

Crisis looms over 2024 election as Maine becomes second state to rule Trump off the ballot

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29 December 2023

The decision of Maine's secretary of state that Donald Trump cannot appear on the presidential primary ballot is part of an unfolding and unprecedented political crisis in the United States. Maine becomes the second US state to declare that Trump is ineligible to return to the White House because of his role in the January 6, 2021 insurrection on Capitol Hill, which sought to overturn the outcome of the 2020 election.

The Maine action, announced Thursday, follows the decision of the Colorado state Supreme Court, which ruled December 19 that Trump had violated his oath of office by mobilizing his supporters and unleashing them against Congress. He sought to disrupt the official certification of the Electoral College vote, won by Democrat Joe Biden by a margin of 306-232. Biden won the popular vote by more than 7 million.

Section Three of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution declares anyone ineligible to hold office who has previously sworn an oath to uphold the Constitution and then violated it. The Colorado court found that Trump clearly did so on January 6. The 34-page decision issued by Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, a Democrat, closely tracks the Colorado ruling and cites it repeatedly.

Bellows writes:

I am mindful that no secretary of state has ever deprived a presidential candidate of ballot access based on Section 3 of the 14th Amendment. I am also mindful, however, that no presidential candidate has ever before engaged in insurrection.

Court suits and other legal and administrative proceedings aiming to prevent Trump from appearing on the ballot are underway in more than a dozen states, according to press tabulations. This week, the Wisconsin Elections

Commission recused itself from hearing a suit against placing Trump on the ballot, while the California secretary of state declined to remove him from the ballot. In both states the issue will now be taken up in the courts.

Trump has yet to defeat a single challenge on the basis of the substance of the issues. Those courts and state election authorities that have rejected challenges to his ballot status—the majority so far—have done so exclusively on procedural grounds, mainly based on findings that the issue must be decided in the federal courts, not by the states.

Such findings, and the conflicting decisions in various states, mean that the issue will inevitably find its way to the US Supreme Court, which is dominated by Republican appointees, including three out of nine who owe their positions to Trump himself. The very fact that the highest US court must step in to decide who can be on the presidential ballot is an indication of the extremity of the political crisis.

The normal political processes of American capitalism—congressional elections every two years, presidential elections every four years, political campaigns run by the two capitalist parties and declared legitimate by their allies in the corporate media—are breaking down. They can no longer contain the political tensions erupting in the United States, whose source is not the personality of Trump, but far deeper social and historical processes.

The 2020 election saw the collapse of the “peaceful transfer of power” and not just on January 6. Two weeks later, Biden was sworn in to the presidency with Washington an armed camp and his predecessor skulking out the back door of the White House, refusing to attend the inauguration ceremony, while continuing to promote his baseless claims of a “stolen election.”

The 2024 election promises to start where 2020 left off, with the legitimacy of the vote being questioned from the very beginning. Numerous states, mostly those won by Biden in 2020, are seeing serious legal challenges to Trump

being on the ballot. Republican officials in states carried by Trump in 2020 are already suggesting that Biden be kept off the ballot in their states if the challenges to Trump are upheld.

In the course of 2020, there were armed attacks by far-right Trump supporters on capitol buildings in Michigan and other states, ostensibly in opposition to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, that were encouraged and incited by then-President Trump. What will such fascists be capable of in a state that bars their *Führer* from the presidential ballot? Will it even be possible to hold a presidential election in November 2024?

The Maine decision underscores the correctness of the warning made by the WSWS after the Colorado decision:

The potential divide along state lines, on such a basic question as which candidate will be allowed on the ballot, raises the prospect that the outcome of the 2024 election will be rejected in large parts of the country, not simply as politically unwelcome, but as illegal and unconstitutional. The breakup of the United States is directly posed.

Trump's spokesmen and apologists have responded to the actions in Colorado and Maine by blasting "election interference" and claiming his exclusion from the ballot is an attack on the democratic rights of American voters. This is cynical in the extreme coming from a candidate and a party that sought to overturn the votes of 81 million Americans in 2020 and keep Trump in the White House as president-dictator.

Nor does the Democratic Party have any claim to be defending democracy against Trump's attacks. The Democrats slow-walked the prosecution of Trump for the events of January 6, and Biden declared that his political goal was to maintain a strong Republican Party even as the GOP openly embraced Trump and his increasingly fascistic appeals. This was in pursuit of bipartisan support for his principal priority—the preparation and instigation of the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

The conflict within the state is a ferocious struggle within the ruling class in which there is no democratic faction. Trump and the Republicans represent a fascist tendency, as Trump channels the ravings of Adolf Hitler, only with immigrants and Muslims substituted for Jews as his scapegoats and targets.

The Democrats openly embrace the Israeli genocide in Gaza, which they are arming, financing and directing, combining it with a mounting witch hunt against the mass

popular opposition that the Gaza slaughter is provoking among students, youth and working people. They would like to keep the conflict within the state confined within some sort of constitutional system, largely because they fear the revolutionary consequences of the breakdown of the two-party system.

Both of these parties are mortally dangerous to the working class.

The critical issue for workers and youth is to grasp the connection between the domestic crisis wracking American capitalism and its increasingly reckless and criminal foreign policy. There is a reciprocal relationship between the two.

On the one hand, there is a continual effort on the part of the ruling class to use the explosion of militarism abroad to somehow divert attention from and contain the internal crisis, which is rooted in the deep-going social polarization between a tiny elite of super-rich parasites and the vast majority of working people struggling to survive.

On the other hand, the growth of militarism reacts back on the political structures of the United States, which are unable to handle the combined impact of war abroad and mounting social tensions at home. War only exacerbates the domestic social tensions, as the ruling class seeks to impose the full cost of record military budgets on the working class through the gutting of what remains of social benefits. The logic of imperialist war is the suppression of domestic opposition and the abolition of democratic rights.

The crisis of American capitalism has now become the most destabilizing factor in world politics. Just as American economic supremacy, once the basis of the post-World War II boom, is long gone, American political stability, once taken for granted as the model for the so-called "free world," is a thing of the past.

The critical and urgent issue is the independent intervention of the working class, which must oppose both reactionary factions of the financial aristocracy and their political parties. The working class must defend democratic rights and oppose imperialist war through its mass, independent industrial and political mobilization on the basis of a socialist program.



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