize opposition, to a coup. On the day of the coup, the Democrats sat by and did nothing as it unfolded, with Biden even calling on the coup plotter-in-chief, Donald Trump, to address the country on national television.

Over the past two-and-a-half years, the Democrats have avoided any serious effort to expose what happened on January 6 and the social and political forces behind it. The Biden

administration’s main priority has been to forge a bipartisan agreement with his “colleagues” in the Republican Party—who backed the coup—on the basis of war.

Biden himself has said as little about the coup as he could and nothing about the indictment since it was handed down. Trump plans to make his entire election campaign a referendum on the charges, but Biden wants it to be a non-issue.

The *Times* wrote in an article published Thursday, “Biden campaign officials and allies believe they can focus on topics with a more direct impact on the lives of voters—economic issues, abortion access and extreme weather—without explicitly addressing Mr. Trump’s issues.”

That is, the Democrats plan to run a campaign based on their standard and threadbare lies, while “Mr. Trump’s issues”—that is, the staggering crisis of American democracy--will be ignored to the extent possible. This is because the Democrats, a part of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, are far more concerned about defending the capitalist state, prosecuting war and suppressing working class opposition than they are about the growth of fascism.

In 1929, Leon Trotsky wrote of the decay of capitalist democracy under the impact of the gathering economic crisis and stormy class struggles:

By analogy with electrical engineering, democracy might be defined as a system of safety switches and circuit breakers for protection against currents overloaded by the national or social struggle. No period of human history has been—even remotely—so overcharged with antagonisms such as ours. ... Under the impact of class and international contradictions that are too highly charged, the safety switches of democracy either burn out or explode. That is what the short circuit of dictatorship represents. (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1929, “Is Parliamentary Democracy Likely to Replace the Soviets?”* pp. 52-57.)

The danger of dictatorship does not come from the degraded personality of Donald Trump. It comes from the social and class tensions ripping apart American society. Only the intervention of the working class on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program can provide an alternative.



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