

Jacobin and Democratic Socialists of America promote illusions in a “progressive” Biden administration

Gabriel Black
25 November 2020

While tens of millions of people are on the brink, facing a spiraling pandemic and an economic catastrophe, Biden is forming a right-wing administration of intelligence operatives, militarists, financial executives and big tech representatives. The Democrats have responded to Trump’s refusal to concede the election and his efforts to carry out a political coup by calling for “unity” with the Republican Party, denouncing “socialism” and preparing a government of austerity and war.

In this context, *Jacobin* magazine, affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), is playing an essential role in trying to keep radicalizing young people tied to the Democratic Party.

Throughout the 2020 elections, the DSA worked to subordinate the growing anger of workers and youth to the Democratic Party. This was done first through the full support for the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders, who dropped out in March and became Biden’s most enthusiastic supporter.

Even before Sanders’ “political revolution” ended, *Jacobin* sowed illusions in the ability to move Biden to the left. In 2019, *Jacobin* editor Bhaskar Sunkara declared in an interview with the *New York Times*, “Even a Biden presidency would be great” because there “will be plenty of room for socialists to be opposition.” He insisted that, no matter what happened, it was necessary “to avoid a third-party candidacy.”

This August, *Jacobin* stated, “Both Harris, and to a lesser extent, Biden, have shown a limited but encouraging propensity to gesture leftward under pressure.” A Biden administration could, therefore, be a government that implemented major social reform:

“The current unprecedented conditions, coupled with the still small but growing power of the US left, mean the next four years aren’t necessarily doomed to be a repeat of the Obama years.”

It has not taken long for these claims to be exploded by the actions of Biden himself. *Jacobin* is responding by doubling down on its insistence that all energy must be directed to supporting and pressuring the Democratic Party.

In their first article on Biden’s victory, “Celebrate Today, Fight Tomorrow” (November 6), *Jacobin*’s David Sirota celebrated Biden’s election as a “very good thing.” Sirota tells his readers “we are not guaranteed to see systemic changes” under Democratic Party leadership, as if Biden *could*, under the right conditions, offer “systemic changes.” Sirota stated that “under pressure from progressives” Biden “changes his tune.” He therefore called on his readers to make “loud demands,” “pressure for real change,” and “muster the will.”

As Biden has put together his right-wing government, *Jacobin* has responded with a series of political advice letters. The concern of the publication is that Biden’s refusal to make even nominal and meaningless gestures to mass social anger will further discredit the Democratic Party.

“Dear Joe Biden: Don’t Put Rahm Emanuel in Your Administration,” reads one headline of an “open letter to President-elect Joe Biden.” The article, written by a DSA Chicago alderman, tries to convince Biden that Emanuel, with whom Biden closely worked during the Obama administration, would be “disastrous in a Biden Administration.”

In another, “Joe Biden Should Absolutely Erase

Student Debt,” the author makes the case that “cancelling student debt may be one of Biden’s only options to stimulate the economy,” sowing the illusion that Biden “could relieve the crushing debt burden that millions are facing.”

In a third piece of advice, “Joe Biden Should Take a Hard Look at What Obama Did in 2009—And Do Exactly the Opposite,” the author warns that the “incoming Biden administration risks repeating the catastrophic policy failures of the past decade,” as if the pro-Wall Street attacks on the working class conducted under the Obama administration were “policy failures,” and not the deliberate implementation of ruling-class policy.

Other articles complain that Biden is not giving political positions to *Jacobin*’s main allies in the Democratic Party. For example, in “Joe Biden is Freezing Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren Out of His Cabinet,” the author worries that Biden is “freezing the Left out of his cabinet,” and tells readers that “we’ll have to push him to win any progressive gains.”

Several articles express concern over the nakedly right-wing character of the incoming Biden administration. In “Joe Biden Is Filling His Cabinet With Pro-War Hawks,” the author writes, “If you were hoping for a change of heart from Joe Biden after a decades-long career as a hawk, we’ve got bad news.” The hopes of *Jacobin*, however, spring eternal. Whatever happens, there is to be no break with the Democratic Party.

None of this is surprising. As the Socialist Equality Party wrote in the run-up to the election, responding to pseudo-left apologists for Biden who were promoting the politics of “lesser evilism”:

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.

The policy of a Biden administration, we noted, would not be one of social reform, but brutal austerity.

The political role of *Jacobin* and the DSA is to prevent at all costs a political break with bourgeois politics in general and the Democratic Party in particular. Theirs is the politics of the upper middle class, which is determined by the effort, on the one hand, to obtain positions for themselves within the state apparatus and, on the other hand, to prevent an independent mobilization of the working class against capitalism and for socialism.

The coming weeks and months will be a period of immense social crisis and political upheaval. The pandemic is spiraling out of control and the death toll is rising. This, combined with the massive social crisis, has produced mass social anger. A Biden administration will offer nothing to address the concerns and interests of the vast majority of the population.

The development of a genuine socialist movement against authoritarianism, war, inequality and the ruling-class policy of herd immunity must be based on opposition to the Democratic Party and all those, like *Jacobin* and the DSA, that function as its political instruments.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact