

The hush money trial of Donald Trump and the crisis of class rule in America

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With the selection of a jury, the criminal trial of former President Donald Trump in New York City begins in earnest. Opening statements could come as soon as Monday.

Trump is charged with violating federal and state laws in connection with his alleged payoff of porn actress Stormy Daniels to keep her from going public about a sexual encounter between the two. The prosecution alleges violations of federal election laws and state laws by the then-Republican presidential candidate just weeks before the 2016 election.

Of the numerous criminal cases against Trump, the hush money case is the only one that has come to trial. When compared to the federal case relating to the attempted coup of January 6, 2021, the state case concerning Trump's effort to overthrow the election result in Georgia, and even the criminal case over Trump's illegal mishandling of classified documents, the New York hush money case is analogous to the prosecution of Al Capone for tax evasion.

It comes after four years of a feckless response by the Democratic Party and Biden to a massive state conspiracy to overthrow the Constitution. And it follows by only four days the indications from the right-wing majority on the Supreme Court that it is preparing to throw out many of the charges against those who participated in the violent assault on the US Capitol.

The Biden administration and the Democratic Party have no interest in holding Trump to account criminally for his crimes against democratic rights because to do so would expose the broad—and continuing—support within substantial sections of the ruling class and the state apparatus for the attempted coup, further undermining the two-party political monopoly in the US.

All of this, however, does not lessen the far-reaching significance of the fact that, for the first time in American history, a former president is being criminally prosecuted.

The opening of the trial marks a new stage in an intense crisis at the highest levels of the American state that has been building for 50 years.

This August will mark the 50th anniversary of the resignation of Richard Nixon in 1974 as a result of the crisis stemming from his campaign's break-in at the Watergate headquarters of the Democratic National Committee.

Establishing a pattern that would persist in the following decades, Nixon's crimes against democratic procedures and his refusal to abide by the constitutional framework were bound up with deep divisions within the ruling class over foreign policy. At that time, a faction within the Democratic Party opposed a continuation of the massively unpopular imperialist war in Vietnam and demanded a negotiated settlement.

Nevertheless, the ruling class took extreme measures to prevent Nixon's criminal prosecution. Gerald Ford's pardon of Nixon undermined Ford's own reelection bid in 1976.

Ford's successor, Jimmy Carter, ended up a one-term president under conditions of a massive upsurge of class struggle, including the record 111-day national coal miners' strike. What sealed Carter's demise was the 1979 Iranian revolution and seizure of US hostages.

Ronald Reagan's second term was undermined by the eruption of the Iran-Contra crisis. Once again, the pursuit of a counterrevolutionary and criminal foreign policy—in this case, the dirty CIA contra war against Nicaragua—involved the violation of US laws in the form of a secret operation run from the basement of the White House. Iran-Contra could have brought down the Reagan administration, but the Democrats decided to play down the crimes and keep Reagan in power.

By the time of the election of Bill Clinton in 1992, the increasingly fascistic Republican Party was unwilling to accept the loss of an election. The impeachment of

Clinton at the end of 1998 was an attempt to utilize a consensual sexual relationship to remove a twice-elected president from office.

Two years later, the Supreme Court halted vote-counting in Florida in order to steal the election for George W. Bush, the loser of the popular vote. Democrat Al Gore and his party passively accepted the theft of the election, fearing the consequences of a challenge for the stability of the two-party system.

The 2000 crisis marked the first direct suppression of votes in a presidential election. Justice Antonin Scalia argued in a concurring opinion in support of the five-to-four ruling in *Bush v. Gore* that the American people do not have a constitutional right to elect the president.

Barack Obama came to power at the height of the sub-prime mortgage financial collapse and presided over a multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street. This was followed by new wars and military interventions in the Middle East, a program of targeted assassinations, including of American citizens, and the preparation for war against Russia over Ukraine in the form of the US-backed far-right Maidan coup of 2014.

Trump took office in 2016 despite losing the popular vote to Hillary Clinton. From the outset, the Democrats focused their opposition on Trump's failure to back the preparations for war against Russia, making his delay in military aid to Kiev the basis for Trump's first impeachment in December 2019. The second impeachment, in the immediate aftermath of January 6, was a half-hearted affair aimed at giving the Democrats the appearance of holding the exiting president to account, even as the incoming president, Biden, was calling for bipartisan unity and a "strong Republican Party."

Now, in the current trial in New York, factions of the ruling class aligned with the Democratic Party are seeking to use a sex scandal and relatively minor legal violations to settle accounts with Trump. They are not acting in response to Trump's assault on democratic rights or his reactionary social policies, but because on critical issues of foreign policy—the NATO alliance, the war against Russia over Ukraine—they do not consider Trump a trustworthy steward of US imperialist interests.

The trial could result in a hung jury, an acquittal, which could conceivably strengthen Trump, or a conviction. In the latter case, the trial will be widely seen as an attempt by the Democrats to preempt the election and its result will further delegitimize the existing political setup. Trump may well continue his campaign, rallying support as a political martyr. But even if a conviction forced the

withdrawal of his candidacy, the fascistic Republican Party would find a replacement no less reactionary.

In no case, however, will the outcome of the trial lessen the intensity of the political crisis or the escalation of war abroad and political reaction at home.

Indeed, jury selection in the Manhattan courtroom unfolded at the same time that Democratic Mayor Eric Adams, with the full backing of Biden, was unleashing the NYPD to carry out the mass arrest of students peacefully protesting only miles away at Columbia University against the genocide in Gaza and the complicity of the university.

The significance of the trial and the necessary political response of the working class have been clearly explained by Joseph Kishore, the presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party. In a statement posted on Twitter/X, Kishore wrote:

In the conflict between the Democrats and Republicans there is no progressive or democratic faction. The working class must not be a mere bystander in this crisis. Not by looking to any faction of the state, but by developing an independent political movement of the working class against the entire capitalist system—in this way a path forward can be forged.

Trump is a manifestation of the political putrefaction of the ruling class, not its cause. The intense divisions within the ruling class open up an opportunity for the working class to intervene against the entire reactionary political framework and the capitalist system it upholds. A positive outcome depends above all on the independent intervention of the working class on the basis of the fight for political power and socialism.



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