

Biden attacks Trump for “hampering” the reopening of business

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In an op-ed column by Joe Biden posted on the *Washington Post*’s website on Monday, the presumptive Democratic presidential candidate criticizes Donald Trump’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic entirely from the standpoint of disaffected sections of business.

Under the headline “Joe Biden: How the White House coronavirus response presents us with a false choice,” the long-time senator and vice president under Obama is concerned above all to rebut attempts by Trump and the Republicans to depict himself and the Democratic Party as opponents of the immediate reopening of the economy.

Biden does not oppose forcing workers back to work under conditions where the deadly virus continues to spread out of control and exact a horrific toll among meatpackers, autoworkers, Amazon workers (whose boss is the owner of the *Post*, Jeff Bezos) and many other sections of the working class. He already signaled to the ruling class his support for its back-to-work campaign in a *New York Times* column published a month ago titled “My Plan to Safely Reopen America.”

He begins his op-ed in the *Post* by attacking Trump for not “unifying the country,” but instead “deflecting blame and dividing Americans.” Biden continues, “He hopes to split the country into dueling camps, casting Democrats as doomsayers hoping to keep America grounded and Republicans as freedom fighters trying to liberate the economy.”

There are indeed “dueling camps” in the coronavirus crisis, but they are not the two parties of the American corporate-financial oligarchy. They agree in all essentials on the capitalist drive to exploit the catastrophe to further enrich the oligarchs and impoverish the working class, regardless of the cost in human lives.

The two opposed camps are, on the one side, the capitalist ruling elite and all of its political and media stooges. From the outset, they have seen the pandemic as a financial issue and are utterly indifferent to the destruction of human life and livelihoods it has triggered. On the opposite side is the working class, which wants to fight the pandemic, save lives

and protect the jobs and income of the vast majority of the people.

Trump is presenting a “false choice,” according to Biden, because the Democrats are no less in favor of prematurely reopening the economy than the Republicans. “The truth is,” he writes, “that everyone wants America to reopen as soon as possible... Governors from both parties are doing their best to make that happen, *but their efforts have been slowed and hampered* because they haven’t gotten the tools, resources and guidance they need from the federal government to reopen safely and sustainably.” [Emphasis added].

Trump must be replaced in the November election, in other words, because he is botching the return to work and hindering both Democrats and Republicans in their efforts to resume, on a “sustainable basis,” the extraction of profit from the labor of the working class.

It must be noted that Biden’s presentation of the mood in the country is entirely false, and he knows it. There is no popular drumbeat for a rapid reopening of the economy and lifting of health and safety restrictions. On the contrary, every reputable poll has shown large majorities opposing a premature reopening and supporting a continued lockdown until the pandemic is contained. The latest Pew poll, published at the end of last week, showed that two-third of those questioned opposed the back-to-work drive.

Biden goes on to speak vaguely, without making any specific demands or proposals, of the need for “widespread testing” and “worker safety protocols.” Such phrases abound in the statements of CEOs and the editorials of corporate media that are nervous over the seething anger and growing resistance of workers to the undisguised indifference of the government and the corporations to their health and their lives. Corporate America is aware that it is impossible to achieve a robust and lasting economic recovery without to some extent containing the pandemic, restoring consumer confidence and preventing a tidal wave of small-business bankruptcies.

Biden directly addresses these layers within the ruling elite, writing that “ours is a demand driven economy—you

can shout from the rooftops that we're open for business, but the economy will not get back to full strength if the number of new cases is still rising or plateauing and people don't believe that it's safe to return to normal activities. Without measures in place to prevent the spread of the virus, many Americans won't want to shop in stores, eat in restaurants or travel..."

Biden crosses the "t's" and dots the "i's" to his argument by adding that "distributing adequate testing and protocols that conform with the guidance of public health experts ... would speed up the reopening process considerably and make it a whole lot more effective."

He goes on to denounce Trump for pitting Americans "against one another across manufactured battle lines of 'health' and 'the economy.'" But as the response of governments all over the world to the pandemic is showing, within the framework of capitalism, the conflict between public health and the "economy," i.e., capitalist profit, is catastrophically real.

There are a number of things Biden does not mention in his column. One is the parallel rise of the stock market and the death toll from the pandemic. He does not care to refer to this grisly and damning feature of the crisis because he knows full well that the market response is due above all to the colossal bailout of the parasites and criminals on Wall Street passed with the unanimous support of both parties at the end of March.

On Sunday, Trump's treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin boasted that the so-called CARES Act has thus far provided \$8 trillion in Treasury and Federal Reserve funds to pay off the bad debts of the corporations and banks. While millions go hungry, unable to work and unable to obtain jobless benefits or any other relief, and the government demands that the states and cities carry out massive cuts in social services, the Fed is pumping \$80 billion *every day* into the financial markets.

Silence betokens support. The same goes for Biden's silence on the demand by Trump and the Republicans that any new stimulus bill include legal immunity for companies that cause workers to become sick or die because they refuse to provide protection from the virus.

Biden's column follows by three days statements by Obama leaked to the press in which the former president denounces Trump's response to the pandemic as "an absolute chaotic disaster." This intervention into the pandemic crisis came during a private call with several thousand people who worked in the White House during the eight years of the Obama-Biden administration.

In the call, obviously meant to be leaked, Obama praised Biden's role in overseeing his administration's "economic stimulus program" and its response to the H1N1 and Ebola

outbreaks. This is in line with the Democrats' strategy of presenting Biden as the continuator of Obama's legacy and counterposing the Obama administration's supposedly exemplary record in the 2008 financial crisis and the series of viral outbreaks between 2009 and 2016 to the performance of Trump. According to this narrative, Biden is the "steady hand" needed to steer the ship of state in a period of crisis.

The problem, aside from Biden's obvious difficulty in uttering a coherent sentence, is the viciously anti-working class record of the Obama-Biden administration and its failure to make any preparations for a corona-like pandemic, despite repeated warnings from public health and medical authorities that such an occurrence was a near-inevitability.

In reality, Biden's oversight of the 2009 "stimulus" package—an \$800 billion measure that consisted largely of tax breaks and incentives for business—was part of the multitrillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street that set the precedent for the much larger bailout underway today.

The Obama years saw an unprecedented redistribution of wealth from the working class to the financial elite, effected largely through the inflation of asset values on Wall Street, combined with a brutal reduction in the living standards of the broad mass of workers. The total fixation on increasing the fortunes of the rich and the super-rich, combined with the continuation and expansion of the neocolonial wars in the Middle East inherited from the Bush administration, was accompanied by cuts in education, health care and basic social infrastructure, paving the way for the current disaster under Trump.

Disgust and anger among workers over the right-wing policies pursued by the candidate of "hope and change" was expressed in 2016 in the decision of millions of Obama voters to boycott the election, and of some to vote for Trump, who was able to pose as the "antiestablishment" candidate in opposition to the equally right-wing Obama alumna, Hillary Clinton.



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