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USA - Debate

Seven Theses on the Post-Trump Right and DSA's Role in the Fight Ahead

- Debate -

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At this point, many statements have been issued by various groups about the events that took place in the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday. It shouldn't have to be said that DSA Santa Cruz stands in stalwart opposition to the far right protesters who barged into Congress. The feelings stirred by seeing armed white supremacists storm into the Capitol with near impunity should not be minimized. We too are outraged and terrified by this event.

While condemnation is widespread, we feel it is also necessary to intervene in some of ways this event is already being framed and narrated, both in popular media and by many on the U.S. Left, including our own organization. Below are seven theses put forward for discussion by the Executive Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America, Santa Cruz Chapter.

Theses:

1. This is not a Coup. It is important to be precise with our categories and to recognize the very real dangers presented by the take-over of the Capitol for what they actually are, rather than through analogy or Hollywood-inspired morbid fantasy. A coup—the undemocratic seizure of power, usually by elements or factions within the state—doesn't describe Wednesday's events particularly well. **What happened this week was not an attempt to seize and operate the machinery of the state; it was a haphazard, deadly, media spectacle.**

Realistically, the danger is not that the occupation of the Capitol will keep Trump in office or prevent the inauguration. Instead the very real danger represented by Wednesday's action is that it will embolden and inspire individuals and groups on the far right to launch further acts of violence—acts of violence against the left, against people of color, against workers, against immigrants, against Antifa and BLM, against all of us. **Wednesday didn't necessarily help the Republican Party or the Trump administration hold on to power in the short term, but it will propel recruits into groups like the Proud Boys. This is what we must organize against.**

2. As socialists, we are opposed to everything that happened in Washington Wednesday because it was an attempt by racist, right wing extremists to grow their movement, not because we are, in principle, opposed to occupying Congress. Any criticism of Wednesday's action must be centered on the politics of the actors involved, more than on the disrespect of "hallowed American institutions" as many CNN commentators have lamented. As socialists, we are committed to defending the limited forms of democracy that exist in this country, however hollow and compromised they may be. **But we do not fetishize these institutions.** The politics of building more robust, genuine forms of democracy will require transforming, and in some cases, abolishing entirely, these very institutions. This project is not aided when we focus on the tactics, rather than the politics of Wednesday's actions.

3. The impulse to condemn Wednesday's events on the basis of their violation of "Law and Order"—a phrase invoked by both Trump and Biden—must be resisted. As socialists, we are committed to defending democracy, but we recognize "Law and Order" as a phrase that, sooner or later, will be used against us. So too should we oppose the language of "treason" "sedition" and "patriotism" in discussions of this event.

4. Similarly, much liberal hand-wringing has been over the fact that some media outlets were slow to describe this as an act of "terrorism". This objection comes from the correct recognition that when acts of violence are committed by people of color, above all by Muslims, the media is quick to describe those acts as terrorism, while similar actions by white Americans rarely earn the moniker. While this observation points to a deeply racist fact about the U.S. media that should rightly be condemned, **the invocation and the extension of the term "terrorism" will ultimately do**

more harm to the left than good. Its use, to describe violence by the right or the left, will ultimately serve to justify an expansion of the repressive powers of the state. We can recall, for example, how anti-terrorism measures enacted after 9/11 were used by the state to surveil and repress anti-war organizers. [1]

5. One common response has been to point out that if this same action had been taken by people of color, or by BLM, or by those on the left more generally, it would have been met with overwhelming force and crushed. This is obviously true. **But we have to be careful about how we use this claim. When this framing is used to condemn the laxity of the state's response to Wednesday's actions, the result is to normalize the state repression we have come to expect against our own movements.** When we compare the light treatment of Wednesday's protest to what would surely happen to BLM protesters, the intention is obviously to point to the injustice of the repression of BLM. But the very act of making the comparison between a movement opposed to the everyday reality of police terror and a movement that is fundamentally in harmony with it, leads us to either imagine that the state should treat white supremacists the same as it treats BLM protesters, or else we are led to imagine that the state could treat BLM protesters as leniently as Wednesday's protest.

The problem is that both of these positions treat the police as an institution standing above politics, as a neutral instrument that can be used for good or for bad. **But we know that, at the end of the day, the police and the rioters who stormed the Capitol are two components of the same political project of white supremacy; they may occasionally come into conflict, even violent conflict, but there is no inherent antagonism between the Police and the far right in the way that there is between cops and our movements.**

Merely pointing out that these movements are treated differently from one another turns a structural fact about the state and its relation to white supremacy into a seemingly arbitrary and accidental matter of the state "just not being fair" to those who want to dismantle white supremacy. This line of argument is well intentioned but ultimately mystifies more than it illuminates.

6. One very clear lesson that every leftist should take from witnessing Wednesday's events is that a smooth continuum runs from the police officer to the MAGA chud clad in American flags and viking horns. **However, as socialists we must develop a more strategic understanding of the relation between the state and the far right than merely asserting an equivalence.** Yes, individual cops took selfies with confederate flag waving protesters in the Capitol and one video showed police officers abandoning their posts, appearing to give rioters open access to the building. Next time you are squaring off against a line of police militantly blocking a BLM march down a public street, recall these images to mind.

But, we also need to recognize that the state has a more complicated relation to these demonstrations. The fact that demonstrators made it into the Capitol was the result of a complex set of political choices. Our thinking about this needs to have room for this complexity, without reducing it to simple statements about how "the police supported the protest." It is undeniably true that individual cops, including some in command, supported the protest. It is true that cops overwhelmingly backed Trump's reelection. It is also true that the storming of the Capitol was not simply a result of the police letting it happen. Instead, it was the result of the police being overwhelmed by a crowd (losing a violent, pitched fight in the process) and making the calculation that employing more force would have escalated the conflict.

Factoring into this strategic situation were choices about police deployments, the relative low level of actual risk to the status quo posed by this demonstration, the relative marginality of the protesters themselves, and of course, the feelings of individual cops (which always impacts the intensity with which they do their jobs). We don't deny that, ultimately, the police are an instrument of white supremacy but we recognize that, as an institution, they are relatively autonomous from the extra-state elements of the white supremacist project. As such, they always have one eye on maintaining their own legitimacy. Understanding these distinctions and divisions is crucial if we are going to have a strategic relation to states, and a correct understanding of the far right.

7. Wednesday's actions need to be seen as an important moment in the broader political realignment of this country as we move into the post-Trump era. The split on the Right that may result from this, however, is not likely to be one that generally orients national politics leftward. After Wednesday, we can imagine an emboldened, anti-institutional far right divided from their previous allies in the mainstream of the Republican Party, but as Mike Davis points out, this break-up may actually just serve to provide cover for the continued rightward movement of the Republicans, who will be able to keep the policies of the Trump administration while more easily distancing themselves from the more riotous elements connected to Trump himself. [2]

Meanwhile, the Democrats will be eager to reach across the aisle to form a coalition with any Republican whose politics don't quite rise to the level of armed skirmishes in the rotunda. The result of this, then, could very easily be the rightward movement of both parties, as well as the massive growth of the extra-parliamentary far right, possibly still loyal to Trump (though Trump himself may or may not be central to this project). In this shifting political landscape, calls for symbolic acts of condemnation, whether from AOC or Mitch McConnell, ring hollow, and the legislative path forward for progressive policy is decidedly narrowed. What socialists need to do is clear:

" Organize our workplaces, buildings, and blocks to keep our neighbors and coworkers safe, to keep both white supremacists and cops OUT, and to confront them when necessary. After the events of Wednesday, the flight attendants union began organizing to bar passengers who participated in Wednesday's events from return-flights out of DC. [3] **This type of worker-organizing against white supremacists needs to be distinguished from more general calls for increased state repression and tightening of civil liberties.**

" As the largest and most organized force on the U.S. left, the DSA has a particular role to play. We call on every chapter of the DSA to develop plans to monitor and confront far right organizing in their regions. This shouldn't be done haphazardly, but should include developing deeper ties to organized labor, tenants unions, and other community organizations rooted in the multi-racial working class.

" As we move into this new phase in U.S. politics signalled by Wednesday's events, it is time for the DSA to re-evaluate its relation to the Democratic party and the institutions it controls. Instead of drawing the organizing energies of our members into campaigns to call congress members, we need to turn our face more directly to the working class. Is filing articles of impeachment "the most appropriate response" to the events of Wednesday? From Russiagate to the first Trump impeachment, Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer's primary strategy for dealing with Trump has consistently revolved around this kind of spectacle, as though the forces that brought Trump into power can be outmaneuvered by clever congressional politicking. Time and again this has failed. Our response must be different. It must emerge from our understanding of how this racist, anti-worker, anti-poor capitalist death machine can actually be overcome. That will require organizing, not lobbying.

Solidarity Forever,

The Executive Committee of DSA-Santa Cruz.

Source [Santa Cruz Left](#).

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[1] *The Guardian*, 24 November 2003 ["FBI uses new powers to bug anti-war groups"](#).

[2] See ["Riot on the Hill"](#).

[3] Payday Report, 6 January 2021 ["Flight Attendants Union Calls for Trump Rioters to Banned from Flights Home"](#).