

Trump presses threats of violence, voter suppression

By Patrick Martin
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President Trump is pushing ahead with efforts to mobilize fascist thugs, intimidate voters, and use force to hijack the 2020 elections, while the Democratic Party response has been limited to ineffectual verbal protests or abject silence.

During Tuesday's debate with Democrat Joe Biden, Trump refused to disavow the fascist Proud Boys, telling the group to "stand back and stand by." He continued, "Somebody has to do something about Antifa and the left. This is not a right-wing problem. This is left-wing."

This open appeal to fascists to come to his defense has been answered by representatives of the Proud Boys and similar groups pledging their support to his campaign and offering their services against anti-Trump voters.

The *Washington Post* reported Thursday, "President Trump's debate-stage call for volunteers to stand watch at voting locations has prompted an enthusiastic response from known neo-Nazis and right-wing activists, leading many state election and law enforcement officials to prepare for voter intimidation, arrests and even violence on Election Day."

The newspaper said that "more-extremist supporters appeared to be joining" the effort launched by the Trump campaign and the Republican National Committee to assemble a 50,000-strong force of poll watchers they have given the title "Army for Trump."

Another olive branch from the Trump administration to the fascists was reported by NBC News, which obtained internal communications from the Department of Homeland Security in which officials were instructed to provide favorable comments to the media about 17-year-old Trump supporter Kyle Rittenhouse, who used his assault rifle to kill two demonstrators against police violence in Kenosha, Wisconsin on August 25.

Officials were told that in response to questions from the media about Rittenhouse, they should suggest that he had acted in self-defense (although both men he killed were unarmed) and that he "took his rifle to the scene of the rioting to help defend small business owners." Rittenhouse was actually responding to a call from a local right-wing

militia. Internet appeals by gun groups and Christian fundamentalists have already raised over \$500,000 for his legal defense.

Trump aims to mobilize right-wing thugs to intimidate voters, particularly in the major cities. In Tuesday's debate, Trump singled out election officials in Philadelphia because they did not allow right-wing activists to enter election offices where voters were applying for mail ballots. The heavily African-American city traditionally provides a huge margin for the Democratic Party. Reducing voter turnout in Philadelphia is an important part of the Trump campaign's effort to capture Pennsylvania's 20 electoral votes, which would be critical to an Electoral College victory.

Combined with voter intimidation is voter suppression, which includes myriad actions to make it more difficult for voters either to send in mail ballots or to go to the polls. In the most blatant act of voter suppression of the fall campaign, Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott issued a proclamation Thursday limiting the number of drop-off locations for mail-in ballots to one site per county. This means that small rural counties with a few thousand voters will have the same number of drop-off locations as Harris County, which includes the city of Houston and has nearly five million residents.

The heavily Democratic county, with a large Hispanic, African American and Asian American population, will be forced to shut 11 of its 12 drop-off locations. Travis County (Austin) will have to shut three of its four locations.

Abbott claimed his order was "to maintain the integrity of our elections," adding, "As we work to preserve Texans' ability to vote during the COVID-19 pandemic, we must take extra care to strengthen ballot security protocols throughout the state. These enhanced security protocols will ensure greater transparency and will help stop attempts at illegal voting."

The decree has nothing to do with preventing vote fraud, which repeated state and federal investigations have found to be effectively nonexistent. The sole purpose is to make it more difficult for urban residents to vote, because they are

more likely to cast ballots against Trump. Texas is one of a dozen states won by Trump in 2016 that are regarded as highly competitive in 2020. Loss of its 38 electoral votes would mean a landslide defeat for the Republican campaign.

While Trump and the Republicans press ahead with plans to rig the outcome of the November 3 election—if it happens at all—the Democratic Party has responded with a mixture of complacency and complicity. In the course of a campaign swing through Ohio and Pennsylvania, Biden made no reference to Trump’s repeated declarations that he would not accept the outcome of the 2020 vote and would not commit to a “peaceful transfer of power.”

Biden and his campaign surrogates pretended that Trump’s refusal to abide by the rules for the debate—agreed to in advance by both campaigns—was merely the manifestation of a childish personality. In reality, Trump’s performance laid bare his fascist politics, driven by a hysterical hatred of the working class and fear of socialism.

Meanwhile, in Washington, congressional Democrats continued their day-to-day horse-trading with the White House as though its occupant had not spent 90 minutes on the debate stage threatening American democracy and inciting fascist violence.

On Wednesday, the Senate passed a “continuing resolution” worked out on a bipartisan basis, to continue funding the federal government until December 11, avoiding the prospect of a federal shutdown at the beginning of the new fiscal year October 1. This means that the Democrats declined to use a funding cutoff as a means of pushing back against Trump’s threats not to honor the election results.

The same day, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi held a lengthy meeting with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Trump’s representative in talks over passage of a new coronavirus bailout bill much desired by Wall Street and specific industries like the airlines. Again, there was no suggestion that Trump’s incitement of fascists against Democratic voters should call into question the desirability of a deal with the White House.

The response of the Democratic Party-aligned media, spearheaded by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, has mirrored the fecklessness of Biden, Pelosi & Co.

The *Times* published an editorial on the debate which appealed to the Republican Party, arguing, “Conservatives in pursuit of long-cherished policy goals can no longer avoid the reality that Mr. Trump is vandalizing the principles and integrity of our democracy.” It described Trump merely as “petulant, self-centered, rageful,” as though it were a matter of his personality.

The *Times* consoled its readers with the thought that Trump is losing the election and knows it, but it did not address the consequences of this fact: having concluded he

will lose the election, Trump is now seeking to intimidate voters with fascist thugs, manipulate the vote count through Republican-controlled state governments, and rubber stamp a stolen election through a right-wing Supreme Court majority newly reinforced by his latest nominee, the religious zealot Amy Coney Barrett.

Even after outlining Trump’s plans to rig the election, and labeling him a “would-be autocrat,” the *Times* seeks to limit any popular response to casting the ballots that Trump has already declared he will ignore.

Equally bankrupt was the editorial in the *Washington Post*, which conceded that “Trump’s assault on democracy is escalating,” but drew the same conclusion: the only possible response to the threatened hijacking of the election was to vote against the president.

“Trump’s message and behavior reflected a deep contempt for the nation and its voters,” the editors declared. “His actions presaged an attempt to reject and delegitimize the election results, while inciting violence. That’s a threat that must be taken seriously by election and law enforcement authorities—and by responsible leaders in both parties.”

In other words, the *Washington Post*, owned by the world’s richest man, Jeff Bezos, advises the American people to put their faith in the police, the various state governments that administer the elections, and the leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties—i.e., Biden, Pelosi, Schumer and Mitch McConnell.

The principal concern of the capitalist politicians and the editorialists of the corporate media is that Trump’s grab for power will provoke a massive upsurge among American working people and youth, which will threaten to sweep away not only the fascistic president, but the entire capitalist system. They are far more afraid of such a movement from below than from the repression and violence of a Trump dictatorship, which would be directed, in any case, largely against the working people.

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