

Australian government again refuses to condemn Trump coup

Mike Head**12 January 2021**

Acting Prime Minister Michael McCormack this week several times refused to condemn US President Donald Trump for inciting the fascistic coup attempt in Washington last week. McCormack also rejected calls for Trump's removal from office for openly seeking to overturn by force the result of last year's presidential election.

When asked by a journalist on Tuesday, for the second time in two days, if he would condemn Trump's false claim that the election was "stolen" and his incitement of the Capitol siege, McCormack again refused. "I will not criticise Donald Trump, for goodness sake," he said.

McCormack doubled down on this stance even as further evidence was emerging daily of a high-level conspiracy involving senior figures in the Republican Party and sections of the military and police forces to sweep aside the election result. The details revealed how close the insurgent mob summoned by Trump came to capturing members of Congress, and how far they were assisted by a systemic stand-down of security forces.

Equally significantly, the acting prime minister's declaration also came amid growing reports of plans for further violent far-right insurrectionary mobilisations across the United States before the scheduled January 20 inauguration of Joe Biden.

In his initial remarks on Monday, McCormack voiced support for Trump's political agenda, saying it was "unfortunate" that the events of January 6 could overshadow Trump's supposed achievements.

McCormack's comments are not simply a personal opinion. The deputy prime minister, who heads the rural-based National Party, is in charge of the government while Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who leads the big business Liberal Party, takes a week's leave. His stand reinforces that taken last week by Morrison, who also refused to denounce Trump's bid to establish a presidential dictatorship.

When reporters asked Morrison whether Trump bore some responsibility for undermining democracy, he insisted that Trump had urged people to go home peacefully. In fact, the president had told the insurgents "we love you" and repeated the lie that the election had been "stolen" from him.

While the governments of some US allies, such as Britain and Canada, have sought to distance themselves from Trump—after collaborating with his domestic and foreign policies throughout

his presidency—the Australian government has remained aligned with him.

The statements by Morrison and McCormack must be taken seriously. First, they point to their understanding that the Trump-instigated putsch is far from over, and indicate their readiness to embrace any resulting regime. Second, they reveal the ongoing cultivation of similar far-right and neo-Nazi elements who could likewise be mobilised to turn to authoritarian forms of rule in Australia under conditions of a deepening political, economic and social crisis.

On Monday, McCormack made a deliberate pitch to this alt-right constituency by equating the fascistic mob that stormed the US Congress building on January 6 with the mass anti-police violence demonstrations across the US and around the world last year, triggered by the brutal police killing of George Floyd. McCormack provocatively labelled them "race riots," echoing white supremacists and attempting to obscure the multi-racial character of this political development.

In reality, last year's overwhelmingly peaceful protests by millions of people worldwide were met by enormous police and military repression, orchestrated by the Trump administration, which sought to invoke the Insurrection Act to declare martial law. This is in stark contrast to last week's insurrectionary violence, which was aided and abetted by the administration and permitted to continue for hours by the police, FBI and Pentagon.

On Tuesday, the acting prime minister went further, invoking the phrase "all lives matter" that has been adopted by white supremacist groups to attack the "black lives matter" slogan advanced during last year's huge multi-racial marches.

"There are a lot of people out there who are being a bit bleeding heart and who are concocting outrage, but they should know that those lives matter too," he declared. "All lives matter."

This phrase has added symbolism because it was championed last year by the anti-immigrant, far-right One Nation Senator Pauline Hanson, who sought to have it endorsed by the Senate. Like Hanson, the Coalition is seeking to divert in right-wing nationalist and xenophobic directions the political alienation and hostility felt by broad layers of the population, especially in working class and rural areas, who have suffered decades of

deteriorating economic and social conditions at the hands of the corporate elite and political establishment, now exacerbated by the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Both Morrison and McCormack have defended the supposed “free speech rights” of parliamentary representatives of their Liberal-National Coalition, including George Christensen and Craig Kelly, to publicly agitate in support of Trump’s incendiary “stolen election” claims.

Christensen had taken to Facebook again last Thursday, even as the putsch was still underway in the US and Republican Congress members were continuing to refuse to certify the results of the presidential election. Essentially justifying the assault on the Capitol, he claimed the situation was “a dumpster fire at the moment ... all because no one dared audit the vote.” He also accused Twitter of “pouring fuel on the fire” by “censoring the leader of the free world” in locking Trump’s account.

This is to insist on Trump’s unfettered access to Twitter and social media so that he can mobilise and incite his fascistic followers throughout the country, when he should be arrested on charges of plotting to overthrow democratic rule, along with all his co-conspirators in the Republican Party and the police-military apparatus.

Leaders of the Labor Party and the Greens have condemned McCormack for equating the takeover of the Capitol to last year’s huge marches against police killings but said nothing about the political significance of the government’s refusal to denounce Trump’s incitement of the attempted coup.

How closely the Morrison government has aligned itself with Trump was highlighted on December 22, just weeks before the January 6 insurrection, when Trump awarded Morrison the Legion of Merit, a US military decoration, for “leadership in addressing global challenges” and strengthening the Australia and US military alliance.

Like Trump and his backers, sections of the Liberal-National Coalition have actively sought to develop an extreme right-wing movement, fomenting anti-immigrant racism and demonising China. It is competing with a plethora of far-right parties, such as Hanson’s, to try to establish a reactionary social base, above all via the promotion of divisive anti-Chinese, anti-Muslim and anti-refugee prejudice.

This was a key factor underlying the political coup against former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in August 2018, spearheaded by Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and the most right-wing sections of the Coalition. Turnbull was also regarded in Washington as insufficiently committed to the mounting US aggression toward China.

Since becoming prime minister as a result, Morrison has identified himself with Trump, who publicly welcomed his replacement of Turnbull. Trump further hailed Morrison’s election victory in May 2019, tweeting: “Congratulations to Scott on a GREAT WIN!” Trump afforded Morrison a rare full ceremonial welcome on his US visit in September 2019. During

that trip, Morrison attended a Trump rally in Ohio and praised Trump, saying the pair “share a lot of the same views.”

As in the US and Europe, Trump-style and “alt right” formations are only able to gain traction by exploiting the political disaffection of broad layers of the population by their treatment at the hands of the establishment parties—Labor, the Coalition and the Greens. These political, social and class tensions have been deepened by the acceleration of the corporate assault on jobs and working conditions in response to the pandemic.

Australia may not have yet suffered the catastrophe caused by the profit-driven official response to the pandemic across the US and Europe, but the social assault has been no less severe. While the share markets and wealth held by a tiny elite have soared, fed by massive government stimulus packages, nearly five million workers are unemployed or “under-employed” and many face impoverishment and mortgage or rental crises.

Responsibility for this lies above all with the Labor Party and the trade unions, which have overseen an unending offensive against the jobs, wages and social conditions of the working class over the past three decades, and formed a de facto coalition with the Morrison government via the “national cabinet” to deepen this attack since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Moreover, with the economy mired in the deepest recession since the 1930s, the corporate elite is demanding that the Coalition step up the onslaught on workers’ conditions and basic social services, which will inevitably trigger explosive working class struggles.

No less than in the US, the political establishment is fragile. Since the 2008–09 global financial crisis, one prime minister after another—seven in all—has fallen victim either to inner-party intrigues or been voted out of office. As in the US, the cultivation of fascistic forces is the response in ruling circles to the rising threat of working class revolt. The aim is to create a political base hostile to socialism and prepared to use violence against opposition to war, austerity and authoritarianism. The development of a mass working class movement, informed by a socialist perspective, is the only means of defeating this fascist threat.



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