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The Fourth of July in the United States, six months after the January 6 fascistic insurrection

The two hundred and forty-fifth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th takes place this year under extraordinary circumstances.



John Trumbull's painting Declaration of Independence [Source: Wikimedia Commons]

This is the first Fourth of July since Trump incited a mob on January 6 with the aim of overturning the results of the 2020 elections and establishing a presidential dictatorship. The political conspiracy had the support of the Republican Party, which promoted the lie that the election had been “stolen.” It had the backing of a significant faction of the state apparatus, which oversaw a standdown of police forces at the Capitol as the events unfolded.

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In a year dominated by Trump's efforts to overturn the Constitution, the Democratic Party and its affiliates have been engaged in an effort to destroy the legitimacy of the American Revolution through the racist rewriting of history. The *New York Times* launched its "1619 Project," which denounces the American Revolution as a "slaveholders' rebellion," the main aim of which was to perpetuate slavery in the United States.

The adoption by the Second Continental Congress of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776 marked a major turning point not only in the history of the future United States, but the entire world. Karl Marx noted that the War of Independence, which had begun one year earlier, in April 1775, "sounded the tocsin for the European middle-class," providing the impetus for the great democratic revolutions of that era, including the French Revolution that began in 1789.

In announcing their irrevocable break from the British monarchy, the "Founding Fathers" grounded the revolution in the universal ideas of the Enlightenment, conceptions that at their own time were thoroughly progressive. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," the Declaration, written by Thomas Jefferson, proclaimed, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." If "any Form of Government becomes destructive to these ends," it continued, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it."

As with all the bourgeois democratic revolutions, there was a chasm between the universalist ideals of equality and the objective conditions that prevailed at the time. In particular, the American Revolution was not able to resolve at that point the fundamental contradiction of American democracy, the existence of the institution of chattel slavery.

However, the revolution set into motion the social and political processes that would lead, eighty-five years after the Declaration of Independence, to the outbreak of the US Civil War, the Second American Revolution, which culminated in the abolition of slavery. The Civil War cleared the decks for a new stage of class struggle, between the working class and the bourgeoisie, that continues to this day.

What is it that underlies the staggering decay of democratic forms of rule today? First, the extreme growth of social inequality. Four decades of social counter-revolution have

produced a concentration of wealth in the hands of a negligible percentage of the population that would put to shame even the British aristocracy.

The top one percent of American households now possesses \$34.2 trillion, 15 times more than the wealth of the bottom half of the population. During the pandemic, the world's billionaires increased their wealth by more than 60 percent, from \$8 trillion to \$13.1 trillion. Individuals like Amazon's Jeff Bezos or Tesla's Elon Musk are social and economic ecosystems of their own, with immense power over the lives of billions of people.

This is combined with the inexorable and unending war drive of American imperialism. During the past year and a half, the ruling elite has presided over a homicidal policy that has led to the deaths of more than 600,000 people from the coronavirus pandemic in the US alone. This same ruling class, now under Biden, is escalating a policy of militarism and war that threatens the lives of tens, if not hundreds of millions.

The noxious product of social inequality and war creates the objective conditions for dictatorship. Trump represents this process in its most concentrated form. The events of January 6 are significant not only for what happened six months ago, but for what is ongoing. Trump speaks for a faction of the ruling class that is actively plotting for the overthrow of the government and the abolition of what remains of democratic forms of rule.

Over the past week, Trump has led a series of campaign-style rallies as the unofficial kickoff for the Republican 2022 midterm election campaign, further solidifying his position as the de facto leader of the Republican Party. At a rally in Lorain County, Ohio last weekend, Trump railed against "radical left Democrats" who "are doing everything possible to put your family in grave danger" by allowing immigrants into the country and undermining the police.

Trump's remarks in Ohio were preceded by a statement from Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, an outright fascist and proponent of the QAnon conspiracy theory, who called for the arrest of "radical Democrat socialists," including "the Jihad Squad led by AOC, the little communist from New York City."

On Thursday, the Supreme Court voted by 6–3 to uphold restrictions on voting in the state of Arizona. The decision, which guts what remains of the Voting Rights Act, is a signal to states throughout the country to pass further measures undermining the right to vote. It is also aimed at bolstering the fraudulent claims of the Republicans that the elections were “stolen.”

There is, however, no faction of the ruling class committed to the defense of democratic rights. The response of the Democratic Party has been, at every point, to cover up and downplay the significance of Trump’s coup and the ongoing danger. Biden came to power six months ago calling for “unity” and “bipartisanship” with Trump’s enablers in the Republican Party.

And then there is the thoroughly reactionary project, spearheaded by the Democrats, to rewrite history, presenting not only the American Revolution but also the Civil War as merely episodes in unending and enduring racial struggle, in which black Americans have waged a solitary fight against endemic white racism.

One of the most reactionary consequences of the denigration of the revolutionary traditions of the United States is that it has allowed the fascistic Trump to absurdly posture as a defender of the heritage of the American Revolution, even as he plots to overturn the Constitution and the democratic rights that were its product.

What both factions of the ruling class have in common is a deep fear of the political radicalization of the working class. In his fascistic tirades, Trump portrays himself as the best mechanism for the financial oligarchy to preserve capitalism and eliminate the threat of socialism. The Democrats’ promotion of racial conflict is a mechanism for dividing the working class. As WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North wrote in the Introduction to *The New York Times 1619 Project and the Racist Falsification of History*:

The interaction of racist ideology as it has developed over several decades in the academy and the political agenda of the Democratic Party is the motivating force behind the 1619 Project. Particularly under conditions of extreme social polarization, in which there is growing interest in and support for socialism, the Democratic Party—as a political instrument of the capitalist class—is anxious to shift the focus of political discussion away

from issues that raise the specter of social inequality and class conflict. This is the function of a reinterpretation of history that places race at the center of its narrative.

It is of immense significance that the only organized defense of the two American revolutions was organized by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party. Apart from the intervention of the Trotskyist movement, the only opposition to the 1619 Project would have come from the right.

This underscores a more profound truth, that the defense of democratic rights, not only in the US but internationally, depends on the independent mobilization of the working class for socialism.

The Declaration of Independence proclaimed the “right” and the “duty” to “alter or abolish” any government that becomes destructive of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Changing what must be changed, these words read today as an indictment of the ruling class and the entire social and economic system over which it presides, which has been confirmed in horrifying form over the past year and a half.

Opposition to fascism, dictatorship and authoritarianism is impossible outside of the fight to establish a workers’ government, in the United States and internationally, to extend democracy to the economy itself through the expropriation of the rich, the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, and the construction of a socialist society based on genuine equality.

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