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The Trump putsch

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

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For the time being, Trump is badly wounded and the Republican Party is deeply divided. The Fascists are demoralised because Trump is dumping on them to save his own skin. The Democrats are angry and also feel vindicated.

Anarchists in the United States need to ensure that the organisers of the Trump Putsch are clearly identified as Fascists for the world to see. Anarchists need to seize the opportunity to break the links that have been developing between them and the mainstream Right and calling the Fascists by their true name is an essential part of that. And Anarchists need to run hard against the Democrats' agenda of righteous "law and order" and neo-liberalism. Biden was always going to be a bad President. The Trump Putsch means he'll be worse.

Lessons

The first lesson to be drawn is that the US bourgeoisie have not given up on capitalist democracy. It is their preferred form of rule, since there are too many capitalists to fit inside a single palace. While the capitalists are prepared to abandon democracy if it is necessary to preserve their power, they fear that a dictator would rule in the interests of one faction of capital rather than the capitalist class as a whole.

Secondly, there is nothing surprising about the events in Washington. Not the Fascist mobs. Not Trump's incitement. Not the complicit approach of the cops. Not the failure of the putsch. Not the Democrats' turn to "law and order". And not the liberals' surprise at all of these things except the last.

The Democrats will handle the aftermath of the putsch in a way that will strengthen the Right. They will pass yet more repressive laws. They will wax lyrical about the precious institutions of capitalist democracy and vehemently denounce the invaders of Congress. But when it comes to prosecuting and sentencing, many of these invaders will get kid glove treatment.

Finally, we need to realise that liberals are not our friends. They are not quietly on our side while we do the dangerous stuff. When push comes to shove, liberals want the heavy hand of the State to suppress Right wing dissent. They do not support working class counter-mobilisation. When the workers of the United States make a revolution, they will disperse the liberals' precious Congress – themselves – not to establish a dictatorship, but to allow the mass organs of workers' democracy to take power. And they will need to be prepared to defend themselves against a last-ditch violent reaction by the old regime, supported whole-heartedly by the liberals.

It is important to call the events of Tuesday 6 January in Washington DC in the US by their proper name. It was an attempted Fascist putsch, consciously incited though not directed by Donald Trump. It was an attempt to prevent the US Congress taking the final step to authorise the inauguration of Joe Biden as President a fortnight later. It failed and we're glad it did.

Capitalist media organisations are notoriously unreliable at estimating numbers at political events, but it's clear that at least tens of thousands of Trump supporters attended a demonstration in Washington under Fascist leadership. Up to a couple of thousand people, including organised Fascist groups and known Fascist identities, stormed the Capitol building (the US Parliament House). The mob included not a few off-duty cops who were seen flashing their IDs to the Capitol Police on the way in. The rioters disrupted the proceedings, which were a certification of the results of the Electoral College, and took over the meeting chambers and many other areas of the building. Photographs have emerged from inside showing men in combat gear, carrying weapons and zip ties for handling prisoners. Eventually, the rioters were forced to leave. Congress resumed its session and recognised the result of the Electoral College.

Police treatment of the Washington event was remarkably light, especially considering that Fascists had been threatening for weeks to storm the Capitol and that Black Lives Matter protestors have been met with overwhelming and aggressive police violence. Leftist demonstrators would never have been given the opportunity to reach the steps, let alone breach the doors and break windows. Instead, several cops posed for selfies with members of the mob. At a later point, a woman Trump supporter was shot dead by Capitol Police. Three other Trump supporters died from "medical emergencies" (only one of which occurred inside the Capitol) and a cop died the next day.

Trump incited his Fascist followers to storm the Capitol as a last ditch attempt to prevent Biden's inauguration, following the refusal of Mike Pence (Trump's Vice President) to prevent it by acting in his role of presiding over the Senate. This was after a series of attempts by Trump to frustrate the inauguration of Biden. He called rallies of his supporters outside counting centres; launched dozens of court cases, losing on all but a handful of minor procedural points; and tried to heavy various State governors and officials involved in the election process. His phone call to the Georgia Secretary of State was recorded and released on the Internet and showed just how desperate Trump was becoming.

The Trump putsch, if it had been successful, would have transformed the United States into a Fascist dictatorship. Trump's private army would have swept away the legislative branch of government. To make it stick, he would have been compelled to sack and/or arrest thousands of public officials – including, possibly, judges. But to carry through a putsch in defiance of a democratic election, it's necessary to have plenty of friends in high places. Trump found he didn't have nearly enough friends. He was beaten by the Deep State.

The failure of the putsch is a major blow to Trump. He has forced many Republican politicians, including the Vice President, to break with him. Most of the rest of the country is enraged. He has now been forced to promise a peaceful transfer of power on 20 January. This is both an admission of defeat and a concession that his conduct until now has contained an implicit threat of a coup.

There is no precise analogy from well-known history, but the closest one is Adolf Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. A relatively small group of people attempted, with daring action, to deliver the government of Germany into the hands of a dictator. The failure of the putsch was a setback for the Nazis, but the Weimar Republic treated the putschists with kid gloves. Hitler was sentenced to only five years prison and was released after

nine months. Worse, successive Weimar governments eroded democratic rights with frequent states of emergency and left Germany's social problems unresolved. Hitler was able to rebuild his political credibility and then capitalise on the crisis created by the Depression. And we all know what followed that.

The Beer Hall Putsch analogy contains a lesson. Trump has given his enemies an opportunity to put him out of business, but the Democrats won't follow through. The Fascists who stormed the Capitol building are being denounced by everyone, including Trump, and will probably be hung out to dry, but the consequences for Trump himself won't be anywhere near hard enough. And the way Biden governs will, in due course, rehabilitate Trump. Left to their own devices, the Democrats will pave the way for the revival of Trump's political fortunes.

Democrats will make their own assaults on democratic rights. Already, Biden has called the people who stormed the Capitol "domestic terrorists" and Democrats across the board have picked up on his cue. In using this term, Biden isn't referring to the pipe bombs and the truck full of Molotov cocktails found in Washington, which have hardly got a mention in the mainstream media. He also wasn't speaking about the death of a cop, which occurred after his statement. The "terrorism" he was denouncing was what was on everyone's TV screens – a mob breaking windows, occupying the Capitol and disrupting a sitting of Congress.

Biden knows what he is doing. By denouncing Trump's foot soldiers as terrorists, he is preparing for a broader crackdown on political activity outside accepted political channels. Any new laws or police powers will apply as much to the Left as to the Right. They will be used by the cops with glee against the Left and not at all or hardly ever against the Right. And Democrats denouncing (with equal parts ignorance and malice) the rioters in the Capitol as "anarchists" will have real consequences for actual Anarchists.