

Trump builds himself a Versailles on the Potomac

Patrick Martin
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On Monday, excavators began tearing through the East Wing of the White House, beginning the construction of a monstrosity that symbolizes the fascist presidency of Donald Trump: a \$200 million, 90,000-square-foot “White House Ballroom,” financed by Trump’s billionaire donors.

The demolition of the East Wing of the White House marks a grotesque milestone in the decay of American democracy. The seat of the American presidency is being physically transformed into the architectural embodiment of oligarchic rule. According to renderings released by the administration, the new hall will be drenched in gold: chandeliers, gilded Corinthian columns, coffered ceilings, marble floors—a monument to wealth, greed and cultural vulgarity.

The East Wing has been, since its construction during the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the most “popular” aspect of the residence of the American president. For decades it was open to public tours for which visitors, frequently school children, could queue up without making a reservation. After the 9/11 attacks, new security measures restricted the number of visitors and required pre-registration, but it is still the case that half-a-million visitors toured the East Wing last year.

Now what had been the most accessible part of the White House complex will be turned over to the financial oligarchy. The new ballroom, Trump boasted Tuesday, will accommodate 1,000 people—five times the East Room’s capacity—allowing for even larger banquets for the super-rich. Trump reportedly complained that the current space was too “small” for the fundraising dinners he holds for his billionaire friends, the gangsters and oligarchs whose fortunes finance both the Republican Party and Trump personally.

The White House, while built in part by slave labor,

has been occupied by Adams, Jefferson, Lincoln, Grant—figures identified with the democratic traditions of the American Revolution and the fight against slavery and reaction in the Civil War. Now, its East Wing is being rebuilt as part of Trump’s Versailles—a palace for the oligarchy erected atop the ruins of American democracy.

In the decades before the French Revolution, Versailles became synonymous with corruption, aristocratic luxury and decay. Trump’s project evokes the same spirit: the attempt by a dying social order to immortalize its power through gilded excess.

The “Versailles on the Potomac” will serve as the venue for high society galas, meetings with billionaires, and celebrations of military power. It is the physical manifestation of a government of, by and for the rich. The administration’s defenders have insisted that “private donations” absolve the project of any scandal, but that is the essence of corruption: the purchasing of access to public power by private interests.

Trump boasted this week that there were “no zoning conditions” and that he could “do anything” he wanted. “This is the White House,” he said he was told. “You’re the president of the United States, you can do anything you want.”

Trump, like Louis XIV, the builder of Versailles, embraces the credo, “L’etat, c’est moi.” (“I am the state”), although in the bureaucratic jargon of the 2025 Project, this is translated into English as the “unitary executive.” The original planners of the US capital, however, having passed through the furnace of the American Revolution, deliberately located the Capitol, the seat of the legislature, on the highest available hill, where it would tower over the residence of the executive.

There are other elements of fascist grandiosity in

Trump's plans for Washington DC. He is reportedly planning to build a huge arch near Arlington National Cemetery, also to be funded by donations from oligarchs and corporations. At a meeting last week with several dozen billionaire supporters, he held up a model of the arch topped with a gold statue of Liberty. "It's going to be very beautiful, I think it will be fantastic," he declared.

There are, of course, elements of dementia and self-glorification in such plans. The arch is already being described, sarcastically, as the "Arc de Trump," playing off its resemblance to the Arc de Triomphe built in Paris on the orders of Napoleon. But Hitler too had such notions. He worked with Albert Speer on plans to build a Triumphal Arch in Berlin set to be more than twice the height of the French monument. The collapse of the Third Reich ended that endeavor.

The destruction of the East Wing and its replacement with a palace ballroom symbolize a broader process—the systematic erasure of the democratic ideals upon which the United States was founded. It coincides with Trump's moves to invoke the Insurrection Act, to deploy the military domestically, to criminalize opposition, and to elevate his family and inner circle to positions of power. The "renovation" of the White House is inseparable from the reconstruction of the state along dictatorial lines.

But far from being an expression of strength, these developments expose weakness and fear. The American oligarchy—mired in social inequality, financial parasitism and endless war—can no longer rule through democratic means. It must instead rely on gold-plated palaces, propaganda and brute force to maintain its crumbling legitimacy. Trump's ballroom is being built not out of confidence in the future, but out of dread of the masses.

A White House spokesman responded to the massive October 18 "No Kings" protests, in which more than seven million people participated, with a peremptory dismissal: "Who cares?" Trump himself called the protests a "joke," describing them as "very small, very ineffective," while vilifying the demonstrators as "whacked out."

But even in this administration there is tacit acknowledgement of the intensifying popular anger. On Monday, the Treasury Department—whose headquarters is adjacent to the White House, giving a clear view of

the East Wing demolition—instructed workers not to share photos of the project on social media. While claiming this was for security reasons, the danger was not from a foreign enemy, but from the "enemy within," as Trump would put it.

Trump and his fascist aides may be blind, but the financial oligarchy as a whole sense the danger, when, on the same day, headlines announce that billionaires are spending \$200 million to build a huge new addition to the White House, and that 154,000 school children in New York City are homeless, with nearly 65,000 of them living in shelters.

As Versailles stood for the *ancien régime*, so too will Trump's White House renovation stand for a degenerate ruling class whose time is running out, and which faces a social revolution that will take its place in the great historical line from the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917.



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