

Australian pseudo-left denies fascist danger in US presidential election crisis

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Socialist Alternative, an Australian pseudo-left party, has published several articles over the past weeks asserting that the unprecedented crisis surrounding next month's US presidential election is not a cause for any great concern.

The articles on Socialist Alternative's *Red Flag* website centre on downplaying the extraordinary actions of US president and Republican candidate Donald Trump. The essential message is that Trump's threats of a coup, his declarations that he will defy the election result if it goes against him, and his promotion of fascist violence are no big deal.

There is no fascist danger, the American ruling class would never resort to dictatorial rule and hardly any social opposition or political ferment is evident within the working class. Such is Socialist Alternative's essential argument.

The articles are couched in terms of a debate within the pseudo-left internationally. The alternatives for this corrupt, upper middle-class milieu are whether to openly support Democratic Party candidate Joe Biden, a war criminal and shill for the banks, or to maintain a nominal independence, the better to subordinate workers and youth to "left Democrats," who support Biden, as well as various middle-class protest movements that they dominate.

Socialist Alternative favours the latter strategy, but not on the basis of any considerations of political principle. The intricacies of pseudo-left electoral manoeuvres and sordid horse-trading, however, are not the primary issue.

The essential thrust of Socialist Alternative's articles is against those—above all the *World Socialist Web Site*—who warn that the US elections mark a turning point in American and world politics, posing immense dangers and political issues before the working class.

Red Flag instead insists that little has changed over the past 20 years. The current US election is much like every other that has gone before it.

This argument is an attempt to chloroform the working class, and to prevent workers and young people from making any re-evaluation of their outlook based on the social and political upheavals they are living through. It is connected to Socialist Alternative's hostility to the fight to mobilise the working class independently against capitalism and all of its defenders, and the organisation's promotion of middle-class protest movements oriented towards one or other section of the political establishment.

The two main articles are "Socialists should not vote for Joe Biden" by Omar Hassan, published on October 8, and "Is this the most important election ever?" by Ben Hillier, which appeared on October 11. The similarities between the two articles, down to the repetition of identical phrases, clearly indicates that they are part of a political campaign by Socialist Alternative to promote its dangerously complacent assessment of the US election.

Hillier notes the "succour given to the far right under this president" and Hassan writes that "Trump is giving confidence to the far right with his rambling bigotry. And it is undoubtedly true that Trump is trying his best

to steal the election..." But these observations have the character of for-the-record disclaimers, intended to soften the obviously right-wing character of Socialist Alternative's attempts to deny Trump's fascistic strategy.

The two articles appeared in the weeks and days after Trump declared that he would not leave office, even if he lost the election, openly promoted fascist Proud Boy thugs during a debate with Biden earlier this month, and produced a campaign video clearly modelled on a Leni Riefenstahl propaganda film glorifying Adolf Hitler.

Trump's strategy is not primarily an electoral one. He intends to delegitimise the vote, mobilise fascistic militias to terrorise his political opponents and stack the Supreme Court to provide a rubber-stamp for his planned theft of the ballot.

Both articles were published after the deadly consequences of this strategy were revealed. They appeared days after the US Federal Bureau of Investigations raided and arrested far-right conspirators, who were in the advanced stages of a plot to kidnap and murder Michigan's Democratic governor Gretchen Whitmer. The coup attempt followed the lines of Trump's plans to lay siege to "battleground states."

Trump has previously called for the "liberation" of Michigan and other states where the vote is likely to be close, from limited coronavirus lockdown measures. Despite the attempts of the Democrats and the media to bury the Michigan coup plot, it is already clear that the conspirators were part of a fascist terrorist network, whose plans extended to other states and nationally. The limited material made publicly available has already shown that they had a myriad of ties to the Republican Party, possibly extending into the White House and its periphery.

Hassan and Hillier simply pretend that the coup plot did not occur, failing to even mention it. Instead, they resort to extraordinarily complacent generalities.

Hassan writes: "Reasonable people can disagree about whether Trump is a fascist, but it is ludicrous to think that a fascist coup or fascist government is on the cards in the United States. Arrayed against Trump are substantial sections of the state machinery, most important of which are the military generals, and large sections of the capitalist class. There is simply no need or appetite for a dictatorship among the US ruling elite: they are getting fantastically wealthy and face no internal threat to their rule."

Hillier concurs: "Sober analysts should admit that, regardless of who is elected, they really don't have sure knowledge of what the next one year, let alone the next four, will bring. What is clear, however, is that right now, there is no indication that the US ruling class is preparing a fascist dictatorship—that is, the physical annihilation of the left and the radical Black movement."

Yet Trump, the commander in chief of the US ruling class and the embodiment of its dominant section, the parasitic financial elite, is openly campaigning for a dictatorship!

This is not a question of the distant future. Trump's administration has already launched an attempted coup d'état against the American

Constitution. It illegally threatened to mobilise the military against protesters opposing police violence in June. Unidentified federal agents have kidnapped demonstrators in Portland and other cities, and Trump has denounced socialism in the language of the fascist demagogues of the 1930s.

As for Trump's critics within the ruling class (the "substantial sections of the state machinery" and "large sections of the capitalist class" that Hassan promotes as a bulwark against the president's fascist plans), they have signalled their own "appetite" for dictatorial rule.

Biden and the Democrats have stated that if Trump loses the election and refuses to vacate the presidency, their hopes are staked on the military and the intelligence agencies taking over the White House and installing a new government. This would be a dictatorship of the Pentagon and the CIA, in all but name. The Democratic Party election campaign centres on calls for internet censorship, even greater levels of militarism, which are incompatible with democratic rights, and a McCarthyite witch-hunt of political opponents as "Russian agents."

Both factions of the ruling elite are dispensing with basic democratic norms, and this is the outcome of a protracted decay of American democracy and US capitalism.

Hillier and Hassan refer to the major assaults on civil liberties carried out by the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, but only to assert that nothing fundamentally has changed. "So when you hear people talking about the unprecedented importance of the US election between President Trump and Democratic candidate Joe Biden, consider that we've been here before," Hillier writes.

Trump is unquestionably continuing an attack on democratic rights, escalated by each of his predecessors, Democratic and Republican alike. But the protracted assault on democratic norms by the ruling elite has intensified, marking an open attempt to establish qualitatively new forms of rule, based on authoritarianism.

As Leon Trotsky wrote in 1929: "By analogy with electrical engineering, democracy might be defined as a system of safety switches and circuit breakers for protection against currents overloaded by the national or social struggle. No period of human history has been—even remotely—so overcharged with antagonisms such as ours... Under the impact of class and international contradictions that are too highly charged, the safety switches of democracy either burn out or explode. That is what the short circuit of dictatorship represents."

According to Socialist Alternative, however, no "currents" are "overloaded." Hence Hassan's blithe declaration that the American ruling elite "face[s] no internal threat to their rule."

One would have no idea from the two articles that the election is occurring as the criminal response of the US ruling elite to the worst pandemic since 1918 has resulted in the deaths of more than 220,000 Americans in the space of eight months. The coronavirus does not even rate a mention. The massive social crisis, accelerated by the transfer of unprecedented sums of public wealth to the financial elite, and involving the pauperisation of ten of millions, is passed over in silence.

In reality, the pro-business "back-to-work" campaign, spearheaded by the Trump administration, and the onslaught against jobs, wages and conditions is intensifying a major political radicalisation of the American working class. Strikes and protests have occurred with greater frequency over the past several years than in the past several decades combined, and workers are beginning to organise independently of the corporatised trade unions, including through the formation of independent rank and file committees.

It is this development to which Trump and the Democrats are responding in their turn toward authoritarianism. Trump is not denouncing socialism on a weekly or even daily basis because of personal idiosyncrasies, but because he and the American ruling elite as a whole are terrified of the prospect of a mass socialist movement of the working

class.

Hassan and Hillier also say nothing about the economic crisis of American and global capitalism, the growth of the class struggle internationally, the worldwide promotion of extreme right-wing forces by governments and the escalating danger of war.

In fact, Socialist Alternative's arguments dovetail with those advanced by the corrupt representatives of rotting American liberalism around the Democratic Party. The *New York Times*, for instance, has over the past weeks published multiple articles declaring that Trump is not a fascist and that the worst possible outcome of the election would be a "minor" constitutional crisis. Their aim is to prevent the working class from intervening against Trump, because this would inevitably entail a struggle against the Democrats and the entire capitalist system that they defend.

For all of their claims to oppose Biden, Socialist Alternative offers an unrecognisable portrait of the Democratic Party as a progressive "lesser-evil."

Hassan writes: "Democrats have a basic electoral interest in staking out a more progressive image for themselves, reflecting in a distorted way the grievances of their poorer and more racially diverse constituencies."

Hassan is speaking of a party of Wall Street that has dispensed with any, even nominal interest in the plight of working people, and that seeks to cover its right-wing policies with reactionary identity politics aimed at dividing the working class.

For years, Socialist Alternative has claimed to be waging a struggle against the right-wing Australian Liberal Party, as a means of cultivating ties with the big business Labor and Green parties and the corporatised unions.

What is common to all of Socialist Alternative's gyrations is an attempt to prevent the working class from recognising the depth of the capitalist crisis and the necessity for a genuinely socialist and internationalist perspective directed against the entire political set-up. Speaking for an affluent layer of the upper middle-class, ensconced in the union bureaucracy, as well as the top echelons of academia and the public sector, its aim is to tie workers to the political establishment, from which its privileges derive.

In previous US elections, Socialist Alternative's former allies in the International Socialist Organisation, who dissolved their party last year to integrate into the Democratic Party, openly promoted big business representatives of the Democrats. In 2008, for instance, the ISO hailed as a "transformative event" the election of President Barack Obama and Vice President Biden. They continued to lend cover to the Obama administration, even as it bailed out the banks after 2008, halved the pay of new auto workers and waged eight years of continuous war.

More recently, Socialist Alternative has enthused over Bernie Sanders, who claimed to be waging a "political revolution" through the Democratic Party. A 2016 *Red Flag* article, headlined "Why I am feeling the Bern" declared: "From a principled socialist point of view, it can't be disputed that Sanders falls far short of what is needed. But then, socialism is not Scotland. If it were, we would be there already. Unfortunately, in the real world, the high road of principle doesn't travel so well."

In practice, Sanders' "political revolution" was aimed at channelling a leftward sentiment, especially among young people, back behind the Democratic Party, the graveyard of socialist movements. He is the most enthusiastic supporter of Biden, as he was of Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Socialist Alternative signals some of the key concerns of the political establishment, as transmitted through its pseudo-left representatives, who are particularly sensitive to social and political discontent within the working class and seek to prevent it finding independent political expression.

Amid an explosion of American militarism in 2012, which has now developed into confrontations with Russia and China that threaten a world war, *Red Flag* insisted that it was necessary to dispense with "knee jerk

anti-imperialism,” a line that dovetailed with the efforts of the ruling elite to suppress mass anti-war sentiment.

In the current US elections, *Red Flag* is giving unvarnished expression to the attempts of the political establishment, including in Australia, to downplay the dangers of dictatorship while still absurdly claiming that the Democrats are responsive to pressure from below.



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