

International Marxist Tendency on the storming of the US Capitol: “This was not an organized insurrectionary coup”

Jordan Shilton
1 February 2021

Since a violent fascist mob incited by Trump and his far-right allies stormed the Capitol building in Washington D.C. on January 6, pseudo-left organisations around the world have united to insist that nothing of particular significance took place. Despite mounting evidence showing that the insurrectionists planned to seize hostages and stop the confirmation of Joe Biden as president, and that their criminal enterprise enjoyed political support from large sections of the Republican Party, these organisations have explicitly rejected describing these events as an attempted fascist coup.

A prime example of this complacency, which aims to lull the working class to sleep by assuring it that there is “nothing to see here,” is provided by the International Marxist Tendency. Founded by Alan Woods and the late Ted Grant in 1993, the IMT, like its predecessors, has combined slavish subservience to the trade union bureaucracy and social democratic parties with the use of revolutionary “Marxist” rhetoric designed to disorient and mislead workers and young people coming into struggle.

On January 7, just hours after the storming of the Capitol, the IMT’s US supporters, Socialist Revolution (USA), published an article, “Trump’s insurrection and the chaos of US bourgeois democracy.” The central thrust of this legal brief for the continued stability of US democracy can be summarised as follows: Trump acted as an isolated, despairing figure with no support from the ruling class or state apparatus; the US president did not want his supporters to storm the Capitol building; and American democracy will remain stable for several decades to come.

The IMT’s article trivialises what took place and downplays its political significance. It asserts, “It was widely anticipated that January 6, the day Congress was scheduled to certify the Electoral College vote in a joint session, would be a tense day in Washington. This was the culmination of Trump’s attempt to frame the election as fraudulent, and the president organized a ‘Save America March’ to coincide with the Electoral College vote.”

This is a deliberate downplaying of the true situation. Trump was not merely engaged in an “attempt to frame the election as fraudulent.” For months prior to the November 3, 2020, vote, he led an open conspiracy to overturn the outcome of the election and establish a presidential dictatorship in violation of the Constitution. In June, he threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act against mass protests triggered by police violence to declare martial law and suspend democratic rights. During the first televised debate with Biden at the end of September, he urged the fascist Proud Boys to “stand back and stand by,” while declaring that no election result other than his victory would be acceptable. October saw the exposure of the plot by fascists and far-right militias with direct ties to Trump to take over the Michigan state legislature and kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer, which served as a trial run for January 6.

As for the events of January 6, the IMT dismisses the role of then-Vice

President Mike Pence, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and the majority of the Republican Party establishment in providing political support to Trump’s coup plot. The fact that the election result was being challenged, an unprecedented development on what has traditionally been a ceremonial occasion, created the political atmosphere within which the coup could be attempted. The ability of the mob to so easily enter the Capitol, one of the most heavily guarded buildings in the world, underscores the significant support Trump’s conspiracy enjoyed within the state and security apparatus. And the fact that substantial evidence shows that the insurrectionists planned to seize senators and congressmen as hostages, a goal which they came within seconds of accomplishing, with the aim of extracting concessions from Biden, underscores how serious the plot was.

The IMT denies all of this, asserting, “Trump and his diehard supporters in Congress almost certainly did not plan for the crowd to invade the Capitol but they were playing with fire,” without providing any evidence for this naked apologia. Developing its narrative that the storming of the Capitol was essentially a spontaneous product of the zeal of a handful of right-wing extremists, the IMT added, “Trump’s attack dogs...broke free of their leashes.”

“[T]o be sure, these are dramatic events,” the IMT lectures its readers. “But as Marxists, we must maintain a sense of proportion. This was not an organized insurrectionary coup on the verge of overthrowing the US government and imposing a fascist regime to crush the workers and the left. Far from it!”

A “would-be Bonapartist,” continues the IMT, “must have the support of significant sections of the military. Trump does not have this... If the military were to be called in, it would be to get rid of Trump, not to install him as dictator.”

This grotesquely complacent assessment ends with the reassurance that the far-right will only pose a danger if the working class “fails to take power over the next decade or two.”

Having vouched for the “democratic” credentials of the US military and offered an apologia for Trump and his far-right conspirators within the Republican Party, the IMT proceeded to raise a hue and a cry over Twitter’s decision to ban Trump’s account. The president of the United States, in charge of vast resources of state repression and propaganda, who was using social media to rally fascists and other armed militias to overthrow the government, had fallen victim to “Twitter’s tyranny,” railed *Socialist Revolution* in an article published a week later. Cynically misusing a 1938 quote from Leon Trotsky, in which the founder of the Fourth International warned about the dangerous implications of advocating the suppression of right-wing reactionary newspapers by the Mexican capitalist state, the article denounced the “exceptional acts of censorship” against Trump.

The inability of the IMT to distinguish between Trotsky's principled warning against the use of capitalist state censorship to suppress right-wing publications and Twitter's decision after Trump's incitement of an armed fascist coup to shut down his account, which was in part a response to demands from the company's workforce, demonstrates the worst kind of political stupidity and lack of seriousness. It parrots the line of petty bourgeois journalists like Chris Hedges and Joe Lauria of *Consortium News*, who penned a lawyer's brief for Trump following the January 6 insurrection denying that he was responsible for the storming of the Capitol. As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in response, providing such a political cover to Trump will aid the longer-term impact of the attempted coup, which regardless of its short-term tactical failure will result in the integration of right-wing extremist forces into American politics. (See: What would have happened if Trump's fascist mob had seized hostages?)

The IMT's support for such reactionary political positions expresses its class orientation as a representative of privileged layers of the middle class. They function as the "left" defenders of capitalism by seeking to ensnare workers and young people within the established nominally "left" parties and rotten trade unions.

This has been the essential feature of the politics of Grant and his followers ever since they broke decisively with the Fourth International in the late 1940s. They enthusiastically welcomed the Pabloite revisionist attack on Trotskyism in the early 1950s, which rejected the revolutionary role of the working class, claimed that revolutionary leadership would be provided by factions of the Stalinist bureaucracy, social democracy, and bourgeois nationalist movements, and demanded the liquidation of independent Trotskyist parties into the "mass movement" to serve as "left" apologists and advisors to the bureaucracies.

Over subsequent decades, at one time as the official section of the Pabloites, Grant's organization in Britain, the Militant Tendency, conducted entry work within the Labour Party, not with the aim of dispelling the illusions held by broad masses of workers during the post-war period in social democracy as the Trotskyists of the Socialist Labour League did, but to insist that the Labour Party and the trade unions could be pushed leftwards and would act as vehicles for the achievement of socialism.

The basis of this perspective of "deep entryism" was entirely eroded during the 1980s and early 1990s, when social democratic parties and all labour organisations resting on a national-reformist programme around the world junked their lingering associations with socialism and shifted sharply to the right. This process was rooted in objective changes in the world capitalist economy, with the globalisation of production cutting the ground from under the feet of all programmes that sought to regulate the worst excesses of the profit system through the mechanism of the nation state. The sharpest expression of this process was the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union and its reintegration of Russia and the ex-Soviet republics into the capitalist world economy. In Britain, it took the form of Labour's ever-more open emergence as a tool of big business and the super-rich.

Under these conditions, an unprincipled faction fight erupted between Grant and Woods on the one hand, who went on to form the International Marxist Tendency, and Peter Taaffe, whose supporters first established Militant Labour and later the Socialist Party. Taaffe's organisational break with Labour had nothing to do with a rejection of Militant's orientation to the trade union bureaucracy and Labour, as was shown by the Socialist Party's hailing of Jeremy Corbyn's victory as Labour leader in 2015, which they said represented a major step forward in the building of a new party in alliance with sections of the trade union bureaucracy.

Opposing Taaffe, Grant and his supporters insisted that nothing fundamental had changed about the character of Labour and other social democratic parties, and that the "deep entryism" perspective could

continue internationally. Groups subscribing to this view included Fightback in Canada, whose members retain membership in the pro-imperialist New Democratic Party; the Marxist Left in Brazil, who stayed in the right-wing Workers Party until 2015; Grant's supporters in Pakistan, who worked inside the bourgeois Pakistan People's Party; and Der Funke in Germany, who are still buried in the ex-Stalinist Left Party to this day. This orientation was combined with the promotion of the most dangerous illusions in the "left" nationalist leaders of Latin America's "Pink Tide," above all Hugo Chavez, the former military paratrooper and Venezuelan president who publicly embraced Woods and claimed to be studying his and Grant's writings to reinforce his "socialism."

In denying Trump's fascist coup, the IMT's supporters in the US are concerned above all with preventing workers and young people from breaking politically from the Democrats and trade unions, and establishing an independent revolutionary party capable of politically mobilizing the working class in struggle against capitalism. To this end, they issue revolutionary incantations to "build an independent working class party," while their members function as members of the Democratic Socialists of America, i.e., a faction of the Democratic Party, one of the twin bourgeois parties of US imperialism.

This double bookkeeping was on full display in the IMT's article in response to Biden's inauguration. After stating that the "Democrats take charge for the capitalists" and that an "independent class party" must be built, the piece concludes with an appeal for the DSA to lead this struggle. "The role of socialists is not to prop up the system but to help accelerate its downfall," they write. "If the DSA called on its elected members and others running for office to do this as independents instead of as Democrats, this would be an important step in the direction of independent class politics."

From the standpoint of the IMT, there is nothing contradictory about these irreconcilable positions. Their aim is to serve as the last line of defence for the Democrats by dragging radicalized workers and young people back into the party of Wall Street, drone assassinations, and endless war with the absurd claim that the DSA, a loyal faction of the Democrats that campaigned for Biden's election, can function as a mechanism through which to establish the political independence of the working class.

The working class can only take up a struggle against the danger posed by fascism and the far-right, and assert its independent political interests against the ruling elites' insatiable drive to augment its wealth amid a raging pandemic, by waging a relentless political struggle against pseudo-left tendencies such as the IMT.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact