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afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Andre Damon

05.10.2021

The New York Times and the January 6 cover-up

On Sunday, the *New York Times* published an editorial entitled, “Jan. 6 Was Worse Than We Knew,” based on recent revelations of the plot by Trump to overturn the results of the 2020 elections. The opening paragraph of the editorial declares, “However horrifying the Jan. 6 riot at the US Capitol appeared in the moment, we know now that it was far worse.”

The editorial is based on, and comes less than two weeks after, the publication of *Peril*, the new book by *Washington Post* journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, which documents the statements of high-level US congressional and military officials that January 6 was a full-scale coup attempt.



People shelter in the House gallery as rioters try to break into the House Chamber at the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021, in Washington. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

According to *Peril*, January 6 was “a planned, coordinated, synchronized attack on the very heart of American democracy, designed to overthrow the government.” It was “treason,” in words ascribed by Woodward and Costa to General Mark Milley and an attempted “fascist takeover of the country,” in words attributed to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith.

For seven months, the Democratic Party and the *New York Times* have worked to chloroform the public about the events of January 6. With the publication of Woodward and Costa’s book, however, the reality of what happened has become impossible to deny.

The statement by the *Times* that the events of January 6 were “far worse” than “appeared in the moment” constitutes a backhanded admission of the falsehood of its own efforts to downplay Trump’s January 6 coup attempt. No, the events of January 6 were not worse than the *New York Times* knew; they were worse than the *Times* was prepared to publicly admit.

The details of Woodward’s narrative did not come as a surprise to the *World Socialist Web Site*, which had warned in detail about the conspiracy as it unfolded.

On September 24, 2020, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote, “The United States presidential campaign is being transformed into a coup d’état by Donald Trump, who has declared that he will not accept the results of any vote that goes against him.” The statement added, “Trump is not running an election campaign. He is setting into motion a plot to establish a presidential dictatorship.”

The WSWS continued these warnings up to the very eve of the election. Twelve hours before the January 6 insurrection, the WSWS warned of the “ongoing effort by President Donald Trump to stage a coup d’état, nullify the results of the election and establish a presidential dictatorship.”

It is beyond incredible, indeed impossible, to accept that the *Times*, with its innumerable connections to the state apparatus, was ignorant of the scope of Trump’s plot.

There are two conspiracies surrounding the events of January 6. The first was Trump’s plot to overthrow the Constitution and install himself as dictator. The second is the

ongoing effort to downplay and cover up the significance of the coup plot and shield the conspirators from prosecution.

Even after admitting the gravity of the events of January 6, the *Times* continues the cover-up, developing a narrative in which Trump's plot is reduced to legal technicalities. The *Times* presents the events of that day as the outcome of deficiencies in America's electoral laws, as opposed to a full-blown effort by Trump to use forces loyal to him—both outside and within the state—to violently overthrow Congress and establish a dictatorship.

The *Times* writes,

The country was hours away from a full-blown constitutional crisis — not primarily because of the violence and mayhem inflicted by hundreds of President Donald Trump's supporters but because of the actions of Mr. Trump himself.

In the days before the mob descended on the Capitol, a corollary attack — this one bloodless and legalistic — was playing out down the street in the White House, where Mr. Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and a lawyer named John Eastman huddled in the Oval Office, scheming to subvert the will of the American people by using legal sleight-of-hand.

The effort to separate Trump's plotting from the violent attack on the Capitol is a deliberate falsification. In fact, the two were inextricably connected. The fascistic mob that was whipped up by Trump and his co-conspirators was not incidental to the plot. Trump's plan was to stop the certification of electoral votes, under the cover of a "citizens uprising" against a supposedly stolen election. The attack on the Capitol was the "political muscle" for the conspiracy.

In the *Times* presentation, the January 6 coup attempt was a legal maneuver, exploiting archaic and ill-thought-out electoral laws. The editorial draws a parallel between Trump's coup d'état and the election of 1876, which it calls "another dramatic presidential dispute."

There is no historical parallel between 1876 and 2020. The 1876 presidential election was extraordinarily close both in the popular vote and the Electoral College. It was resolved in

a sordid compromise that led to the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of Jim Crow segregation.

Last year's political crisis was not a "presidential dispute," it was a violent coup attempt. Trump's allegations of voter fraud were nothing more than a pretext for mobilizing his forces to carry out an effort to overthrow the US Constitution.

Doubling down on its cover-up, the *Times* writes, "The scheme to overturn the election was highly unlikely to succeed." What is this claim based on? It directly contradicts the presentation in *Peril*, which makes clear that Vice President Mike Pence was inclined to back Trump's coup attempt, and that it took the intervention of former Vice President Dan Quayle, a former senator from Pence's home state, to convince him to back down.

If Pence had backed Trump's coup attempt and refused to call in the National Guard over Trump's objections, the Democrats would not have behaved any differently than when they accepted the stolen election of 2000.

The *Times'* ongoing efforts to downplay and cover up the significance of the events of January 6 are inseparable from its refusal—together with the entire US political establishment—to investigate or criminally prosecute the coup plotters.

The legal immunity granted to the fascist plotters stands in sharp contrast to the vicious prosecution of left-wing political opponents of the US political establishment. In 1918, socialist Eugene Debs was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his opposition to World War I.

In 1941, 18 members of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party were sentenced under the Smith Act to between 12 and 16 months in prison on the false grounds that they engaged in "seditious conspiracy to advocate overthrow of the government of the United States by force and violence." The Smith Act was then used to prosecute members of the Stalinist Communist Party.

All of these figures were prosecuted for their public statements (in some cases, for what courts claimed they believed in spite of their public statements) and not any violent actions.

But after having attempted to overthrow the Constitution in the greatest political conspiracy in American history, Trump continues to live like a king on his Mar-a-Lago estate, regrouping his forces and plotting his return to power between rounds of golf. And Trump's Republican co-conspirators operate with impunity while the Democrats praise them as their "colleagues."

The Democratic Party is far more worried about the growth of working-class resistance to the far right than it is about the dangers of a fascist coup. The same type of cowardice that characterized the German liberals and Social Democrats in the face of Hitler's rise to power is present in spades.

And while the fascist coup plotters are given immunity, the vast machinery of repression—including the apparatus of internet censorship—is always ready to move against left-wing opposition.

The defense of democratic rights in the United States cannot be left to the Democrats and the sclerotic US political establishment. It requires the mobilization of the working class on the basis of opposition to the capitalist system that is the root of social inequality and dictatorship.

World Socialist 04.10.2021