

Biden staggers toward the White House

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President-elect Joe Biden gave a 15-minute nationally televised speech Monday night to mark the occasion of his official victory in the Electoral College.

It is unprecedented for a president-elect to make a speech on such an occasion. For most of modern American history, the vote in the Electoral College—comprised of the electors appointed through the popular vote in the separate states—has been fairly routine. This began to change with the election in 2000, when George W. Bush lost the popular vote to Al Gore and would have lost the vote in the Electoral College as well if the Supreme Court had not intervened to halt the recounting of votes in Florida. In the 2016 elections, Trump lost the popular vote by nearly three million but was able to secure an Electoral College victory due to the distribution of his vote in the states.

The present situation goes far beyond what happened in 2000. Here, Trump, who was massively defeated in both the popular vote and the Electoral College, is engaged in an ongoing effort to nullify the election and overturn the results.

Biden began his remarks by hailing the Electoral College vote as a completion of the election process and a major victory for democracy. “The will of the people prevailed,” he said. “The democracy pushed, tested, threatened, proved to be resilient, true and strong.”

If it was Biden’s intention to reassert confidence in American democracy, however, not only his demeanor but his words proved the opposite.

First, his speech was characterized by its extreme defensiveness. If American democracy is so strong, why does the candidate who won the election by seven million votes have to make a speech to defend the legitimacy of his victory and his coming administration?

Second, Biden’s own account of the process that led to the vote in the Electoral College underscored not the

strength and resiliency but the extreme fragility of what remains of democratic forms of rule.

Biden noted that the Trump campaign has sought to bully and intimidate election officials and ordinary election workers around the country. “It was truly remarkable because so many of these patriotic Americans were subject to so much enormous political pressure, verbal abuse, even threats of physical violence,” he said. “We owe these public servants a debt of gratitude,” he said. “Our democracy survived because of them.”

The implication is that, if it were not for a handful of election officials, the effort by Trump to overturn the elections would have been successful.

Biden then referred to Trump’s unprecedented effort to overturn the election results through legal challenges, heard by more than 80 judges at the state and federal level, including the US Supreme Court. The outcome, he said, proved the “integrity of our judicial system.”

If Trump was relying on the Supreme Court as the final arbiter of the election, however, it was because of its role in handing the election to Bush in 2000. Indeed, Trump has relied on the arguments advanced by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia at the time—that the population does not have the right to vote for president—in his own efforts to overturn the results two decades later.

Biden’s criticism of Trump was itself tentative and evasive. He noted that Trump led an effort to “wipe out the votes of more than 20 million Americans” and that this position was “so extreme, we’ve never seen it before, a position that refused to respect the will of the people, the rule of law, and to honor the Constitution.”

In a manner ingrained in the culture of American bourgeois politics, Biden avoided bluntly stating the obvious: The president of the United States has been engaged in an ongoing fascist conspiracy to establish

a personalist dictatorship.

Nor did Biden dwell on the fact that the Republican Party has been complicit in all of this. While referring to the “stunning” decision of 17 Republican attorneys general and 126 Republican members of Congress to support a Texas lawsuit that asked the US Supreme Court to overturn the election, Biden moved on to declare that he was “pleased” by “the number of my former Republican colleagues in the Senate who have acknowledged already the results of the Electoral College.”

“I’m convinced,” Biden said, “we can work together for the good of the nation on many subjects.” It was necessary, he added, to “lower the temperature.” That is, a future Biden administration will collaborate closely with the party that has been involved in a conspiracy to overturn his own election victory.

While Biden claimed that his Electoral College victory would convince congressional Republicans to acknowledge the result of the vote, Trump and his closest aides and a large section of Republican officials continue their refusal to concede. Trump declared even before the day’s proceedings were completed that his fight to stay in office was not over. His top fascist White House aide, Stephen Miller, is proposing to name “alternate electors” in the battleground states who would cast entirely illegal ballots for the president.

Biden concluded his speech with a brief reference to the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 300,000 people in the United States. “My heart goes out to each of you,” he declared, “who have fallen on hard times through no fault of your own.” He did not, however, suggest that anything had to be done about the catastrophe that is spreading throughout the country. Everything will be solved with his modified version of the Catholic Catechism: “Where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is darkness, light.”

While Biden preaches “unity,” the reality is that social tensions in the United States have reached a point where they are short-circuiting the safety switches of democracy. A substantial section of the American ruling class is turning to dictatorship.

The causes lie not in Trump himself. He is but an instrument and expression of a deeper disease. Even if Trump is not successful now, the precedent has been set. And he is elaborating a “stab in the back” theory

that the election was stolen as the basis for mobilizing fascistic forces as the shock troops of the financial oligarchy.

Biden’s comments were followed by the remarks of the talking heads in the media who counseled that Republicans should “do the right thing” and accept defeat, as if what is involved is a children’s game and not an attempt to overturn democratic forms of rule.

As for Biden himself, wheezing and coughing throughout his remarks, he seemed an apt symbol of the crisis that he sought desperately to cover over. He is presently assembling a right-wing administration, staffed with proven defenders of the military-intelligence apparatus and the ruling class. It would be the height of folly to expect such a party and such a government to defend democratic rights against the fascist threat represented by Trump.

The principal concern of the Democrats is the growth of opposition to the profit system, deepening economic and social inequality, and the homicidal back-to-work and back-to-school campaign being waged by the entire political establishment and both corporate-controlled parties.

American democracy is not “true and strong;” it is at death’s door. The defense of democratic rights is inextricably connected to the independent political mobilization of the working class against capitalism and the entire rotting edifice of bourgeois rule.



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