

Pseudo-left apologists for Biden and the bankruptcy of “lesser-evil” politics

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Three days before the conclusion of voting in the presidential election, the United States is in the midst of an unprecedented social, economic and political crisis. The coronavirus pandemic, which has already claimed the lives of 235,000 Americans, is expanding rapidly, with the number of new cases at record levels. Tens of millions of people are unemployed and face hunger, impoverishment and homelessness. Trump, trailing in the polls, is conspiring to remain in power by ignoring or overturning the results of the popular vote and inciting fascistic violence in the streets.

Under these conditions, the Democratic Party and its affiliated media outlets are insisting that all the energy of workers and youth must be directed toward the election of Joe Biden.

This line comes not only from the Democratic Party itself, but also from ostensibly “socialist” or left organizations that surround it. The leadership of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) circulated a letter earlier this month pledging to go all out to ensure as large a possible turnout for Biden. In an online discussion with WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman David North Wednesday evening, Adolph Reed Jr., a leading left academic and DSA member, insisted, “Obviously, we need to do whatever can be done to try to bring about a Biden victory.”

The “left” argument for supporting Biden was summed up in an op-ed published in the *New York Times* on Tuesday. The column, written by freelance journalist Zeeshan Aleem, was published in the newspaper’s print edition under the headline, “Why Socialists Should Vote for Biden.”

The decision by the *Times*, the main newspaper of the Democratic Party, to commission the column from Aleem expresses the fear within the ruling class over growing popular opposition to capitalism and hostility to both the Republican and Democratic parties. It is marshaling arguments to be used to contain and misdirect this anger.

There is nothing original in the arguments of Aleem. The politics of the middle class is, as a rule, determined by the most shortsighted and pragmatic calculations. Incapable of basing their politics on a scientific analysis of the economic foundations of society, hostile to any serious examination of the class interests that determine the actions of the state, opposed to a critical examination of the programs of political parties, and, especially, angered by any attempt to draw upon the lessons of history in the formulation of strategy and tactics, the political representatives of the petty-bourgeoisie trail in the wake of the ruling elite.

Their economic dependence upon the ruling elite is reflected in their incapacity to formulate an independent political program and orientation. These well-known reactionary characteristics of middle-class politics, to which Marxists have frequently called attention, usually find their most miserable and cowardly expression in their attitude toward elections. All pretenses of political independence from the politics of the corporate-financial elite—even those that have been advanced with socialist phrases—are abandoned. The politics of “lesser evilism” is proclaimed to be an inescapable necessity.

“If you were to think up a nightmare for the socialist left,” Aleem begins, “it would be hard to think of someone more horrifying than

President Trump.” However, he worries, “in some quarters of the left there are signs of hesitation about voting for Joe Biden.”

“Leftists,” Aleem insists, should not only vote for Biden, they should do so enthusiastically. “Politics,” he writes, “is about the balance of power in society—between capital and labor, between elites and the marginalized.”

How, exactly, is a vote for Biden going to shift power in society from capital to labor and from the “elites” to the “marginalized”? Completely absent from Aleem’s column is any actual analysis of what the Democratic Party is and the class interests that it represents.

The Democratic Party is a party of Wall Street and the military. Indeed, as the election approaches, Biden’s fundraising in the third quarter has benefited from an influx of money from the finance industry, which contributed more than \$50 million to the Democrats’ campaign in the third quarter, as opposed to \$10 million for Trump. *Politico* headlined a recent article on the attitude of the markets to the election, “As Trump warns of economic disaster, Wall Street grows giddy about Biden.”

For the past four years, the opposition of the Democratic Party to Trump has focused not on his fascistic politics, but on the demand of dominant factions of the military and intelligence agencies for a more militarist foreign policy against Russia and in the Middle East, culminating in the impeachment fiasco.

Biden has the support of some of the leading war criminals of American imperialism, who have wreaked havoc on the “marginalized” throughout the world: John Negroponte, the former US ambassador to Honduras during the US-backed war against the Sandinistas, former ambassador to Iraq and former director of national intelligence; Michael Hayden, the former director of the CIA implicated in constructing “black site” torture centers under Bush; Colin Powell, one of the leading architects of the 2003 invasion of Iraq; and countless others.

This is the campaign that Aleem claims socialists must support “without apology or embarrassment—and even with some excitement.”

According to Aleem, the election of Biden will produce a “political terrain more conducive to change,” creating conditions for “socialists to go on offense and push for a Medicare-for-all system” and a “Green New Deal.”

The policy of a Democratic administration, however, will be one not of social reform, but brutal austerity. Aleem does not note that the eight years of the Obama administration, in which Biden was vice president, were years not of social reform but a massive transfer of wealth to the rich following the 2008 economic and financial crisis. Indeed, it was the legacy of Obama, along with the right-wing and militarist character of the Hillary Clinton campaign, that allowed Trump to posture demagogically as an opponent of the status quo.

Aleem also does not mention—nor do any of the apologists for Biden—that the Democratic Party supported, on a nearly unanimous basis, the multitrillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street in March, the so-called CARES Act. To pay for this transfer of wealth to the rich, the ruling class is demanding that workers go back to work and risk their lives to pump

out profits.

The Democrats propose nothing to address either the expanding pandemic or the massive social and economic crisis that has been produced by it, other than everyone wearing a mask. Significantly, among the words that do not appear once in Aleem's column are "pandemic," "coronavirus," "unemployment," "poverty," "hunger" or "homelessness." Nor is there any reference to war and militarism.

Aleem claims that a mass turnout for Biden "could also tip the outcome of competitive down-ballot races" and "help ensure that Democrats win back control of the Senate." But who are these "down-ballot" Democrats? As the WWS has extensively documented, many of the candidates and current representatives of the Democratic Party in Congress are drawn directly from the military-intelligence agencies.

Then there is the claim that electing Democrats is necessary to counter the "unique threats that Mr. Trump poses to democracy," including through his "politicization of the Justice Department and calls for violent crackdowns on protests." A "massive left-wing mobilization" is needed, Aleem writes, "given [Trump's] attempts at tampering and his questioning of the legitimacy of mail-in voting."

Indeed, Trump is not only questioning the legitimacy of mail-in voting, he is attempting to organize a coup to establish a presidential dictatorship. Far from opposing Trump's fascistic conspiracies, however, the Democrats have done everything they can to cover up what is happening and prevent a mobilization against it. In the final weeks of the election, the Democrats put up no opposition to the ramming through of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, where she is to hear cases from Trump challenging the results of the election.

For the past four years, the Democrats have worked to block popular opposition to Trump, beginning with Obama's infamous statement that the elections are an "intramural scrimmage" between two sides "on one team." The Democrats are terrified of doing or saying anything that will encourage popular resistance to Trump, because this resistance will threaten to develop into a broader movement against the ruling class and the capitalist system it defends.

In his *Times* column, Aleem refers to "a very fringe view on the left" that opposes support for Biden. Here, he is clearly referring to the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*. He falsifies the position of genuine Marxists, however, by claiming that they hold "that the election of reactionaries like Mr. Trump intensifies the crisis that will inspire people to turn to socialism and justifies ignoring the polls or voting for third-party candidates."

This is a naked lie, and Aleem knows it. In fact, Marxists insist that a genuine fight against the Trump administration and the rise of the far-right is possible only through the independent mobilization of the working class in opposition to the Democratic Party.

Finally, Aleem claims that the "left" is "investing in its own electoral future by taking voting for Mr. Biden seriously." By becoming "a consistent constituency rather than a periodic threat to potential turnout numbers, [the left] will have more leverage over the party establishment."

This is the shoddiest argument of all. While the Democrats do everything they can to block opposition to Trump, they are ruthless when it comes to opposition from the left. In the 2020 elections, the Democrats intervened to block efforts by the Socialist Equality Party to get on the ballot in Michigan, California and other states, insisting that we had to gather tens of thousands of signatures in the midst of a pandemic. In Michigan, the Democratic Party-controlled state government, one of the central targets of Trump's coup plotting, is even seeking to prevent the counting of write-in votes for the SEP campaign.

As for Aleem's claim that figures like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have succeeded in shifting the Democratic Party to the left, this too is a lie. In fact, the more deeply Sanders embeds himself in the Democratic Party leadership, the greater the contempt with which he and

his supporters are treated. Indeed, Biden takes every opportunity he can to declare that he was the one who "beat the socialist."

Aleem concludes by declaring, "A sophisticated and strategic left—a left that strives to win power—knows how to pick its fights and its adversaries." Voting for Biden, he states, "is one of the simplest and most tangible ways to tilt the playing field and offer some protection to the vulnerable... Socialists should fight like hell to get Mr. Biden into office—and then fight him like hell the day that he becomes president."

The attempt to subordinate the opposition of workers and youth to the Democratic Party is not about "winning power" or achieving socialism, but preventing it. In the end, the "socialists" that Aleem is speaking about, those "investing" in their future, are aspiring operatives within the Democratic Party, who want a "socialism" that involves no change in property relations and no redistribution of wealth, who propose nothing but minor reforms that will never be achieved, and who seek above all to return things to how they were.

If Biden comes to power, these people will not "fight him like hell." Responding to this statement at the San Diego State University event, North said: "How can you 'fight like hell' to put in a capitalist politician, tell workers to vote for him, regardless of what his program is, and then say that you should fight like hell once he is in office? Then the argument will be that we have to make sure that the right doesn't come back in, because if Biden goes then we will have the fascists."

Ultimately, the argument of Aleem and countless other apologists for the Democratic Party is: This is all we have. There is nothing "sophisticated or strategic" about this type of politics. It is the same argument that has been employed in every election for decades. Thus, today's prostration before the Democratic Party is justified with reference to the consequence of yesterday's.

The situation confronting workers in the United States and throughout the world in these elections is urgent. Trump represents a faction of the oligarchy that, under conditions of unprecedented crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, is turning openly to fascistic and authoritarian forms of rule. Trump, however, did not come out of nowhere. He is not a demon from hell, but a product of American capitalism.

A resolution to the crisis in the interests of the working class depends upon the building of a socialist political leadership. All of historical experience has demonstrated that nothing is more destructive to the development of the class consciousness of the working class than telling workers in an election that they should cast their vote for the "lesser-evil" capitalist party.

Far from avoiding the danger of reaction and dictatorship, the politics of "lesser evilism" in its own way intensifies it. It serves to disarm the working class and leave it completely unprepared for what is to come, whoever is in the White House come January. The task is not to offer superficial and false solutions to the crisis, but to base one's politics on a scientific analysis of the nature of the crisis and the independent interests of the working class.

In these elections, the Socialist Equality Party calls on all its supporters to cast a write-in vote for Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz for president and vice president, and from there make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party and build a genuine revolutionary, internationalist and socialist movement of the working class.



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