

Where Does He Go From Here?

President Trump's political funeral has been celebrated often before, and that bell has still not tolled. The idea that Washington, D.C., will return to the status quo ante is nonsense.

by Conrad Black



There were no objections to President Trump's address to his followers in Washington on Wednesday until several hours later, when the outrages at the Capitol had occurred. He did not incite violence or go beyond urging his partisans to show "strength." He and his followers sincerely believe the election was stolen from them, and he explained those reasons, apologizing for doing so in such detail.

Under the circumstances, there was nothing irrational about the president's comments, and no excuse for raising the 25th Amendment, which applies to presidents who are physically or mentally incapacitated. Since the president did not break any laws, there is no serious question of impeachment. Congress

lacks the time, the grounds, and the votes for it, and the only point of impeachment and removal would be to try to prevent Trump from seeking office again. Arguments that he should resign are fatuous. The invasion of the Capitol was a shocking event but the assault on the president is a confected storm of righteousness that will subside quickly.

The real principal issue in this immense controversy is whether the presidential election was fairly decided or not. In 44 states, there have been no significant problems at all. As everyone who has followed it knows, there are a number of questions in the voting and counting methods of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—most undertaken in professed response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures reduced the verifiability of ballots and increased the dangers of fraud; opposition to these changes was generally described as “voter repression” by the Democrats.

To those satisfied that the election produced a fair result, everything President Trump and his followers have said and done that alleges otherwise is unfounded. To most of the 48 percent of American voters who supported Trump there are serious doubts about the fairness of the result.

Righteous Anger

The president and his entourage made serious mistakes. After warning accurately of the dangers of mass-mailed ballots, extended voting periods, and the invitation to ballot harvesting, they were inadequately prepared to film and document irregularities and to launch plausible, timely lawsuits.

In practice, most such litigation claimed remedies that were not justified by the alleged facts. In many cases the actions of the state legislatures, to whom the Constitution grants the authority of organizing elections within their states, were

apparently lawful. But the Trump campaign complaint was that the offending states had failed in their constitutional obligation to assure fair elections. Trump and his 74 million voters have a powerful grievance in the refusal of the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the complaint of Texas against Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, supported by 18 other states. They argued that the four defendant states failed to assure that the election was conducted fairly in those states, denying Americans their constitutional right to fair elections.

When seven justices, including all three nominated by President Trump, declined even to hear the Texas case, the court abdicated its constitutional duty and the judiciary as a result temporarily ceased to be a coequal branch of the U.S. government with the legislature and the executive. This is in profound contravention of what James Madison and the other authors of the Constitution established. It leaves the selection of the chief of state and head of government of the United States to an unruly, and as we have seen, potentially unlawful contest: a raw struggle for power between contending parties and factions.

For those who profess confidence in the fairness of the presidential election, all of the complaints about it are outrageous. Trump should just accept his defeat as Governor Samuel Tilden did in the disputed 1876 election (where he did extract significant concessions), as Richard Nixon did in 1960 (for which he has received little credit), and as Al Gore did in 2000 (when he received an adverse Supreme Court judgment).

This election's result is a far more contestable one than those. But the president has not helped his case by absurd claims of a landslide victory if the results had not been tampered with, and even less by his unconstitutional request that the vice president unto himself should have declared the election to be invalid.

Almost half the voters are in a state of righteous anger. Trump almost won, despite being sandbagged by 95 percent of the political media and outspent by his opponent two-to-one, and his enemies had to engage in unprecedented chicanery and rely on the unforeseeable cowardice of the Supreme Court to win. It is hard to line up conscientiously behind the Democratic establishment, the totalitarian Trump-hating media, Big Tech and the information dictators of social media, and the vast and generally nauseating mass of half-wits and pundits in the entertainment and celebrity communities, and say that the argument that the elections were tainted has been completely disproved.

President Trump had to choose between accepting defeat and splitting national opinion profoundly. There is no reason why someone who has real reason to believe that the world's highest and most influential office has been taken from him unjustly should just roll over.

Gradations of Integrity

Those who claim that it was a fair election are now claiming that the attack on the Capitol was racist, a complete fiction for which there is no evidence, and that the Capitol police were themselves racists. This was Biden's theory as he compared Trump to the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, and then incongruously called for national unity. It should be clear in the trials of the perpetrators whether the thugs in the vanguard at the Capitol were mainly professional hooligans who happened to be Trump supporters or serious Trump enthusiasts who happen to be hooligans.

There were gradations of integrity in the responses to last week's events. U.S. Representative Dan Crenshaw (R-Texas) implicitly blamed the president for inciting the hope that the election could still be won, but acknowledged that the election result was questionable. Veteran Fox News commentator Brit Hume dismissed Trump's allegations against the fairness

of the election as “nonsense,” a disappointing capitulation to the iron grip of the anti-Trump media that he must know to be false.

Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and a large number of other Republicans who continued to express qualified support for the president departed on this issue with comparative civility; they are not unpardonable wafflers but they have been exposed as slippery ingrates. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand’s (D-N.Y.) apparent belief that shooting the female Air Force veteran Trump supporter dead in the Capitol was more or less of a positive development, was disgraceful. The righteous weaseling of the Trump hating RINOs—Senators Mitt Romney (R-Utah), Ben Sasse (R-Neb.), and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska)—should at least be sufficient to ensure that they are not reelected.

Words do not come easily to describe the hypocrisy and betrayal of former apparent cabinet loyalists: Elaine Chao, Betsy DeVos, and Mick Mulvaney. The Civil War was an “insurrection”; this was not. It was scores of millions of voters upset at what they think was a stolen election. Many will consider the spectacle of congressmen hiding under their desks in what look like tinfoil hats a representative posture of an institution only 11 percent of Americans think is doing its job well, as reported by a media that 85 percent of Americans don’t believe.

The Largest Faction-Head in Politics

Trump set out five years ago to cleanse the political establishment. In policy terms, he has been a very successful president who was effectively ratified in congressional and state elections, and he has reoriented the Republican Party. He made great inroads on traditional sources of Democratic support among minorities, too.

Trump’s own status is to be determined; those who have not deserted him and can bring in robust traditional Republicans

will be the winners if Trump supports them. These are Senators Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley (R-Mo.), and Governors Ron DeSantis (Florida) and Greg Abbott (Texas), and most conspicuously, Vice President Mike Pence, if he quietly passes on attending the inauguration. There are others.

Trump remains by far the largest faction-head in American politics. He has done himself serious damage but it is not necessarily irreparable, and he has smoked out his pretended supporters and has forced the political establishment to the last extremities of electoral misconduct to defeat him. Where it goes from here depends largely on how Trump plays his cards; he is going to have an easy target in the new administration and his supporters are certainly the majority among the Republicans.

Trump's political funeral has been celebrated often before, and that bell has still not tolled. If he learns anything from all this (and learning from his own mistakes hasn't been his strong suit), he may be around for awhile yet. The idea that Washington will just go back to where it was before he arrived really is nonsense.

First published in