

6 months of the Trump administration: The stench of fascism and political crisis

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The Trump administration reached its six-month mark Sunday, with the usual boasting from the White House about its unrivaled success, and equally bankrupt assessments in the corporate media, portraying Trump as a titan who has remade American political life. The truth is that this is a government characterized by dictatorial methods, militarist provocations and deep unpopularity. And it is plunging into a political crisis that could well trigger its collapse.

The eruption of the scandal over the deliberate cover-up of Trump's connections to billionaire speculator and convicted sex-trafficker Jeffrey Epstein—six years after Epstein's supposed suicide in a Manhattan prison cell—is not a passing matter. It rather resembles such scandals of the 20th century as the Stavisky Affair (1933-34) in France, and the Profumo Affair (1963) in Britain, which upended governments and brought about major shifts in the political life of each country.

It is worth reviewing these historical experiences, always understanding these were not matters of individual misconduct, whether sexual or financial, but revealed the deep-going corruption of an entire ruling class, leading to the discrediting of the entire bourgeois political order in France and the collapse of the Tory government in Britain. The Epstein scandal has even more far-reaching implications, since it is exposing the criminality of the ruling class in the United States, the center of world capitalism.

The Stavisky Affair took place as France staggered under the impact of the Great Depression and the coming to power of Hitler in Germany in 1933. Alexandre Stavisky was a Russian Jew, raised in France, who devised a method of financial swindling involving the issuing of worthless municipal bonds based on fraudulent collateral, including fake jewelry.

When his scheme began to be exposed, many officials of the Radical Socialist Party, the bourgeois party then in power in France, were implicated. But through rampant bribery and legal manipulation, Stavisky succeeded in postponing his trial for fraud 19 times over six years, amid growing public outrage. In January 1934, he was found dead of a gunshot wound, and his death ruled, à la Epstein, a suicide. Eyebrows were raised when some Paris newspapers pointed out that the bullet was fired from a distance that seemed to preclude a self-inflicted wound.

Only a month later, whipped up by antisemitic agitation over the Stavisky Affair, a gang of fascists attacked the French parliament and had to be driven off by police gunfire. The French prime minister resigned and a right-wing coalition came to power, a change of government which foreshadowed the ignominious collapse of France in the face of the Nazi invasion in June 1940.

Leon Trotsky wrote of the attempted fascist coup:

The French people for a long time thought that Fascism had nothing whatever to do with them. They had a republic in which all questions were dealt with by the sovereign people through the exercise of universal suffrage. But on February 6, 1934, several thousand Fascists and Royalists, armed with revolvers, clubs and razors, imposed upon the country the reactionary government of Doumergue, under whose protection the Fascist bands continue to grow and arm themselves (*Whither France?*, p. 3).

The Profumo Affair, 30 years later, involved the intersection of a sex scandal and Cold War politics. John Profumo, a Tory MP, held the post of secretary of state for war, the equivalent of defense minister, the top civilian official overseeing the Army. He formed a relationship with model and call-girl Christine Keeler, who was introduced to him by high-society osteopath Stephen Ward, acting as her pimp. (Ward had Winston Churchill and J. Paul Getty among his patients, as well as numerous royals.) Keeler was at the same time the lover of Yevgeny Ivanov, a naval attaché at the Soviet embassy in London.

When the first rumors of the affair emerged in March 1963, Profumo denied it in a speech to parliament, and was supported by the Tory Party leadership, including Prime Minister Harold MacMillan. Three months later, Profumo was compelled to admit his relationship with Keeler and resign his position as defense minister for lying to parliament and potentially compromising British military security.

The British Trotskyists, then organized as the Socialist Labour League, took the Profumo Affair with utmost seriousness. SLL leader Gerry Healy penned a front-page comment in the party newspaper, *The Newsletter*, on Profumo's resignation, under the headline, "Lies and corruption, the truth about Toryism." He wrote:

Through all these shattering events, more and more evidence is brought to light which proves conclusively that the ruling class and the criminal underworld rub shoulders in the same circles.

Labour leaders such as Harold Wilson tell us that the Profumo scandal is not a moral question. This is the language of humbugs and hypocrites. It is a moral question—a question of class morality.

The Profumo Affair shattered the credibility of Prime Minister MacMillan, and he stepped down by the end of the year, giving way to

a caretaker regime which was replaced by the Labour Party in the 1964 election, ending 13 years of Tory rule. Stephen Ward, put on trial for his central role in the affair, all too conveniently (and like Epstein) allegedly killed himself before a verdict could be rendered—and before he could name any further names.

The Epstein scandal in the United States combines many of the same malign elements: sexual exploitation, financial manipulation, “suicide” under suspicious circumstances, the murky role of the police and intelligence agencies. The corruption is on an “American” scale—that is, almost incomprehensible in its size. The FBI has reportedly identified more than a thousand young girls who were the victims of Epstein’s sex trafficking, a staggering number. Equally staggering, however, is the number of wealthy and powerful men, scions of the ruling oligarchy, who have been held accountable: zero.

Whether there is a “client list” to be made public cannot yet be determined. But Epstein certainly had some means of contacting his customers and patrons, and ways of keeping track of those who owed him favors in return, monetary, political or otherwise. As one report noted, a single Epstein bank account had more than 4,000 listed money transfers, and he had many such accounts in different banks.

It is the vast dimensions of the Epstein affair, not just Trump’s apparent personal connection, that explains the protracted cover-up, before and after Epstein’s death. The Biden administration did nothing in four years, since Epstein’s clients no doubt included many prominent Democrats. Hence the nervousness of both the Department of Justice and the corporate media in pursuing the investigation.

Trump’s lawsuit against the *Wall Street Journal*, announced Friday, could well be a devastating self-inflicted wound, since it could open him up to deposition testimony about his relations with Epstein, a long-time friend and associate. Epstein received kid-glove treatment by the US Attorney for South Florida, Alexander Acosta, later appointed by Trump as his secretary of labor.

The reemergence of the Epstein case reveals deep fissures within Trump’s supposedly unshakeable “base,” as fascists like Steve Bannon and Alex Jones first denounced Attorney General Pam Bondi, then reversed themselves abruptly at Trump’s command. Among the millions who voted for Trump, out of anger over the economic hardship brought on by the pro-business policies of the Biden administration, the Epstein affair only deepens their disgust with all of capitalist politics.

These shifts demonstrate how false the corporate media and Democratic Party narrative of Trump’s political invincibility is. The truth is that Trump is widely hated, and that tens of millions despise his policies, particularly in persecuting immigrants and attacking democratic rights and social benefits. They have made their feelings known in some of the largest protests in American history. The most recent public opinion poll records his approval rating at just 42 percent.

Trump only appears “strong” in comparison to the political eunuchs in the Democratic Party, whose cowardice enrages those who wish to fight back against Trump and fascism. The mass anti-Trump sentiment finds no expression within the Democratic Party. On the contrary, the Democratic Party, and the trade unions and pseudo-left political figures who prop it up, are Trump’s main line of defense.

There is another similarity between the Stavisky and Profumo affairs and the current scandal over Jeffrey Epstein. All of them were or are connected with deepening social tensions, simmering just beneath the surface, and soon to erupt—in the class battles of the 1930s, the mass radicalization of the 1960s, and now the political explosions which are

on the agenda in the second half of the 2020s.

Driving these struggles are far more profound issues than the corruption of Trump and the entire ruling elite, however much that provokes mass outrage. Inflation continues to tear at the living standards of the masses, even as social infrastructure is systematically smashed up by budget cuts and mass layoffs in Washington. For the vast majority, conditions of life have become increasingly impossible.

Trump exploited illusions and discontent to return to power in the 2024 elections, with the indispensable assistance of the Democrats. But sooner or later, like any con man, the day of reckoning comes. Now he seeks to ride out the crisis, while seeking support among his opponents in the ruling elite, through foreign policy initiatives like resuming arms shipments to Ukraine.

The working class cannot simply sit back and allow the crisis to develop. This would mean allowing the ruling class to sort things out, in a way that meets their interests, with or without Trump. That is the road offered by the Democratic Party and its allies and apologists.

The critical first step is to develop the class struggle and make it the basis for the independent intervention of the working class into political life. This means breaking out of the straitjacket of the unions through the building of rank-and-file workplace and neighborhood committees that will take up the immediate tasks of defense of the democratic rights and economic interests of working people.

The development of the class struggle must be connected to an international political struggle for socialism. If Trump is the embodiment of the criminal oligarchy, the face of the political underworld now in power, the mass opposition from below is the face of the future, the coming mass struggles of the working class against the financial aristocracy and its defenders. Victory in these struggles requires the development of a conscious revolutionary leadership of the working class, the Socialist Equality Party.



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