

Biden in Minnesota: A phony “pro-worker” spin on a right-wing campaign

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In a televised town hall on CNN Thursday night and a speech Friday in Minnesota, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden sought to put a “pro-worker” spin on his right-wing election campaign.

Many polls are showing Biden’s lead in Midwestern battleground states slipping and there are mounting statements of concern from within the Democratic Party over the lack of enthusiasm among workers and young people for the decades-long senator and former vice president. Under these conditions, Biden is doubling down on his ludicrous self-promotion as a “working stiff” from “hard-scrabble” Scranton, Pennsylvania, in contrast to the billionaire Donald Trump.

Biden is proposing no significant social reforms to go along with his pseudo-populist demagoguery, refraining even from demanding the restoration of the \$600 per week federal unemployment benefit in the midst of the worst jobs crisis since the Great Depression. The Democrats and Republicans in Congress allowed the benefit to expire at the end of July, threatening millions of workers with destitution, hunger and homelessness. Nor does Biden oppose the deadly back-to-work and back-to-school campaign in the midst of a rampaging pandemic being led by Trump at the behest of Wall Street.

The actual content of Biden’s supposed defense of working people is economic nationalism, promotion of the pro-corporate trade unions, anti-Chinese and anti-Russian agitation and the glorification of the US military. All of these themes were on display in his campaign events this week.

On Thursday night, Biden took questions from both Democrats and Republicans at a televised town hall event held near Scranton and hosted by CNN’s Anderson Cooper. In an effort to underline his plebian roots, he criticized an unnamed reporter who remarked that if elected, Biden would become the first president in many years not to have an Ivy League college degree.

“Who the hell makes you think I have to have an Ivy League degree to become president?” demanded Biden, who

graduated from the University of Delaware and received his law degree from Syracuse University. (Biden failed to mention that he attended Archmere Academy, an elite private prep school in Claymont, Delaware).

He then raised a theme upon which he expanded in his speech Friday in the Minnesota iron range town of Hermantown. “I really do view this campaign as a campaign between Scranton and Park Avenue,” he said. “All [Trump] thinks about is the stock market.”

In the course of the town hall he repeated what has become part of his standard stump speech—a denunciation of Trump for his alleged slur on US soldiers killed in battle as “suckers” and “losers.”

He evaded a direct answer to a direct question as to whether he supported the so-called Green New Deal, which is promoted by the “progressive” Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party. But he made clear his subservience to corporate oil and energy interests when he said he would not ban fracking.

He made much of his support for an expanded child tax credit, offering \$3,000 per child a year for all but the wealthiest families. This paltry measure would do little to reverse the decline in working class living standards and the ever-increasing concentration of wealth at the very top of the income ladder. In any event, as Biden well knows, it would stand virtually no chance of being adopted in a Biden administration.

Biden repeated these themes in his Friday speech in northern Minnesota. They were, however, joined by a heavy dose of “Made in America” economic nationalism intended to outdo Trump’s “America First” protectionism. As in his speech last week to assembled bureaucrats at a United Auto Workers union hall in Warren, Michigan, Biden spoke after touring an apprentice training program at a facility of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners.

Hermantown is located in a region that voted for Trump in 2016, largely because of massive job losses on the iron range during the Obama-Biden administration. Whenever the Democratic Party seeks to make an appeal to workers, it

inevitably takes the form of economic nationalism, national chauvinism and implied or open anti-communism. All of this was in evidence on Friday.

Introducing Biden, Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar declared, “We need ‘Buy American.’” She boasted that the Obama-Biden administration “did something about Chinese steel dumping.”

Playing the populist card, Biden contrasted the plight of laid-off workers struggling to meet their mortgage or rent payment with the “people at the top.” He said, “Billionaires in America during the pandemic made another \$300 billion. Hear what I just said? In the middle of the pandemic. You’re left to wonder who is looking out for ordinary folks.”

What he left out is the fact that congressional Democrats voted nearly unanimously for the Trump administration’s CARES Act, which provided trillions of dollars to the corporations and banks in the biggest bailout in world history, making possible the stock market explosion that funneled hundreds of billions into the pockets of the billionaires. This looting of society continues in the form of ongoing Federal Reserve money-printing, while the already inadequate relief measures for workers and small businesses have ended.

Biden then recycled his Scranton vs. Wall Street trope, amending it to say, “I view this campaign as between Scranton and Park Avenue. All Trump sees from Park Avenue is Wall Street. That’s why the only metric of American prosperity for him is the value of the Dow Jones.”

This was followed by his attack on Trump for denigrating soldiers, to which he added Trump’s badmouthing of John McCain, the deceased Vietnam War pilot and prisoner of war-turned Senate warmonger. Boasting of his friendship with McCain, Biden said, “John McCain was no ‘sucker’ or ‘loser,’ he was a war hero.”

Touting his “Buy American, Build American” plan, he said, “When the government spends taxpayers’ money, we should use that money to buy American products, made by American workers, in American supply chains to generate American growth. My plan would tighten the rule to make ‘Buy American’ a reality.”

This would be the core, Biden explained, of his policy to “reward work, not wealth.” To which he hastened to add, “I’m not looking to punish anybody... not to penalize wealth, but to make sure the wealthy and big corporations finally begin to pay their fair share.”

In other words, Biden will do nothing that challenges the basic profit interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy, whose real “fair share” to pay would be 100 percent, since it is the working class, not the capitalist exploiters, who produce all of the wealth of society.

Biden’s only substantive reform proposal was a \$400 billion infrastructure program, itself entirely inadequate to reverse the decay of America’s social infrastructure and address the lack of decent-paying and secure jobs. Only a small fraction of the trillions handed over to big business, it would, in any event, never be implemented.

Despite the pseudo-populist rhetoric, the Biden campaign has continued to move to the right since the party conventions in August and the official start of the fall campaign on Labor Day.

Earlier this month, Biden told *Stars and Stripes* that he would keep US troops in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria indefinitely and would likely increase the military budget; he used an interview on CNN to attack Trump for failing to uphold US “national security” and disrespecting the military; and he gave a speech in Pittsburgh followed by a campaign ad in which he denounced “violent” protesters and demanded that they be criminally prosecuted.

At both events this week Biden continued his policy of saying virtually nothing about Trump’s threats to hold onto power regardless the outcome of the November 3 vote and to declare martial law and mobilize troops to put down protests after Election Day.

Nor did he mention Trump’s defense of police and fascist murders of anti-police violence protesters in Washington state and Kenosha, Wisconsin; Attorney General William Barr’s call for protesters to be charged with sedition, as well as the Democratic mayor of Seattle; and the call by Trump’s assistant secretary of public affairs at the Department of Health and Human Services, Michael Caputo, for Trump supporters to arm themselves in preparation for the election.

Biden did refer to Trump’s dictatorial moves during a campaign stop in Florida on Tuesday, primarily to highlight his anti-communist credentials. He compared Trump to Fidel Castro as a would-be authoritarian ruler in an effort to appeal to far-right anti-Castro sentiment in south Florida.

Meanwhile, the Biden campaign’s Spanish-language advertising in Florida struck an openly anti-communist note, portraying Trump as “soft” on Russia’s Vladimir Putin, China’s Xi Jinping and Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela.



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