Biden in Kenosha: Ignoring fascist killings, doubling down on identity politics

Patrick Martin
4 September 2020

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden traveled to Kenosha, Wisconsin, Thursday in a staged display of sympathy for the family of Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old black man who was shot seven times in the back by a Kenosha policeman on August 23 and left paralyzed from the waist down.

Biden's appearance was designed to draw a contrast with President Trump, who met Tuesday with police and National Guard officials and small businessmen who suffered property damage but did not meet with the Blake family. But the trip only underscored the right-wing character of the Democratic campaign and the fact that it offers no alternative to the increasingly fascistic direction of Trump's appeals.

Biden met privately with the Blake family in Milwaukee, then spoke with Jacob Blake on a telephone to his hospital bed, before traveling to Kenosha for a community forum at a local black church, where he spoke and took questions for about an hour.

All of Biden's remarks were couched in the framework of racial identity politics, aimed at covering up the class function of the police force as the armed defenders of capitalist property against the working class. This was entirely in keeping with the latest wave of television commercials for the Biden campaign, in which he denounces looting and other property crimes, but says nothing about the fascist violence encouraged by the White House.

Biden claimed he would address "the original sin of the country," slavery, if elected president, treating the rampant poverty and social deprivation afflicting the African American population—along with the working class as a whole—as though it were a survival of chattel slavery, and not the product of the capitalist system which Biden defends no less than Trump.

"I promise you, win or lose, I'm going to go down fighting. I'm going to go down fighting for racial equality, equity across the board," he claimed. "There are certain things worth losing over, and this is something worth losing over if we have to, but we're not going to lose."

The trip was only the second that Biden has made from the East Coast since the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis in March, and his first campaign appearance of the year in Wisconsin, one of three states in the Great Lakes region, along with Michigan and Pennsylvania, that provided Trump his margin of victory in 2016 in the Electoral College.

On the eve of Biden's arrival, Kenosha Mayor John Antaramian, a Democrat, lifted the curfew imposed on the city after the protests erupted over the shooting of Jacob Blake. Damage estimates issued the same day, with little fanfare, suggest that the Trump administration claims of Kenosha in flames, even in ruins, were grossly exaggerated. Total property damage in the city amounted to $1.95 million, or about $20 per capita for a city of 100,000 people.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the Biden visit was his silence on the bloodiest event of the past 10 days in Kenosha, the killing of two protesters on August 25 and the serious wounding of a third, carried out by a 17-year-old vigilante gunman who has been hailed as a hero by the fascist right and openly defended by Trump and other Republican officials.

The gunman, Kyle Rittenhouse, remains in Antioch, Illinois, just across the state line from Kenosha, where his extradition to Wisconsin on murder and attempted murder charges has been delayed for at least 30 days.

Biden did not mention either Rittenhouse or his three victims—Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, Anthony Huber, 26, both shot to death, and Gaige Grosskreutz, also 26,

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severely wounded—in the course of his visit to Kenosha. In part, at least, this is because all three were white working-class men, and thus did not fit into the racial narrative Biden sought to establish for the events of the past week.

New press accounts indicate that Rittenhouse had traveled to Kenosha several times in the two months before he opened fire on protesters, with at least one trip leading to a violent confrontation. Social media videos showed Rittenhouse engaged in a fight in downtown Kenosha on July 1 where he is shown throwing punches at a woman. Court records showed that he was cited in Kenosha County for driving without a license and speeding more than 20 miles over the limit less than a week before the August 25 killings.

That last fact may explain reports Thursday that Rittenhouse's mother Wendy was also under investigation, since she apparently drove her son, armed with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, the 30 miles to Kenosha and dropped him off to participate in the vigilante operation announced by a militia group calling itself the Kenosha Guard.

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