

Trump coup attempt highlights official promotion of far-right in Australia

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The fascistic coup attempt in the US on January 6, orchestrated by President Donald Trump and aimed at overturning the result of last November's presidential election, has highlighted the cultivation of extreme right-wing forces by sections of the ruling elite internationally.

This development is directed against mounting social and political opposition from the working class, aimed at shifting official politics even further to the right and bound up with a turn to authoritarian forms of rule. It has been on display, in the response to the storming of the US Capitol, by elements of the Australian political and media establishment.

Liberal-National Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his deputy Michael McCormack have repeatedly refused to condemn Trump's incitement of the coup attempt. Senior government ministers have said nothing about the fascistic attempt to overturn an election result. Instead, they have spoken out against the shutdown of Trump's Twitter account, presenting it as a grave assault on democratic rights.

This stance is an unmistakable appeal to an extreme right-wing milieu that has been increasingly integrated into official politics over the past decade.

This is demonstrated by the positions of government backbenchers Craig Kelly and George Christensen. For months, both have repeated Trump's false claims about a stolen election, bolstering the lies used to justify the coup attempt. Since January 6, neither has disavowed Trump. Rather, without censure or condemnation from Morrison, they have promoted the absurd conspiracy theory that the assault on the Capitol was carried out by "Marxists" and anti-fascist activists in disguise.

Christensen, a National Party representative from northern Queensland, has longstanding ties to extreme right-wing organisations. He once appeared on the "Convict Report," a podcast hosted by Clifford Jennings, a young Liberal later exposed as a fascist. In 2017, Christensen posed for a photograph with Kane Miller, then leader of the "True Blue Crew," a racist street gang that has attacked left-wing activists and immigrants, at a function hosted by the anti-Muslim "Q Society."

Kelly has spent much of the past year promoting misinformation on the COVID-19 pandemic. Orienting to a right-wing anti-lockdown movement, he has described

mandatory mask-wearing for children as abuse and has falsely claimed that various existing medicines, including antiseptics, can treat the coronavirus.

Christensen and Kelly are frequently presented in the media as eccentric individuals, whose right-wing positions have no broader significance. That they are appealing to a definite constituency, however, is demonstrated by the promotion of Trump by other political and media figures.

Alan Jones, a prominent right-wing radio broadcaster, approvingly declared in November, after Trump's election defeat, that it would be a "brave person to bet against Donald Trump." Jones backed Trump's attempt to overturn the result, declaring without substantiation that the election had been a "manual in the art of voter fraud."

Miranda Devine, a right-wing commentator for Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorp, bemoaned the attack on the Capitol. But she nevertheless presented those who participated in the coup as victims, and contrasted them favourably with millions who participated in anti-police violence protests last year.

Those who besieged the Capitol, Devine wrote, "didn't throw bricks at police or burn police buildings to the ground or beat innocent passers-by senseless. But they will have the book thrown at them, because it's not the crime you commit that matters any more, it's who you are."

For their part, representatives of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, a right-wing outfit with representatives in state and federal parliaments, have all but endorsed the coup attempt.

Mark Latham, One Nation's leader in the state of New South Wales, tweeted on January 9: "Amusing to read media elites, none of whom saw Trump coming, on what it means now. These conceited spoilt children of the Left are blind to how their own arrogance and manic need to control other people embeds the Resistance to them. Among outsiders, stronger day-by-day."

Latham was leader of the federal Labor Party from 2003 to 2005. He has since shifted seamlessly from Labor's nationalist and anti-immigrant positions to open support for the extreme-right, centred on feverish denunciations of "the left."

This broader right-wing milieu has spawned explicitly fascist and neo-Nazi organisations. The National Socialist Network (NSN), for instance, states that its goal is a "white revolution."

On social media, the NSN hailed the “brave white men in Washington D.C.,” who stormed the Capitol, declaring they had “lit a flame that will never go out” and “broken the enemy’s spell forever.”

To the extent that the NSN has been mentioned by the corporate press, it has largely been presented as a fringe aberration. Yet it arose directly out of the stepped-up promotion of extreme right-wing forces by the political and media establishment.

In 2015, a small group of right-wing activists began holding protests under the banner of “Reclaim Australia.” Despite being attended only by a few dozen, or at most a few hundred people, these events were given inordinate media coverage.

Christensen and other Liberal-National politicians addressed some of the gatherings. These events were based on anti-Islam xenophobia, which has been peddled by successive Labor and Liberal-National governments since 2001, under the rubric of the fraudulent “war on terror.”

Other strands of Reclaim Australia’s fascistic perspective were also taken directly from the official parties. These included support for a racist campaign targeting supposed “African gangs” in Melbourne, spearheaded by Liberal-National and Labor politicians, along with the press, and the glorification of Australian militarism, amid a massive official “celebration” of the centenary of World War I.

The United Patriots Front (UPF), a prominent organisation in Reclaim Australia, and its leaders Blair Cottrell and Tom Sewell, have been given media interviews by the state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation and other outlets. The two men, who have both expressed admiration for Hitler, were widely presented in the press as giving expression to “community concerns” over Muslim immigrants and “African gangs.” Sewell has since come out openly as a Nazi, establishing the NSN.

Reclaim Australia and its offshoots developed ties with right-wing populist outfits, such as Hanson’s One Nation Party and the Katter Australia Party. The UPF hailed Fraser Anning, who represented both those parties in federal parliament, before declaring himself an independent. In his maiden parliamentary speech, Anning called for a “final solution” to the “immigration problem”—a direct reference to the Nazi holocaust.

The far-right groups also cultivated ties within the Liberal and National parties. In 2019, it was revealed that a group of fascists had successfully “infiltrated” the New South Wales state executive of the Young Nationals. They included Clifford Jennings, who had previously interviewed Christensen, and had been nominated to executive positions by a senior Nationals’ staffer. When the group, which included avowed Nazis, was uncovered, former National leader Barnaby Joyce initially decried their exposure as a “McCarthyist witch-hunt,” before retracting the comment.

The growing political weight of far-right elements in the

Liberal-National party was a factor in Scott Morrison’s installation as prime minister in a party-room coup in August, 2018. Morrison immediately sought to identify himself with Trump, and has tolerated without criticism the activities of Christensen and other backbenchers seeking to transform the Liberal-National Coalition into an alt-right style movement.

The dangers of the official promotion of the far-right were underscored by the 2019 fascist terrorist attack by Brenton Tarrant, who killed 51 people and maimed 40 at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Tarrant was born and raised in Australia. He had communicated online with Sewell and other representatives of the UPF, who sought to recruit him prior to the Christchurch attack.

This connection was confirmed in an official New Zealand report into the massacre, released this month. The political and media establishment, however, has maintained a deafening silence over Tarrant’s Australian links and their political implications, as have the Australian intelligence agencies.

The threat of right-wing violence was further underscored by the conviction late last year of Philip Galea, a former prominent figure in Reclaim Australia, on terrorism charges. Evidence showed that Galea had plotted to bomb the offices of left-wing organisations in Melbourne, as well as the city’s Trades Hall.

The extreme right-wing organisations have very limited support. They are only able to make an appeal as a result of the widespread political discontent with all the official parties. Labor and the trade unions bear the central responsibility. Their smashing up of the workers’ movement that existed up until the 1980s, and enforcement of a decades-long assault on jobs, wages and conditions has created a social crisis and a toxic political environment, upon which the fascists prey.

The record in the US and Australia, moreover, demonstrates that the traction of the extreme-right is the product of their promotion by the official parties and the establishment media, which are seeking to divert social anger in a reactionary direction, bolster moves toward authoritarian rule and cultivate a base that can be mobilised against the emerging struggles of the working class.



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