

Debate: Fascism, Resistance, and the State - A Critique of Spectre's Antifascist Strategy

Thursday 14 January 2021, by [TUGAL Cihan](#) (Date first published: 13 January 2021).

The editors of *Spectre* have responded to the invasion of the Congress with an editorial call to antifascist mass organization [1]. This fresh voice is important precisely because many on the left (or on its borders, such as liberals) believe leaderless direct action, electoral work, and small cell-based revolutionary organization to be the only strategic options. However, these are all dead ends when battling a growing radical right-wing current, which is on the verge of building its mass organizations. Only organized masses can decisively wipe out such a threat to democracy.

Yet, the task is huge, and a call from one journal is insufficient. We need more strategic declarations of this sort, crafted in response to each specific occasion. More than that, we need to build the organizations that will shoulder the burden of putting the strategy into practice. Also, each of these strategic documents should be discussed in public: their strengths and problems need to be underlined out in the open, in order to collectively build a winning strategy. It is in this spirit that I will offer a sympathetic critique of Spectre's arguments.

The document advances strong analyses of Trump and Trumpism, the possible dynamics of the Biden administration, and the political economy of the extreme right. I will not repeat these here, but simply urge the reader to consult the *Spectre* editorial - as well as my previous analyses [2] - on these issues. Our agreements abound, but I focus here on the partial disagreements.

Spectre is right on target when it calls the invasion a "spectacle." It was not meant to achieve an immediate institutional victory (such as preventing the "peaceful transfer of power," the goal attributed to the invasion by mainstream media). However, as early as the first paragraph, we see a tendency to minimize the capacities of rightwing militants: they lack a plan, they are unable to think much, according to *Spectre*.

Yet, we need to realize that the spectacle was the plan. The siege was a premature but cunning show of force. This is not to argue that these racists are great thinkers or are elaborately organized. But they knew what they were doing at a gut level, at least. They compensated for the shallowness of their thought with a sound feel for the game. This is arguably the best action they could have pulled off with their current state of dispersed, ideologically impoverished organizations, which lack any solid, credible leaders. Among Western radical right movements, the Americans are the least prepared to storm a parliament, but they were the ones to do it.

The document correctly points out that the mainstream associations of the capitalist class denounced the siege, but mistakes this for class unity. It is true that the American business class is not as fragmented as interwar continental European bourgeoisies. However, we cannot ignore the several influential think tanks and other civic organizations built by rightwing business families, which are not in line with the centrist sentiments of the mainstream associations the editorial cites. Could the radical right be where it is now without the backing of some major business families?

Spectre correctly draws attention to the collaboration of the police and many Republicans, but that comes right after a paragraph that exaggerates the anti-invasion consensus among mainstream institutions. The editorial underemphasizes the most worrisome dimension of January 6: the disorientation of institutions. The collaborationism of not only the police and Republicans, but also of the Pentagon is well-documented [3], and there is reason to believe that both the disorientation and the collaboration go much deeper than that [4].

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One of the document’s strengths is its warning against a quite widespread campaign on social media during the last few days: the insistence that police and intelligence forces should do everything possible to crack down on the invaders. As the editors underline, the resulting repressive spike could easily turn against the left and minorities. Mainstream outlets could very well applaud the further deployment of the growing Leviathan against all kinds of alleged “extremism.”

Nevertheless, a recourse to courts and other mainstream institutions could have a legitimate place in the struggle against the extreme right, if it is subordinated to a mass movement-building strategy. Counting on the repressive apparatus of the existing state could be suicidal, but it is just as wrong to rule out the possibility that this apparatus could be useful at all. Let us not forget, for instance, that courts were essential to overturning much of Trump’s Muslim ban, and they did so under pressure from mass movements.

In short, *Spectre* editors are right regarding the basics: Elections or working with existing institutions should not be the backbone of our strategy. And this by no means indicates we will rely exclusively on extremely dedicated militants and/or spontaneous mass action to stop the rise of fascism. Only mass organizations built through campaigns not directly related to antifascism can ultimately prevent a fascist victory.

Yet, it is hard to ignore that some of the specific gains that we direly need to build a mass following, as listed by the editorial itself (Medicare for All, pandemic relief, union rights, etc.), require legislation and implementation by existing institutions. How can we reconcile these apparently contradictory goals: building mass organizations and mass action that are autonomous from mainstream institutions vs. securing certain pieces of legislation? Providing a meaningful answer to that question requires a much deeper debate, but in a nutshell, progressives and socialists should operate mostly “outside and through” the existing institutions. Alternative courses of action would render antifascist radicalism ineffective.

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P.S.

• Spectre. January 13, 2021:
<https://spectrejournal.com/fascism-resistance-and-the-state/>

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Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 56382), [United States \(Capitol\): We Cannot Let Yesterday's Farce Become Tomorrow's Tragedy - Antifascist Organizing Now!](#).

[2] ESSF (article 55836), [United States: The radical right after Trump](#).

[3] <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/the-pentagon-denied-multiple-requests-to-send-national-guard-during-capitol-siege-gop-governor-says/ar-BB1cAEJf>

[4] ESSF (article 56403), [United States: The Invasion of Capitol Hill](#).