Beyond Impeachment: Challenges Facing the U.S. Left in 2020

written by Peter Hudis | December 26, 2019

So, Trump has finally been impeached—or at least sort of. The House voted two articles of impeachment—one for abuse of power for withholding military aid to Ukraine unless it provided Trump with dirt on Joe Biden, the other for trying to undermine Congress's investigation (it did not however charge Trump with the much more serious crime of obstruction of justice). However, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has deferred for now sending the articles of impeachment to the Senate because of a dispute with Majority Leader Mitch McConnell over the terms and procedures of the trial to be held there. That suits McConnell and the Republicans just fine, since they don't want a trial in the first place—even though it is perfectly clear that if one is held they will acquit him on all counts.

Hence, as of this moment (December 22) Trump hasn't actually been impeached and won't be until the Senate trial is held. It is not clear what leverage Pelosi and the Democrats have at this point to extract concessions from Senate Republicans over the rules and procedures, but this much is clear: the rather rushed and narrowly-focused impeachment process has not substantially moved the needle one inch in terms of undermining Trump's hold on power.

This is not to say Trump doesn't deserve to be impeached for flagrantly trying to pressure a foreign country to interfere in a U.S. election and lying through his teeth through the whole process. Yet it's also the case that he should have been impeached long before his call to the President of Ukraine for far much more egregious crimes.

What about his disastrous unilateral immigration policies, which include tearing children from their arms of their parents—a policy that has led to at least a dozen deaths and produced trauma in many children that may take decades to mend? When Obama used an executive order to create the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, many Republicans immediately began to talk of impeaching him for "violating the Constitution." But when a small but important number of left-wing Democrats in the House raised the specter of impeachment over Trump's actions on immigration, Pelosi waved them off as irrelevant.

And what about his infamous phone call with another President, this one Erdogan of Turkey, in which Trump gave him the green light to attack the Kurds of northern Syria with the clear intent of destroying the zones of liberation in and around Rojava, which had provided the best hope for a democratic, feminist, and socialist alternative in the Middle East? Thousands have died because his actions (in no doubt at least in part inspired by his own business interests in Turkey) but somehow that didn't make the articles of impeachment either.

One can of course list a whole litany of crimes committed by this racist demagogue, not least of them appointing as Attorney General William Barr, who clearly cares nothing about the rule of law but serves exclusively as Trump's private attorney on all matters. Trump used to boast that he could murder someone on Fifth Avenue and still retain his supporters; it's now gotten to the point that the Attorney General of the U.S. would officially sanction it!

When it comes to the political impact of the impeachment process one cannot blame Pelosi and the centrist Democratic Party leadership for the fact that the bulk of Trump's backers continue to support him. The vast majority of that ilk would support him whatever the case because they favor his decrepit policies. The Republican Party today is less a party than a cult—a cult centered on egotistical self-aggrandizement run amok. For a large section of bourgeois society, there is nothing to believe in any more other than grabbing as much as you can at the expense of those less privileged than yourself—even if it means destroying society in the process.

The more pertinent issue is whether the impeachment process as conducted by the House Democrats has done anything to mobilize the majority of people in this country who oppose Trump and want to see him gone? There is little evidence that it has. If anything—and especially thanks to the recent British elections—there is a growing sense of despair that he may be headed to re-election.

If you face a powerful and serious enemy, you've got to fight him with all the political ammunition at your disposal. Narrowing the terms of impeachment to two items in a series of hearings (initially closed to the public at that!) and which lasted barely a month hardly counts for that.

Moreover, that the effort to undermine Joe Biden spurred the Democratic establishment to impeachment makes it clear that the gravest affront in their eyes is to come after one of their own. Would they have tried to impeach Trump if he were recorded trying to undermine the campaign of Bernie Sanders? It's hard to imagine that they would, since the emails from the Democratic National Committee in 2016 purportedly obtained by the Russians showed that the DNC and Hillary Clinton conspired, in ways bordering on illegality, to deny Sanders the nomination.

Despite the mess that the House Democrats may have made of things, this is no time to despair, withdraw from politics, or presume that denying Trump a second term doesn't really matter. *It does matter*. Political democracy is under attack around the world today, from Iran and Turkey to China, from Poland to Russia, from Brazil and Bolivia to India. Trump is just the vile American expression of a global phenomenon. If this effort to undermine and destroy political democracy succeeds, the door will be closed to even *discussing* the path to a new, non-capitalist future, let alone actualizing one. Trump will remain in power through 2020, regardless of the impeachment process; our job is to ensure he remains there no longer.

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