Australian pseudo-left dismisses Trump's fascist coup attempt as a "pathetic farce"

Oscar Grenfell
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The scenes of thousands of fascists storming the US Capitol last week in an attempt to overturn the results of November's presidential election have shocked millions of workers and young people around the world.

The coup attempt, directly incited by President Donald Trump, is a watershed in the erosion of democratic norms and a turn to dictatorship in the centre of world imperialism. It has graphically demonstrated that as in the 1930s, capitalism is hurtling towards authoritarianism and fascism. This threat squarely poses the need for an independent political intervention by the working class on the basis of a socialist and revolutionary perspective, as the only means of defending democratic rights.

Under these conditions, pseudo-left parties internationally have stepped in to downplay the dangers and to insist that nothing of significance took place at the Capitol last Wednesday.

Socialist Alternative, an Australian organisation, is no exception. For months, it derided warnings that Trump was preparing a coup as "ludicrous" and "absurd." Now that those warnings have come to pass, Socialist Alternative has doubled down on its insistence that the extreme right poses virtually no threat; the American ruling class and military are committed to democratic forms of rule; and there is no crisis of capitalism in the US or anywhere else.

It often takes weeks or months for the organisation's publication, *Red Flag*, to comment on major events, especially if they occur outside Australia. But in this instance, Socialist Alternative rushed to print, publishing an article headlined "The fascist farce on Washington" within hours of the storming of the Capitol.

In other words, even before the dust had settled and as the events of January 6 were still unfolding, *Red Flag's* editors commissioned an article insisting that all was well in Washington and there was no cause for concern.

The entire piece is written in the flippant, snide tone of its headline. The violent incursion of fascists into the heart of the American government for the first time since the construction of the Capitol in 1793 and the open attempts of Trump and large sections of the Republican Party to overthrow an election result with force, are treated as a joke.

"The rally was a flop—the 'popular' equivalent of a Rudy Giuliani press conference," *Red Flag* author Josh Lees wrote. "The 'storming' of the Capitol was hardly the stuff movies are made about (although I'm sure someone will try). A few windows were broken, and the only person killed was one of the far-right protesters. No real damage to the building was done. Someone sat in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's chair (the horror!)."

The sophomoric "humour" was all aimed at bolstering *Red Flag's* central claim, that there was no coup attempt. "Far from some serious 'coup' or 'insurrection,' this was a pathetic display highlighting the weakness of Trump and the right," Lees declared, before warning in his conclusion against "breathless talk of imagined coups by small fascist groups."

That a coup was attempted is hardly the stuff of imagination. A well-organised group of extreme right-wing activists, who had travelled from around the country, succeeded in taking control of one of the most secure government buildings in the world for several hours. Their explicit aim was to prevent the certification of the Electoral College results of November's national ballot, thereby blocking the installation of a democratically-elected administration. *Red Flag's* related claim, that the attack "failed to win any institutional support," is so obviously false that it is repeatedly contradicted by the article itself.

In the first instance, the rioters were at the Capitol because they had been told to go there by Trump, who currently holds the US presidency, hardly an insignificant institution of the American state.

Secondly, the conditions for the assault were deliberately established by the leadership of the Republican Party, one of the two main parties of the American ruling elite and its state apparatus. As the WSWS noted, "A majority of Republican congressmen and a substantial number of Republican senators orchestrated Wednesday's political debate at which the legitimacy of the Electoral College vote was challenged, to provide the necessary pretext for the planned right-wing uprising."

Thirdly, the fascists would never have gained access to the Capitol, without the active support of key sections of the state apparatus. In the days since the attack, substantial evidence has emerged of a security stand-down, implicating not only the leadership of the Capitol police, but the FBI, the Pentagon and the Secret Service.

After months of public warnings that there would be a major disturbance on January 6, a relative handful of Capitol police officers were left to defend one of the most important buildings of the American government. Some of their colleagues waved the fascists in.

This is so clear that even *Red Flag* was compelled to admit it.

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"Their success in gaining entry had more to do with the sympathy that the cops and other security agencies have with the far right than the protesters' actual strength," Lees wrote. Only a few paragraphs before, he had insisted that "no section of the military" had backed Trump's bid to overturn the election, "nor any other section of the US state apparatus."

Indifferent to the obvious contradictions of his own argument, Lees added more. "Besides their sympathy with the far right, this is the other reason the security apparatus was unprepared for the protesters entering the building—authorities knew that there was no coup, so they were quite relaxed," he stated.

It would be difficult to conceive of a greater muddle. In the space of a few hundred words, Lees alternatively insisted that "no section of the state apparatus" supported the coup; "security agencies sympathised" with and facilitated the coup attempt, and that they were "relaxed" because there was no coup.

The tortured character of the argument demonstrates that Socialist Alternative is peddling lies and a political line that has been contradicted by events themselves.

The most cynical aspect of the *Red Flag* article is its claim to be polemicising against the Democrats, who it accuses of exaggerating the fascist danger "to keep the focus off the incoming Biden administration." Any reference to Trump's assault on American democracy is "nationalist blather" aimed at covering for "the new imperial presidency of Joe Biden."

In fact, Biden and the Democrats are doing everything they can to downplay the events of January 6. Their immediate response was to plead for "unity" with their "Republican colleagues." No calls have been raised from any section of the Democratic Party for a serious investigation of the coup, while Trump and the other plotters, who should have been arrested for their attack on the Constitution, have been given an effective amnesty.

For its part, the corporate media, in the US and internationally, including in Australia, has largely moved on to next business, treating the attempt to establish a dictatorship in America less than a week ago as old news.

All of this is aimed at chloroforming the working class as to the immense and ongoing dangers that it confronts, and covering-up the rot of capitalism and bourgeois rule revealed so graphically on January 6.

Socialist Alternative and the pseudo-left function as the most determined partisans of this ruling class campaign.

In the lead-up to November's election, *Red Flag* published two articles deriding warnings of a coup, as Trump was publicly declaring that he would not accept an election defeat. "[I]t is ludicrous to think that a fascist coup or fascist government is on the cards in the United States," one of them declared, while the other stated: "What is clear, however, is that right now, there is no indication that the US ruling class is preparing a fascist dictatorship."

The pieces were published days after a fascist plot to execute Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and take over the state capitol had been exposed. That conspiracy was not mentioned in either article, both of which consisted exclusively of complacent generalities. Under conditions in which the Michigan plot had graphically demonstrated the fascist threat, as well as the national strategy of Trump and his supporters, *Red Flag* blithely dismissed the danger.

As has since been noted by the *New York Times* and others, the Michigan operation served as a dress rehearsal for the January 6 coup. All those who covered it up, including *Red Flag*, functioned as links in a chain whose purpose was to keep the working class in the dark as to what was being prepared.

On November 23, as Trump was beginning to rally his fascist supporters for January 6, *Red Flag* again denounced warnings that anything was afoot. An article by editor Ben Hillier concluded: "If Trump's is the worst, the most pathetic coup ever, it is exceeded in its piteousness only by the outlandish response it has generated."

Now that the coup attempt that *Red Flag* claimed would never occur has eventuated, the publication is insisting that the far-right is "isolated," "demoralised" and "far weaker than the Democrats make out." This, as the fascists are emboldened by their incursion into the Capitol, and are threatening greater violence on inauguration day next Wednesday.

The record demonstrates that at every point, Socialist Alternative has sought to downplay the fascist plans, deny that there is any crisis of democracy and insist on the stability of capitalist rule.

The argument of the pseudo-left, amid the deepest breakdown of world capitalism since the 1930s, the homicidal response of the ruling elites to an unprecedented pandemic and mass social anger among workers and young people, is that all is well in the US, and by extension, internationally.

This perspective, so clearly contradicted by what is taking place, is rooted in class interests. Speaking for affluent layers of the upper-middle class centred in academia, the union bureaucracy and the top echelons of the public sector, the pseudo-left is wedded to the existing political and social order and hostile to any threat to it. Tied by a thousand threads to bourgeois parties such as the Democrats in the US and Labor and the unions in Australia, the pseudo-left has a key stake in defending the viability of bourgeois-democracy and the official political set-up.

Above all, the aim is to prevent workers and young people from drawing the necessary conclusions from the extraordinary events of last week and the past twelve months. Namely that the defence of social and democratic rights requires nothing less than a break with the entire political establishment, and the turn to a new perspective aimed at the revolutionary, socialist transformation of society, if dictatorship, fascism and capitalist barbarism are to averted.

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