

Trump's first 7 days: The framework for presidential dictatorship

Socialist Equality Party (US)
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In the week since he took office, Donald Trump has wielded the power of the presidency to do what no president before him has ever attempted: overturn the Constitution and establish a dictatorship. Under the pretext of a non-existent “invasion” by immigrants, Trump has invoked wartime powers, claimed the authority to override acts of Congress and launched a campaign to terrorize the immigrant population of the country.

In just seven days, Trump has initiated the opening stages of a strategy that he and fascist aides like Stephen Miller and Tom Homan have been preparing for years. This includes:

Claiming presidential authority to strip citizenship from individuals born in the United States, in direct defiance of the Fourteenth Amendment and its guarantee of birthright citizenship, and in violation of the Constitutional separation of powers.

- Asserting that all non-citizens in the US—approximately 30 million people—have no First Amendment rights, making criticism of the government and its institutions grounds for deportation.

- Ordering the US Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to develop operational battle plans to suppress what he terms an “invasion,” granting the military authority with no geographic limitations within US borders.

- Directing the military-intelligence apparatus to prepare for the invocation of the Insurrection Act and Alien Enemies Act, setting the stage for formal martial law.

- Deputizing local police and the FBI to enforce immigration laws and deploying them to American cities like Newark, Chicago and elsewhere.

Chaining deportees to their chairs on repatriation flights to countries like Colombia and Brazil, acts reminiscent of the brutalization of “enemy combatants” in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

- Threatening criminal prosecution against state officials and private citizens who take lawful steps to protect or advise those targeted by his orders.

- Initiating a sweeping purge of federal agencies to remove any individuals deemed insufficiently loyal or likely to obstruct these authoritarian measures.

- Sparking a major international conflict with Colombia by threatening war-like measures in an effort to bully the country into accepting deportation flights.

The big lie: An immigrant “invasion”

The pseudo-legal pretext for these sweeping and authoritarian measures is Trump's declaration that mass migration constitutes an “invasion,” equating the movement of immigrants to a military attack on US soil by a foreign army. Using this fabricated emergency, Trump asserts that congressional laws regulating immigration are not binding but merely advisory, allowing him to claim unchecked executive authority to override

the Constitution and govern by decree.

The executive order titled “Protecting the American People Against Invasion” frames immigration as a dire threat to national security and public safety. It asserts, without evidence, that the previous administration “invited, administered, and oversaw an unprecedented flood of illegal immigration,” allowing millions of undocumented immigrants to cross the border or arrive by commercial flights, supposedly “in violation of longstanding Federal laws.” Immigrants, the order declares, “present significant threats to national security and public safety,” accusing them of committing “vile and heinous acts against innocent Americans” and engaging in “hostile activities, including espionage, economic espionage, and preparations for terror-related activities.”

To label the phenomenon of mass immigration an “invasion” is a flagrant lie and a declaration of war against the entire population. One in six people living in the United States is foreign-born, and the vast majority of Americans live, work and attend school alongside immigrants. According to the text of Trump's order, millions of immigrant schoolchildren, workers, parents and grandparents are deemed to have engaged in an act of war simply by “settling in American communities” and carrying out their everyday lives.

The declaration that immigration is an “invasion” clashes with the entire history of the country, which was founded by immigrants. If the present form of mass migration constitutes an “invasion,” then so was the migration of the British and Dutch in the 17th-18th centuries, the Germans and Irish in the mid-19th century, and the Italians and Eastern Europeans in the late 19th and early 20th. To base emergency rule in any country on the claim of an immigrant “invasion” would be reactionary to the extreme; in America it is a repudiation of its historical identity as “a nation of immigrants.”

The scale of this supposed “invasion,” another executive order asserts, necessitates the suspension of laws passed by Congress: “The Immigration and Nationality Act [INA] does not, however, occupy the Federal Government's field of authority to protect the sovereignty of the United States, particularly in times of emergency when entire provisions of the INA are rendered ineffective by operational constraints, such as when there is an ongoing invasion into the States.” This sweeping declaration asserts that the president's “inherent powers” override the legislative authority of Congress, effectively nullifying the constitutional separation of powers.

Criminalizing opposition to the administration

The right of all non-citizens to criticize the government or the presidency has been effectively suspended by a separate executive order titled “Protecting the United States from Foreign Terrorists.” The order

states:

The United States must ensure that admitted aliens and aliens otherwise already present in the United States do not bear hostile attitudes toward its citizens, culture, government, institutions, or founding principles, and do not advocate for, aid, or support designated foreign terrorists and other threats to our national security.

The order includes a demand that, within 30 days, the military-intelligence apparatus must

recommend *any actions necessary* to protect the American people from the actions of foreign nationals who have undermined or seek to undermine the fundamental constitutional rights of the American people, including, but not limited to, our Citizens' rights to freedom of speech and the free exercise of religion protected by the First Amendment, who preach or call for sectarian violence, the overthrow or replacement of the culture on which our constitutional Republic stands, or who provide aid, advocacy, or support for foreign terrorists. (Emphasis added)

This order is not only aimed at stripping the rights of immigrants—even those lawfully present in the United States. It also directs intelligence agencies to “identify and take appropriate action” to strip citizenship from Americans who advocate the “overthrow of the government.” This sweeping directive conflates political opposition with treason, effectively targeting anyone critical of the administration's policies. The orders as a whole use immigration as the spearhead for an assault on the rights of the population as a whole.

Already, right-wing Zionist organizations are demanding the deportation of students and academics who have protested the ongoing genocide in Gaza, a chilling preview of how such powers could be wielded to suppress dissent and stifle opposition to US imperialism.

Violating posse comitatus and the Fourteenth Amendment

The order demanding that the Pentagon draw up battle plans for deployment on US soil to engage in immigration enforcement reads:

No later than 10 days from the effective date of this order, deliver to the President a revision to the Unified Command Plan that assigns United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) the mission to seal the borders and maintain the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of the United States by repelling forms of invasion including unlawful mass migration, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and other criminal activities.

This directive raises the prospect that millions of unarmed immigrants could be classified not as civilians but as “enemy combatants.” If implemented, this would subject them to treatment governed not by the laws of the United States but by the laws of war, paving the way for

unprecedented repression and the militarization of domestic governance under the guise of defending “sovereignty.” It violates the common law principle of posse comitatus, where the military is prohibited from engaging in law enforcement operations on US soil.

The order rescinding birthright citizenship lays bare the fraudulent nature of Trump's claims that his policies are aimed at “protecting” American citizens. In reality, this order represents an unprecedented assault on constitutional rights and democratic principles. By attempting to arrogate the power to strip citizenship from individuals born on US soil—whose right to citizenship is explicitly guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment—Trump and his fascist advisers are carrying out a frontal assault on one of the foundational legal pillars of American democracy.

This executive order was enjoined last week by John Coughenour, a Reagan-appointed federal district court judge, who called the order “blatantly unconstitutional.” During a hearing in Seattle, Coughenour all but stated that the order was part of a plot to overturn the Constitution: “There are other times in world history where we look back and people of goodwill can say, ‘Where were the judges? Where were the lawyers?’”

While Coughenour's ruling temporarily halts the implementation of this draconian measure, the Trump administration has already filed an appeal, setting the stage for the order to be heard by the US Supreme Court, which is dominated by far-right justices. Even if the Court rules against Trump, it is an open question whether Trump will defy the order and require executive agencies to follow his directive to deny passports and other citizenship documentation to the US-born children of non-citizens.

American history contains many shameful instances of extraordinary violations of the rights of immigrants, including the Alien and Sedition Acts, Chinese exclusion, the Palmer Raids, the systematic exclusion of Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler, the Japanese-American internment, the crudely named “Operation Wetback” and the mass deportations of the past three decades. Trump often makes explicit political appeals to this tradition.

But the present assault on immigrants contains something new: Trump's crackdown is part of an effort to concentrate state power in the hands of the executive branch in a manner that is without precedent. Trump is picking up where he left off on January 6, 2021, when he attempted to overturn the results of the 2020 election and establish a presidential dictatorship by orchestrating an assault on Congress to stop the certification of the Electoral College. In the 2024 election campaign, he promised to rule as a “dictator on day one” and to “terminate” the Constitution. Now he is trying to implement those plans.

Trump's policies reflect the interests of a tiny financial elite, determined to solidify its dominance by tearing down the remaining democratic and social protections for the vast majority of the population. Democracy is incompatible with oligarchic rule. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has noted previously, Trump is not an interloper into the Garden of Eden of American politics. The protracted process of wealth concentration, facilitated over decades by both parties, has vomited up Trump and placed him back in the White House.

Collaborationist role of the Democratic Party

Trump is counting on the collaboration of the Democratic Party, which is already voting to confirm his cabinet nominees and force through his reactionary attacks on immigrants, as evidenced by the bipartisan passage of the Laken Riley Act last week, which requires mandatory detention for deportation of immigrants charged with crimes as minor as shoplifting. Above all, the Democrats are terrified that any serious challenge to Trump could spark a wave of social opposition that would threaten not only his

administration but the entire framework of capitalist rule.

The Democratic Party's capitulation is not an accident but a reflection of its role as a party of Wall Street and war. The continuity between Trump's first and second administrations—his efforts to invoke the Insurrection Act, suppress opposition and consolidate power in the executive branch—has been met not with alarm or resistance from the Democrats but with silence and complicity.

Even the *New York Times* acknowledged, in a column published Saturday, that unlike in 2017, "Few Democrats talk about impeachment or sustain their alarm over incipient fascism, even with Elon Musk possibly gesticulating like a Nazi. ... Democrats do not seem as anguished or animated by this Trump Restoration as they were by his ascension." This goes for longtime leading figures like Biden and Harris, as well as "progressives" like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who have been rewarded with prominent roles for their hard work trapping and suppressing left-wing opposition.

Trump's first week has produced a degree of bewilderment in the population. In the coming weeks and months, the rollout and execution of these orders will provoke immense opposition in a population that is more internationally interconnected and intermixed than ever before. Combined with orders to slash social spending, dismantle environmental protections, and eliminate taxes on the wealthy, this administration represents a direct war on the working class, not just in the United States but internationally.

Whether Trump succeeds in transforming the United States into a dictatorship will be determined through the unfolding class struggle. Already, reports of initial spontaneous protests led by workers and high school youth have begun to develop in places like California and Texas. The weeks and months ahead will produce immense outrage against the crimes of the Trump administration, but what is required first and foremost is a political program.

Build school, workplace and neighborhood committees to mobilize the population in defense of democracy!

The Socialist Equality Party (US) calls for the development of committees in neighborhoods, schools and workplaces to prepare, educate and organize workers and their families for the coming assault. Such committees will serve as hubs for the dissemination of information and as the platform for mobilizing the population against Trump's dictatorial efforts to break apart families and eviscerate democratic rights.

The committees will bring together teachers, students, parents, workers and concerned neighbors of all backgrounds to plan lawful public responses to attacks on members of the community under the principle: "An injury to one is an injury to all." Wherever they function, committees will strive to break down all efforts by the two big business parties and the trade union bureaucracies to divide workers along immigration status or national background. They will expose the xenophobic lies of the corporate media by waging a campaign of mass political education aimed at rendering the population "wide awake" to the threat against democracy.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) will provide advice and support to such committees and will be actively involved in fighting to build committees and link them across school, workplace and national boundaries in a powerful network of correspondence and collaboration. The IWA-RFC will strive to introduce into the struggles ahead a political program aimed at connecting the defense of immigrants to the fight to defend the basic democratic rights of all.

The IWA-RFC will advocate for a program based on the class struggle, which throughout American history has proven necessary to bring

together workers of all backgrounds to crush political backwardness and state repression. On this basis it will strive to transform the defense of immigrants into an offensive fight by the international working class against Trump and his source—the capitalist system.



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