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One year since the fascist coup attempt of January 6

Today marks the one-year anniversary of Donald Trump's attempt to reverse the 2020 election, overturn the Constitution and establish a dictatorship.

Two events will be held to mark the anniversary of January 6, one organized by the Democrats at the US Capitol, the other by Trump at a rally in Arizona the following week. The content of the speeches that will be given by both Biden and Trump is thoroughly predictable.

Biden will deliver a series of bromides about the sanctity of American democracy without giving any actual account of what took place in the coup attempt, who was involved and how close it came to succeeding. He will paper over the seriousness of January 6 and the ongoing threat to democracy with empty appeals for unity with a Republican Party that is deeply implicated in the coup itself.



Right-wing insurrectionists loyal to Donald Trump storming the US Capitol in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021 (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)

Trump will cover his brazen plan to seize power, establish a dictatorship and kill thousands of people in the process with his standard fascistic lies. He will claim Biden stole the election through mail-in ballots and will warn of the danger of socialism. In preparation for the event, Trump and his co-conspirators like Stephen Miller and Steven Bannon will be poring through *Mein Kampf* and the writings of Goebbels for inspiration.

On the anniversary of January 6, five main points must be emphasized:

1. **January 6, 2021, was an attempt to establish a dictatorship.** January 6 was a turning point and a unique event in American history. It was a full-throttled attempt by the president to overthrow the election in order to remain in power and establish a personalist dictatorship.
2. **This attempt almost succeeded.** The coup attempt came extraordinarily close to succeeding in overturning the election. It failed entirely on account of organizational mishaps, inexperience and, in certain cases, outright accidents.
3. **No institution of the political establishment actively opposed the attempt to establish a dictatorship.** The police were intentionally understaffed and often fraternized with the mob. The military refused to intervene for 199 minutes, providing Trump with a window in which to act. The Democratic Party refused to make any appeal to the population to oppose the coup for fear of triggering an explosion of social opposition.
4. **The danger of dictatorship remains urgent.** Attempts to downplay the events of January 6 facilitate Trump's ongoing preparations for future plots. It is now openly acknowledged that Trump and the Republican Party are preparing their next attempts at dictatorship.
5. **The only social force that can stop dictatorship is the working class.**

One: January 6, 2021, was an attempt to establish a dictatorship

By January 6, Trump had been broadcasting his plans for dictatorship in public for more than one year. He attempted to invoke the Insurrection Act in response to popular protests against police violence over the course of 2020. In the lead-up to the election, he said he

would not accept the outcome if he lost. When he was defeated, he blamed mail-in ballot fraud and urged his supporters to support his bid to remain in power.



Donald Trump, flanked by Attorney General William Barr, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after the clearing of Lafayette Square on June 1, 2020. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky, File)

In the past year, information relating to the preparations for January 6 has come to light establishing the plotters' aims beyond a shadow of a doubt.

In the weeks leading up to January 6, 2021, Trump and aides Stephen Bannon and Peter Navarro organized over 100 Republican members of Congress in a bid to delay the certification of the Electoral College. Navarro himself recently told the *Daily Beast*, "We spent a lot of time lining up over 100 congressmen, including some senators. It started out perfectly. At 1 p.m., [Representative Paul] Gosar and [Senator Ted] Cruz did exactly what was expected of them. It was a perfect plan."

The brazenness with which the plotters acknowledge their aims is itself a testament to the weakness of opposition from the Democrats. Navarro explained in his recent memoir, *In Trump Time*, that the plan, nicknamed the Green Bay Sweep after the football play, was hatched by Bannon in coordination with Trump himself. Its aim was to delay certification and provide time for paramilitary forces and pro-Trump demonstrators to follow Trump's orders to seize Congress and trap the members inside.

“The political and legal beauty of the strategy was this,” Navarro wrote. “By law, both the House of Representatives and the Senate must spend up to two hours of debate per state on each requested challenge. For the six battleground states, that would add up to as much as twenty-four hours of nationally televised hearings across the two chambers of Congress.” The first person who Navarro communicated with on the morning of January 6 was Bannon. “I check my messages and am pleased to see Steve Bannon has us fully ready to implement our Green Bay Sweep on Capitol Hill. Call the play. Run the play.” Trump, Navarro wrote, “was certainly on board with the strategy. Just listen to his speech that day.”

Fascist organizers of the protests held in Washington that day have told congressional investigators that they participated in “dozens” of planning meetings with members of Congress who were involved in the putsch plan.

Rolling Stone reported in October, “Some of the planners of the pro-Trump rallies that took place in Washington, D.C., have begun communicating with congressional investigators and sharing new information about what happened when the former president’s supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol” and “detailed explosive allegations that multiple members of Congress were intimately involved in planning both Trump’s efforts to overturn his election loss and the Jan. 6 events that turned violent.”

Paramilitary and far-right groups brought forward earlier in 2020 to support the deadly policy of the ruling class over the course of the pandemic were called into action, some forming quick response teams with guns stashed should street fighting break out. These far-right groups were promoted by big business and the media in the spring of 2020 as the spearhead of efforts to rescind temporary lockdown measures imposed in March after a wave of strikes in the US and internationally forced an initial shutdown of production. The social layers to whom Trump and Wall Street appealed to “liberate” states from lockdowns at state capitals in April and May 2020 cultivated close ties with Republican leaders and answered Trump’s call to descend on Congress less than a year later.

As more and more details come to light, it is now recognized on an international scale that what took place brought the US to the immediate precipice of dictatorship.

In his book *Peril*, journalist Bob Woodward reported that Chinese General Li Zoucheng spoke to Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and “was very worried that the United States was actually going to collapse.” Woodward reported that after January 6, “the Chinese military went on military alert, as did the Russians, as did the Iranians.”

Canadian academic Thomas Homer-Dixon published an article in the *Globe and Mail* titled, “The American polity is cracked, and might collapse. Canada must prepare.” The December 31 article warns that the United States “is becoming increasingly ungovernable” and “could descend into civil war.” Homer-Dixon warns that a second Trump presidency “could be totally unconstrained, nationally and internationally” and that “it is not inaccurate to use the F word”—fascism. Similar articles are appearing in leading publications worldwide.

Two: The coup attempt of January 6 came extraordinarily close to succeeding

Trump’s plot almost succeeded. Over 120 Republican congressmen and six senators supported baseless objections to the certification of the Electoral College. A short time later, after Trump directed the crowd at the Ellipse to march on the Capitol building, members of Congress escaped the angry mob with seconds to spare. Vice President Mike Pence was whisked away to safety as the crowd called for his hanging. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and then-Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer were hidden in a bunker beneath the Capitol and called the Pentagon, begging them to clear the grounds and protect their lives.

Had the mob succeeded in taking members of Congress captive, the Democratic Party would have negotiated for their release in exchange for an arrangement that kept Trump in power.

The plot’s failure was due entirely to tactical mistakes and inexperience on the part of the mob and its organizers. At times the plot appeared to fall short due to pure chance. Upon breaking into the building, the mob followed a police officer who led them away from where congressmembers were huddled a short distance away. At another point, the mob walked past a door that would have led them to another group of representatives.

Three: No institution of the political establishment actively opposed the attempt to establish a dictatorship

The plot did not fail because it encountered opposition from within the political establishment and the state. Not a single institution of bourgeois politics took action to stop the coup attempt.

The police were understaffed, and many officers welcomed protesters into the Capitol building. The military stood by for 199 critical minutes as the crowd occupied the Capitol and broke into congressional offices in search of Congress members and their staff.

More details have recently emerged about the role played by the military on January 6. *Newsweek's* William Arkin reported on January 2 that Trump planned to call the military into the streets on the day of the putsch, and that Pentagon leadership was concerned that a split would take place in the armed forces.

The Democratic Party made no appeal to the population to oppose the putsch, even though 700,000 people live within the Washington D.C. city limits, where 95 percent of ballots cast were against Trump. Not a single Democratic member of Congress took out his or her cell phone and posted a video appeal on social media calling every opponent of dictatorship into the streets of American cities. Not a single Democratic governor or mayor called for mass protests.

President-elect Joe Biden, whose administration Trump was attempting to prevent from taking office, took hours to address the nation. When he ultimately spoke, Biden took the remarkable step of inviting Trump to deliver a televised address to the nation in the midst of his unfolding coup. In a 10-minute speech delivered the evening of January 6, Biden said, "Our democracy is under an unprecedented assault" and declared: "Therefore, I call on President Trump to go on national television, now, to fulfill his oath and defend the Constitution and demand an end to this siege."

Biden's appeal to Trump set the tone for the response of the Democratic Party in the year that has followed.

The congressional investigation moves in fits and starts, largely behind the backs of the population, but Trump has not been criminally prosecuted for his role in attempting to

overthrow the Constitution and establish a dictatorship. He is currently living at his compound in Mar-a-Lago. None of the congressional representatives who supported the coup attempt have been removed from Congress or charged with crimes. A ruling class which locked up thousands of impoverished people from Central Asia on suspicion of terrorism after September 11 and jailed and deported countless communists and socialists in the red scares of the 20th century has taken action only against the flotsam and jetsam of January 6, the low-level participants, while leaving those who directed the mob largely untouched. Even the rotting Weimar Republic took more action against Hitler, who was in jail a year after the Beer Hall Putsch failed in 1923 (albeit under comfortable conditions).

The Democrats' response to January 6 is dictated above all by fear of social opposition from below. Their main role is to chloroform discontent, to shore up the two-party system, to use racial and gender politics to divide the working class, and to block the development of a movement against the threat of dictatorship. Their response to January 6 has been to do everything possible to minimize what took place in order to prevent the population from becoming aware of how close the country came to dictatorship.

Over the course of Trump's term in office, the Democrats ignored Trump's attacks on democratic rights and opposed him on foreign policy grounds, alleging that he was an inefficient steward of the interests of American imperialism. Brought to power on a wave of opposition to Trump, the Democrats have continued the COVID-19 policies of his administration, sacrificing hundreds of thousands of lives to fuel the speculative bonanza on Wall Street.

Their endless references to race and gender and sexual orientation are aimed entirely at enriching privileged sections of the wealthiest 10 percent of society and have nothing to do with defending the democratic rights of the population. In the most flagrant example, the Democrats have continued the worst aspects of Trump's attacks on immigrants, deporting record numbers to countries devastated by decades of imperialist war and US-backed dictatorship. The fight against Trump and dictatorship will not take place through this party.

Four: The danger of dictatorship remains urgent

It is widely understood that Trump and the Republicans are planning another takeover. Columns in the corporate press noting the anniversary of January 6 acknowledge that dictatorship is an imminent possibility and ponder the likelihood of civil war.

The Republican Party has transformed itself into a fascistic party that is not prepared to accept the result of democratic elections. As Harvard political scientist Steven Levitsky recently told AP, “It’s not clear that the Republican Party is willing to accept defeat anymore.”

Following Trump’s lead, the Republican Party has legitimized vigilante violence as a part of the political process. Its own congressional representatives routinely threaten Democratic opponents with violence in order to secure their right-wing political ends. Threats of violence against Democratic congressmembers have increased by 107 percent in the last year. The Republican Party is engaged in naked efforts to disenfranchise millions of voters through illegal voting restrictions and is installing local election officials who will overturn future elections. It is preparing its next authoritarian moves in plain sight.

Officials from within the military now warn that Trump is attempting to solidify his support within the Pentagon in preparation for his next conspiracies. In December, the *Washington Post* published a statement by ex-generals titled, “The military must prepare now for a 2024 insurrection” which warns:

As we approach the first anniversary of the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, we—all of us former senior military officials—are increasingly concerned about the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election and the potential for lethal chaos inside our military, which would put all Americans at severe risk. In short: We are chilled to our bones at the thought of a coup succeeding next time.

The *Post* statement warns of “the potential for a total breakdown of the chain of command” within the Pentagon and concludes that in the 2024 election, “With loyalties split, some [commanders] might follow orders from the rightful commander in chief, while others might follow the Trumpian loser. Arms might not be secured depending on

who was overseeing them. Under such a scenario, it is not outlandish to say a military breakdown could lead to civil war.”

Even the editorial board of the *New York Times* recently acknowledged that the Democrats’ inaction is paving the way for future putsch attempts. The *Times* January statement, entitled “Every Day is Jan. 6 now,” concludes:

We should stop underestimating the threat facing the country. Countless times over the past six years, up to and including the events of Jan. 6, Mr. Trump and his allies openly projected their intent to do something outrageous or illegal or destructive. Every time, the common response was that they weren’t serious or that they would never succeed. How many times will we have to be proved wrong before we take it seriously? The sooner we do, the sooner we might hope to salvage a democracy that is in grave danger.

This is an acknowledgment that the entire corporate media has been engaged in a systematic effort to downplay the seriousness of the events of January 6 and that, in doing so, the media establishment has objectively facilitated Trump’s plotting. The *Times* itself has played a critical role in not only downplaying the events of January 6, but elevating those responsible for carrying it out. In October 2021, the *Times* published an op-ed by Senator Josh Hawley, one of the most prominent coup plotters in the Senate, and later praised his sage proposals for addressing the supply chain crisis.

The events of January 6 were foreseeable. This is proven by the coverage on the *World Socialist Web Site*, which was warning on a daily basis for over a year leading up to the election that Trump was preparing an attempt to overturn the Constitution and establish a dictatorship.

The *Times* editorial statement is an indictment not only of the newspaper of record itself, but also of the “left” publications around the Democratic Party and representatives of libertarian tendencies who continue to downplay the importance of January 6 or who now openly sympathize with Trump.

In a January 26, 2021, article, “The Meaning of January 6,” historian Bryan Palmer adopts the haughty tone of an academic who is above it all. Palmer’s conclusion is that the events of January 6 were not an insurrection, and that “the left” must reject the notion that it

posed a threat to democratic rights. In a section headed “Insurrection as hyperbole,” Palmer summarizes his argument, deriding those who call January 6 a coup attempt: “Hyperbole flowed as the trail of tears grew to a tidal wave.”

Palmer speaks with total indifference at the prospect of fascist dictatorship. He even commends the fascist mob for “interrogating and scrutinizing critically” the state institutions, as though individuals wearing “Camp Auschwitz” shirts defaced the Capitol because they oppose the criminal historical record of American imperialism. For all Palmer’s denunciations of bourgeois democracy, he only serves to justify and apologize for the Democratic Party’s efforts to downplay the danger.

Left Voice, a publication associated with the Argentinian Socialist Workers Party (PTS), recently wrote that January 6 “was not a fascist coup or even an attempted coup.” According to *Left Voice*, January 6 was a sign of the *strength* of the political establishment. *Left Voice* calls January 6 “a moment that provided an opportunity for the establishment of the political regime and the media—including politicians in both parties—to begin to reestablish legitimacy through their rejection of the right-wing rioters.”

After January 6, the political crisis has diminished. “In broad strokes, this is the political scenario we find ourselves in,” they conclude: the crisis has “receded to latency.” *Left Voice* reaches this conclusion by declaring that the working class is passive. On January 6 and its aftermath, “The masses who had been mobilized against Trump for the past four years looked to Biden and the regime to respond—they were trusted to take care of it, and there was no response from the working class and oppressed.”

Paraphrasing Trotsky, “these attorneys of the Democratic Party deny the responsibility of its leaders in order thus to escape shouldering their own responsibility.” Although *Left Voice* presents itself as a critic of the Democrats, in actual fact it provides justification for the fecklessness of the Democrats by blaming the working class for the Democrats’ refusal to mobilize the population against the coup!

A third section of the radical middle class, comprised of anarchist and libertarian elements like Glenn Greenwald and Jimmy Dore, were impressed by the coup attempt and have become apologists for the putsch. Deeply disoriented, they have whiplashed from

supporters of the Democratic Party into defenders of fascist killer Kyle Rittenhouse and opponents of mask and vaccine mandates. Such individuals personify the worst traits of American radical politics: pragmatism, pessimism, nationalism, anti-communism and extreme individualism. Their professed concern that health restrictions infringe on “individual rights” coincides entirely with the interests of Wall Street and eviscerates the *social* rights of billions of workers to protection from sickness and death.

Five: The only social force that can stop dictatorship is the working class

January 6 is not a historical accident, it is the outcome of the protracted decay of the American political system. For decades, the two parties have worked together to enforce massive cuts to social programs, to wage permanent imperialist war, to facilitate unbridled financial speculation and to abolish democratic rights. The corporate media and political establishment have deliberately cultivated far-right elements as a bulwark against the working class. The Democratic Party has replaced any prior association to social reforms with an obsession with race and identity that feeds and strengthens the far right.

In 2000, amid the crisis surrounding the US presidential election, the International Committee of the Fourth International explained that bourgeois democracy could not survive on the rotten foundations of America’s increasingly oligarchic society. In December, as the Supreme Court deliberated over whether to halt the counting of votes in Florida, WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North said:

What the decision of this court will reveal is how far the American ruling class is prepared to go in breaking with traditional bourgeois-democratic and constitutional norms. Is it prepared to sanction ballot fraud and the suppression of votes? Is it prepared to install in the White House a candidate who has attained that office through blatantly illegal and anti-democratic methods? A substantial section of the American ruling elite, and perhaps even a majority on the Supreme Court, is prepared to do just that. This is because, among this social layer, there has been a dramatic erosion of support for traditional forms of bourgeois democracy.

The disastrous development of the coronavirus pandemic over the course of the last year has enormously intensified the social contradictions that gave rise to the events of January 6. The forces of political reaction mobilized by Trump have proved critical in the ruling

class's murderous policy to reopen business and schools and infect as many people as possible with COVID-19.

None of the economic and social issues giving rise to the events of January 6 have been addressed. The Democratic Party has proven itself totally opposed to implementing policies required to raise living standards and stop the spread of the pandemic because it represents the interests of the same financial aristocracy that prioritizes profits over life.

But the last years have seen a historic global increase in strikes and mass protests against inequality. The working class, more internationally interconnected and urban than ever before, is the social force that has the power to crush fascism and the threat of dictatorship.

Opposition is growing daily to the unbridled spread of the pandemic at workplaces and schools across the world. Protecting society from mass infection and the specter of fascism requires attacking both at their common source: the capitalist system. The dizzying celebration of parasitism and speculation that is the Dow Jones, Nasdaq and S&P 500 is driving the spread of the pandemic, and the massive growth of inequality requires the adoption of ever more ruthless and anti-democratic methods of rule. The wealth of the financial aristocracy must be expropriated, trading must be suspended, the major corporations must be nationalized, and Wall Street must be closed down.

The movement in the working class can recognize its immense potential only through the struggle to democratize every aspect of political, social and economic life, including democratic workers' control over production and COVID-19 safety. This means freeing the world's productive forces from the dictatorship of capitalist profit and placing production under the democratic, social control of the working class.

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