

The Democratic Party crisis and the civil war election

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Following the June 27 debate between President Joe Biden and Donald Trump, and just four months before the US presidential election, there are growing calls within the political establishment and media for Biden to step down as the Democratic Party candidate and perhaps even resign from office.

On Sunday, Democratic House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries convened an online conference with ranking committee members. It was reported that Reps. Jerry Nadler (New York–Judiciary Committee), Mark Takano (California–Veterans’ Affairs Committee), Don Beyer (Virginia–Administration Committee) and Adam Smith (Washington–Armed Services Committee) called on Biden to withdraw.

Speaking on “Meet the Press,” California Democratic Representative Adam Schiff observed that Biden’s interview with ABC’s George Stephanopoulos on Friday “didn’t put concerns to rest.” Virginia Senator Mark Warner is assembling a group of senators with the aim of forcing Biden out of the race. The role of Schiff, the former chair of the House Intelligence Committee, and Warner, the current chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, underscores the close involvement of the intelligence agencies in these discussions.

Whether or not Biden drops out of the presidential race, a prospect that seems increasingly likely, a substantial section of the ruling class has clearly lost confidence in him.

Biden’s performance in the debate has precipitated these maneuvers, but more fundamental issues are at stake. Indeed, the fact that Biden’s cognitive capacity is significantly impaired has been known for some time. The debate fiasco, however, made impossible the continued public denial of this fact.

The concerns within factions of the ruling class aligned with the Democrats that Biden will lose in a contest with Trump are motivated by several factors.

There are, first of all, the implications for US foreign policy. This week, the heads of state of the NATO powers are meeting in Washington D.C. to plot the next stage of escalation in the war against Russia, including preparations for the direct deployment of thousands of NATO troops. The large contingent of “CIA Democrats” that function within Congress

as direct agents of the military and intelligence apparatus do not trust Trump and fear that his erratic conduct of foreign policy may disrupt the far-advanced war plans of American imperialism in Ukraine, as well as in the Middle and Far East.

In statements defending his position as the Democrats’ candidate, Biden has stressed this issue. He boasted to Stephanopoulos, “I’m the guy that put NATO together, the future. No one thought I could expand it. I’m the guy that shut Putin down. No one thought it could happen. I’m the guy that put together a South Pacific initiative with [the] AUKUS [military alliance].”

A second and even more fundamental consideration within the ruling class is the consequences of a Trump victory for the social and political stability of the United States.

Last week’s Supreme Court decision in *Trump v. United States* declared the president immune from prosecution for any crime carried out under the cover of an “official” act. This not only legitimizes Trump’s January 6 coup, it places the president above the law and transforms the chief executive and “commander-in-chief” into a dictator.

As the dissenting judges in the case themselves noted, the ruling provides immunity for presidential activities ranging from the assassination of political opponents to staging a military coup. This unprecedented decision heralds a breakdown of constitutional arrangements that regulate the whole state-federal structure of the country.

In its analysis of the Supreme Court ruling, the WSWS characterized it as the Counter-Revolution of July 1, 2024, noting, “A permanent state of dictatorial rule surrounds the occupant of the White House, akin to the authority the fascist states of the last century concentrated in Mussolini and Hitler.”

The ruling, which effectively overturned the Constitution and core democratic principles advanced by the American Revolution and Civil War, has exacerbated the highly unstable social and political conditions existing in the United States. There is an awareness within sections of the ruling class that the coming to power of Trump under these conditions will fuel explosive social discontent and a process of irreversible political radicalization.

While the media has largely dropped reference to the ruling from its coverage, the noted Princeton University historian

Sean Wilentz, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, underscored its far-reaching significance. The decision, Wilentz wrote,

has radically changed the very structure of American government, paving the way for MAGA authoritarianism just as the Taney Court tried to pave the way for enshrining the Slave Power. All of which makes *Trump v. United States* the *Dred Scott* of our time.

Dred Scott is a reference to the 1857 Supreme Court ruling delivered by Chief Justice Roger Taney that entrenched the “slave power” and made civil war all but inevitable. While Wilentz does not say so explicitly, the implications are clear: The United States is on the verge of a new civil war.

It is not just a question of the characteristics of Trump or the particular composition of the Supreme Court, which has implemented a series of deeply reactionary decisions that undermine core democratic principles. It is a culmination of a decades-long process that has accelerated over the past quarter century.

At the time of the theft of the 2000 elections, in a lecture titled “Lessons from history: The 2000 elections and the new ‘irrepressible conflict’,” WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North noted that a Supreme Court decision to hand the election to Bush would reveal “how far the American ruling class is prepared to go in breaking with traditional bourgeois-democratic and constitutional norms.” North asked,

Is it prepared to sanction ballot fraud and the suppression of votes and install in the White House a candidate who has attained that office through blatantly illegal and anti-democratic methods?

A substantial section of the bourgeoisie, and perhaps even a majority of the US Supreme Court, is prepared to do just that. There has been a dramatic erosion of support within the ruling elites for the traditional forms of bourgeois democracy in the United States.

Nine days later, the majority of the Supreme Court issued its infamous *Bush v. Gore* decision, stealing the election and handing power to Bush, which Gore and the Democratic Party accepted. The 2000 elections were followed by an unending and expanding attack on democratic rights, under both Democrats and Republicans, which involved unlimited domestic spying, the sanctioning of torture as state policy, indefinite detention without due process and drone assassination, including of US citizens.

The breakdown of democratic forms of rule has two fundamental underlying objective causes: 1) unending and escalating war; and 2) the extreme growth of social inequality.

The 2000 election was followed by the “War on Terror,” including the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq under Bush and a series of wars throughout the Middle East under Obama, which has now metastasized into an open conflict between the NATO powers and Russia. The Biden administration and American imperialism have fully backed genocide in Gaza, which, according to a study published Friday in *The Lancet*, has led to the deaths of roughly 186,000 people, or nearly 8 percent of the total population.

The capitalist oligarchy controls the entire state apparatus, which exists as a permanent conspiracy against the interests of the vast majority of the population, the working class. In the media commentary over Biden’s fate, there are continuous references to the “donors,” i.e., the corporate-financial oligarchs who funnel billions of dollars into the campaign coffers of both the Democrats and Republicans. It is taken as a matter of course that the final decision will be made by the handful of billionaires who finance the campaigns of both capitalist parties.

Commenting on the deepening crisis of American democracy, Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Joseph Kishore wrote on X:

For the working class, the critical question is to intervene in the crisis with its own program. Democracy cannot be preserved within the framework of capitalism. The defense and expansion of democratic rights require the expropriation of the capitalist oligarchs, an end to the dictatorship of the corporate and financial elite, the establishment of a workers’ state, in the US and internationally, and the socialist reorganization of social and economic life.

On July 24, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party will host a demonstration and meeting in Washington D.C. coinciding with the address of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Congress. The purpose of this event is to build a movement in the working class against the genocide in Gaza, imperialism and capitalism, and in defense of democratic rights. We urge our readers and supporters to make plans to attend and help build the demonstration by filling out the form below.



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