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Trump intensifies coup plot as Congress meets to certify election results

The United States Congress is meeting today to formally count the Electoral College votes in the 2020 presidential election. Under normal conditions, this process is a formality. Today's vote, however, takes place under conditions of an active and ongoing effort by President Donald Trump to stage a coup d'état, nullify the results of the election and establish a presidential dictatorship.

Trump, with the active support of a majority of Republican House members and a substantial number of Republican senators, is seeking to block the certification of the votes. He declared on Tuesday that Vice President Mike Pence, who acts as president of the US Senate, "has the power to reject" electors. Such an act would be blatantly unconstitutional.



President Donald Trump speaks in the East Room of the White House, in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

Speaking in Georgia on Monday, Trump declared, "They are not taking this White House. We are going to fight like hell."

Outside of Congress, tens of thousands of Trump supporters are gathering in Washington DC, led by neo-fascist and paramilitary organizations such as the Proud Boys. On Tuesday, Trump lent his full support to the demonstrations and said he would speak at a rally in front of the White House Wednesday morning.

In the face of Trump's active effort to overthrow the Constitution, the Democratic Party and its defenders are doing everything possible to conceal and downplay the threat posed by Trump's actions. Their main concern is to avoid taking any action that might alarm the public and set into motion an oppositional movement that could get out of control.

On Monday, Biden called Trump's efforts to overturn the election "whining and complaining." He referred to a group of conspirators seeking to overthrow the constitutional order in the United States as "our opposition friends," and he repeated his call for both sides to "unite" and "put the divisive politics behind us."

More than just spinelessness and prostration, Biden's remarks express a basic class reality. While they have differences, primarily centered on foreign policy, Trump and his Democratic opponents are, in the final analysis, representatives of the same capitalist class. As former president Barack Obama put it, the conflict is an "intramural scrimmage." The *Nation*, the flagship publication of American left liberalism, with its historic association with Stalinism and Popular Front politics, exemplifies the Democratic Party's efforts to lull the population to sleep.

Referring to Trump's actions as "crazy," the *Nation* declares categorically that Trump will not succeed in his coup attempt. "The good news is that Trump seems to have shot his bolt. He has enough juice left to create mayhem but not enough... to subvert the election."

Another article in the *Nation* calls Trump's actions a "clown coup" that is "doomed to failure." It concludes, "Trump is diminishing in political power with every passing day and there is no need to make unrealistic claims about his ability to overturn the election."

The *Nation's* unshakable belief that everything in American politics will return to normal on January 20 is an expression of its faith in the impregnable nature of American capitalism. Inasmuch as it believes capitalism is invincible and invulnerable, it seems inconceivable to the *Nation* that there is any need for the ruling class to even consider carrying out a coup d'état.

This is the voice of sclerotic American liberalism. Without a program, its only response to the crisis of capitalism is to stick its head in the sand and hope that everything goes back to the way it was.

Speaking of the fascist street demonstrations that brought down the French government of Édouard Daladier in 1934, Leon Trotsky wrote:

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.

Now too, fascist violence and extraconstitutional coup-plotting have become an objective factor in American politics.

Let us be blunt: Trump's coup is not guaranteed to fail, and workers must take his threats with the utmost seriousness. He remains president for two weeks and is determined to use all the powers at his disposal—enumerated and unenumerated—in his effort to cling to power.

While the Democrats pull their punches, Trump is not afraid to draw blood. He speaks for sections of the ruling class arguing for a preemptive counterrevolution amid the greatest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s. He is warning the ruling class that time is running out: Either crush social opposition in the working class, or it will engulf you.

Anyone who believes that “it can’t happen here”—that the United States is immune from fascism and dictatorship—is blinding himself to the reality of the crisis of American capitalism. It not only *can* happen here, but it *is* happening here.

The commentary within the official media and the likes of the *Nation* is marked above all by its superficiality, as though Trump’s actions were caused by his mood swings. But Trump does not speak just for himself. The very fact that he has already gone so far means that a substantial section of the financial oligarchy is prepared to break with the trappings of democracy.

Ultimately, January 20 is just a date. Even if Biden were to limp into office, Trump would remain a dominant political figure in the United States, and there are others waiting in the wings to take his place. It remains unclear whether Republican-controlled states will even recognize a Biden presidency.

This crisis is unfolding against the backdrop of the expanding pandemic, which has already killed more than 350,000 people in the United States alone. Hospitals throughout the country are at capacity, and Los Angeles County has instructed paramedics to begin rationing care.

In the face of this disaster, all sections of the ruling class have doubled down on their policy of “herd immunity,” demanding that businesses remain open in order to continue pumping out profits. Amidst mass death and social misery, Wall Street continues its relentless rise, along with the wealth of the financial oligarchy.

These homicidal policies reflect a social order so unequal that the most basic interests of the oppressed classes cannot be taken into consideration in creating policy. The decay and putrefaction of American democracy is ultimately the expression of the crisis and death agony of American capitalism. And Trump is only the most visible symptom of the disease.

In the fight to defend democratic rights, just like the fight to save lives in the pandemic, the remedy is the same: The power of the financial oligarchy must be crushed and overthrown by a mass movement of the working class fighting for the socialist transformation of society.

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