

Australian political and media establishment responds nervously to Trump coup attempt

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Prominent representatives of the Australian ruling elite have responded with nervousness to the unprecedented fascist coup attempt in the US on Wednesday, which was directly incited by US President Donald Trump as part of his bid to overturn the results of the November presidential election.

The concern from sections of the political and media establishment is not motivated by any commitment to democratic rights. Australian governments, like their counterparts internationally, have attacked civil liberties for the past two decades, first under the banner of the fraudulent “war on terror” and more recently with a McCarthyite campaign against supposed “Chinese foreign interference.” Journalists and whistle-blowers have been attacked for exposing war crimes and refugees brutally persecuted, while increasingly virulent nationalism and militarism have been promoted.

Rather, the official fears are over the domestic and international implications of intense political instability and upheaval in the US, the centre of world capitalism and Australia’s chief strategic ally since World War II.

The ruling class is afraid that the coup attempt marks the further erosion of traditional bourgeois democratic forms of rule. They rightly fear that it will intensify a political radicalisation of the working class amid already widespread anger over the criminally-negligent, pro-business response to the pandemic, the imposition of austerity and mass unemployment, and the official promotion of the extreme-right.

As the coup attempt was unfolding, Prime Minister Scott Morrison issued a tweet bemoaning violence and the “distressing scenes” of the US Capitol being stormed by fascistic Trump supporters. During a press conference later in the day, however, he refused to condemn Trump’s incitement of the attack. When asked about the fact that George Christensen, a backbench member of his own government, was promoting Trump’s lies that the US presidential election had been stolen, Morrison lamely replied that “there is such a thing as free speech in this

country.”

Since being installed as prime minister in a party-room coup in August, 2018, Morrison has closely identified himself with Trump. This has included appearing at what amounted to a Trump campaign rally in Ohio in late 2019, and backing all of the US administration’s many provocations against China.

Morrison has also tolerated the activities of Christensen and several other MPs who have cultivated ties with an “alt-right” milieu supportive of Trump. Far-right organisations, despite lacking popular support, have been given inordinate coverage in the press over the past five years. As is the case internationally, their elevation to prominence is aimed at diverting rising discontent over the social crisis, caused above all by the pro-business program of Labor and the unions, in a reactionary, nationalist direction and shifting official politics even further to the right.

Labor responded by pointing to Morrison’s ties to Trump. Its national Twitter account posted an image of the two men arm-in-arm, with the caption “It’s the company you keep.” Labor leader Anthony Albanese declared that “the violent insurrection in Washington is an assault on the rule of law and democracy. Donald Trump has encouraged this response and must now call on his supporters to stand down.”

Labor, however, largely refrained from criticising Trump throughout his presidency, in line with its unalloyed support for the US-Australia alliance. It has functioned as a “constructive opposition” to Morrison, and has marched in lockstep with his government on “national security” and foreign policy, including the confrontation with China that began under a previous Labor administration.

Labor’s belated criticism of Trump is because the party is anxious to cultivate ties with the incoming administration of President-elect Joseph Biden. It makes the same grotesque appeal as Biden to the coup plotter in chief to call off his fascistic supporters. The Democratic Party government will continue the Trump administration’s policies of massive tax cuts for the wealthy and attacks on the working class, while escalating the bipartisan aggression against China initiated

under Obama.

Labor and sections of the media are promoting the delusion that a Biden administration, stacked with corporate appointees, attacking the working class and extending an olive branch to the Republican Party forces who have just attempted a coup, will usher in a return to “normalcy” and “civility.” This is aimed at chloroforming the working class as to the implications of a fascist coup in the centre of world capitalism.

Other commentators, however, have openly warned that the attack on the Capitol is a turning point in the disintegration of American democracy, reflecting deep concern in ruling circles over its implications for US foreign policy and potential for a further radicalisation of workers and youth in the US and internationally, including Australia.

The *Australian*, the national flagship of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp, has previously promoted Trump but condemned the coup attempt, with an editorial yesterday denouncing “one of [the] gravest assaults on the Capitol since George Washington laid its cornerstone in 1793.”

An accompanying opinion piece by David Kilcullen, headlined “American mythology dies on the Hill,” stated: “The dramatic unrest in Washington yesterday seems to represent a historic shift in the conflict dynamic in the US.”

Kilcullen wrote that “several myths died this week. One was the complacent notion that ‘it can’t happen here.’” This was a reference to longstanding claims that the establishment of a fascist government is impossible in the US, given its democratic traditions. “On the contrary, Thursday looked a little like the opening move of a colour revolution, as seen in Ukraine, Serbia, Georgia or the Arab Spring,” Kilcullen wrote, before warning of the ongoing danger of a “regime change.”

Peter Hartcher, international editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, similarly wrote that: “The world might be witnessing not only the death throes of the Trump presidency but of US democracy.” He pointed to the support for the coup by significant Republican Party figures who he suggested had lost the “mindset of democracy”—a regression, he said, that would not be overcome through Biden’s installation.

Bob Carr, a decades-long Labor Party politician and former foreign minister, bluntly wrote that “American politics is not going to return to civility,” and that “the old Republican Party is finished.” Regardless of the outcome of Trump’s attempts to overturn the election, Carr warned: “Yesterday’s chaos on Capitol Hill is a precursor for the fire next time.”

Carr concluded by citing German playwright Bertolt Brecht on Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler: “Do not rejoice in his defeat you men/ For though the world stood up and stopped

the bastard/ The bitch that bore him is on heat again.”

The commentary has not given any coherent account of what lies behind the disintegration of American democracy and the re-emergence of fascism. References are frequently made to the “culture wars” while supposed racial conflicts are presented as a central issue, in line with attempts to suppress any discussion of class and to divide working people on the basis of race.

As defenders of the profit-system, figures such as Carr and Hartcher are unable to point to the real root cause: the crisis-ridden global capitalist system, the immense growth of social inequality and the turn by sections of the ruling elite to dictatorship in response to mass working class opposition.

This is not a peculiarly American phenomenon, as is often claimed. It is a global process, as evidenced by the promotion of neo-fascist forces in Germany, who are once again a major force in the Bundestag, the rise of authoritarian leaders in a host of countries, from India to Brazil and Poland, and the official cultivation of extreme right-wing organisations, including in Australia and New Zealand, where a fascist gunman murdered 51 people in a March, 2019 terrorist attack on a Christchurch mosque.

Kilcullen, nevertheless, pointed to what is animating the fears within the political and media establishment. He stated that “the contest” was “now a three-cornered conflict among left-wing populists, right-wing populists and an establishment that includes elites from both political parties.”

In other words, the old mechanisms of capitalist rule are breaking down, illusions in the viability of parliamentary democracy are being dispelled and a new period of social upheavals has begun. The reference to “left-wing populism” was a clear allusion to the prospect of a mass movement of the working class directed against capitalism, not only in the US, but internationally, including in Australia. Such a movement, based on a socialist perspective, is the only means of defeating the fascist threat.



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