

Trump's January 6 pardons: The boss of the attempted coup lets loose his fascist thugs

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In an action Monday night that openly encourages and incites violence against all those who oppose his fascist policies, President Donald Trump pardoned or commuted the sentences of every participant in the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Those whom Trump hails as the “J6 hostages” came to the Capitol at his command four years ago, armed with a variety of weapons and with access to stockpiles of guns and ammunition. They rampaged through congressional offices seeking to seize and execute anyone who stood in Trump’s way and erected a gallows to hang the US vice president.

Ahead of the 2020 presidential election, Trump had for months been planning what the WSWs characterized in September 2020 as a “coup d’état ... setting into motion a plot to establish a presidential dictatorship.”

The majority of Republican members of Congress were active participants in the plot, voting to stop the certification of the election results, while the Democrats stood by and took no action. Biden actually appealed for Trump to go on national television as it was happening.

Congressional Republican leaders, and even Trump’s own Vice President JD Vance, seemed caught off guard by the sweeping character of the pardons, since they had been declaring for weeks that “of course” anyone convicted of violence against the Capitol Police had to be punished. It is logical to conclude that, having taken the measure of the spinelessness of his nominal opponents in the Democratic Party, who collaborated in his inauguration without the slightest dissent, Trump decided to give the maximum encouragement to his fascist shock troops.

Within hours, OathKeepers founder-leader Stewart Rhodes, his 18-year prison term commuted, was

meeting with Republican congressmen to discuss additional measures to free other fascist thugs whose crimes were committed on days other than January 6 and so were not covered by the initial Trump pardon.

Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio was freed from his 22-year prison sentence, imposed for his joint role with Rhodes as the principal organizers of the paramilitary groups that spearheaded the attack on the Capitol.

It was the Proud Boys to whom Trump gave the direction, during a debate with Biden in 2020, to “stand back and stand by.” These are the forces Trump summoned to Washington on January 6, with the promise that it “will be wild.” With his mass pardon, Trump has effectively added a new instruction: “Do your worst. I will protect you.”

Trump has a clear understanding of the impotence and cowardice of the Democratic Party establishment and its apologists in the corporate media and the pseudo-left groups.

The Democratic Party spent years covering up the scale of what happened and protecting the Republican participants in the conspiracy. Their mantra was, as Biden put it after the coup, “We need a strong Republican Party.”

The Biden administration blocked any serious investigation into the attack on the Capitol, allowing Trump and his co-conspirators in the Republican Party and the military-intelligence apparatus to resume their assault on democracy while the Justice Department focused its attention solely on the lowest-level perpetrators.

While covering up the scale of the coup attempt, the Democrats spent the next four years doing the bidding of major US corporations and waging war all over the world: policies that made them rightly despised.

The result is that the president who organized the

January 6 coup, in an attempt to remain in office as an unelected dictator in defiance of the massive vote against him in the 2020 elections, has been able to reenter the White House not by violent attack but by default.

The contrast in the use of the presidential power on January 20 was strikingly described by journalist Jeffrey Toobin, one of a handful of bourgeois commentators to write critically of the actions of both Biden and Trump. Biden pardoned his immediate family and close political allies on the January 6 committee that failed to investigate the coup, to protect them against retaliation. Trump pardoned his cohorts and minions, to prepare a new assault. Toobin wrote, “Mr. Biden played defense, Mr. Trump offense.”

That being said, it is not the Democratic Party and the corporate media which will have the final word on the prospects of the Trump administration. It is the working class, both in the United States and internationally. There is no doubt that the violence and state repression being unleashed in America will come as a tremendous political shock. The working class must be warned and must think through its response soberly.

Trump commands no great well of popular support. He won the 2024 election with 49.8 percent of the popular vote, compared to 48.3 percent for Democrat Kamala Harris. His policies are even more unpopular, with two-thirds of those responding to recent surveys opposing the pardon of the January 6 criminals.

Whatever the initial confusion prompted by Trump’s anti-immigrant racism, which seeks to divert working class anger over inflation, unemployment and deteriorating social conditions into a blind alley, millions of working people will be horrified by the impending police-military assault on their neighbors, co-workers and friends. A popular reckoning with Trump is inevitable.

The decisive question is for workers to recognize that the source of the assault on democratic rights is not merely the rabid conceptions of the fascist president but the crisis of the world capitalist system. As the WSWS wrote earlier this week, “Trump represents the quintessence of the American ruling class. His personal characteristics are a hideous expression of the main features of the oligarchy of billionaires whose wealth and power have swelled to unprecedented dimensions over the past four decades.”

The working class must advance an independent program of its own, based on a revolutionary socialist perspective, directed against the financial oligarchy as a whole, including both its political parties, the Democrats as much as the Republicans.



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