

The Biden administration: Illusion and reality

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There is an intense effort in the Democratic Party-aligned media to present the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris as a fundamental turning point in American politics.

No doubt there is immense relief among millions in the US and around the world to see the fascist Trump leave Washington, two weeks after he spurred on an insurrection aimed at stopping the congressional certification of Biden's victory.

But with the transfer of the White House from the Republicans to the Democrats, it is necessary to counter illusions about what this government will or even can do. Its actions will be determined by the interests of the ruling class under conditions of an unprecedented social, economic and global crisis. However, efforts are underway to chloroform the public about the realities of the procapitalist, imperialist politics of the Biden administration and the catastrophic economic and social conditions under which it begins.

New York Times editorial board member Jesse Wegman declared that “Biden Can Heal What Trump Broke” in an op-ed Wednesday. “America is now being led by a decent, experienced public servant who cares about improving his constituents’ lives,” Wegman proclaimed.

Writing in the *Guardian*, Senator Bernie Sanders declared that an opportunity has now opened up for Biden and the Democrats to “put an end to business as usual” and address the array of problems confronting the country, from the Trump administration’s disastrous response to the pandemic to wealth inequality.

With control of the White House and both the Senate and the House, Sanders said, Democrats “must summon the courage to demonstrate to the American people that government can effectively and rapidly respond to their pain and anxiety.” Sanders vowed that he would set a positive example for Biden and his

congressional colleagues to follow as the incoming chairman of the Senate Budget Committee.

The United States has been here many times before. In 1993, when the “man from Hope,” Bill Clinton, came into office, it was proclaimed to be the end to the right-wing Reagan/Bush era. At home, Clinton brought an end to welfare “as we know it,” while abroad he waged war in the Balkans and dropped bombs on Iraq. Obama, the candidate of “hope and change,” expanded on the wars begun by George W. Bush, while funneling trillions of dollars to Wall Street, overseeing what was at the time the greatest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top of society.

This is, of course, not a purely American phenomenon. One only has to look to the recent experiences of Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party in the UK, where promises of radical change beyond anything promised by Biden were quickly dispensed with once coming to power or, in the case of Corbyn, leadership.

Much has been made of the flurry of executive orders signed by Biden in his first days in office—including orders halting construction of Trump’s border wall, reversing the anti-Muslim travel ban and rejoining the Paris climate agreement—as representing far-reaching and transformational policy changes. If one looks, however, they consist of bits and pieces that do nothing to fundamentally alter the conditions of broad masses of the population. An extension of the national moratorium on evictions does not apply to most loans or relieve unpaid rent, just as the extension of the “pause” on student loan interest payments does nothing to ease the burden of \$1.7 trillion in debt still owed by tens of millions.

Biden’s pandemic plan consists of a limited mask mandate and promises of more rapid vaccine distribution to administer 100 million doses in the first 100 days. Biden’s advisors have already acknowledged

that it will still be months before most people can get a shot, even if they meet their goals. Biden has ruled out shutting down nonessential production to get the spread of the virus under control and has declared that all K-8 schools will be reopened within three months. This under conditions in which more than 3,000 people are dying every day, and hospitals are overflowing with COVID-19 patients.

The Biden administration is already slow-walking its meagre promises for \$1.9 trillion in pandemic relief. Despite Democratic control over Congress, Biden has insisted that the bill have Republican support, meaning it will be further whittled down in negotiations. With another 900,000 Americans filing for unemployment last week, CBS News reported that it could take months for the \$1,400 stimulus checks—which Biden and the Democrats campaigned on in the Georgia Senate races as an immediate \$2,000 payment—to be passed and sent out to Americans.

Everything the administration does will be within the framework of 1) what is acceptable to the financial oligarchy and Wall Street, and 2) the requirements of the global geostrategic interests of American imperialism. The Democrats are making clear that when it comes to the pandemic, they will continue to pursue the murderous “herd immunity” policy followed by Trump, which has pleased the markets.

As far as foreign policy, the Senate confirmation hearings for Biden’s cabinet nominees have made clear that his policies around the world will be a continuation of Trump’s in many respects, along with a further ratcheting up of tensions with Russia. The central issue upon which the Democrats waged their opposition to Trump was over US relations with Russia. The Biden administration is being stacked with alums of the Obama administration who pushed for war on Libya, stoked the civil war in Syria and broadly expanded American drone war operations.

Under questioning from South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, secretary of state nominee Anthony Blinken declared Iran a “state sponsor of terrorism,” rejected the claim that Israel is a racist nation, opposed the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and told Central Americans fleeing poverty and violence not to come to the United States. Avril Haines, who was quickly confirmed as director of national intelligence on Wednesday, said she supported

the “aggressive stance” towards China that was pursued by Trump.

The orientation of the Biden administration is for “unity,” that is, unity with the Republican Party on the basis of a right-wing, pro-imperialist policy.

Biden is a creature of the state, having worked in national politics for nearly half a century. As we have noted, he lives in that universe. His central concern is to refurbish the state apparatus and collaborate with the Republican Party, to establish what is in effect a government of national unity directed against the working class. The framework of official politics is moving not to the left, but to the right, with the fascistic forces cultivated by Trump further integrated into the structure of the state itself.

A year after the first case was confirmed in the country, American society has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has triggered a sharp rise in unemployment, hunger and homelessness. More than 418,000 have died, and 25 million have been infected. Tens of thousands of small businesses have permanently closed, while the rich have seen their wealth rise through the stratosphere along with the stock market.

The conditions are ripe for a massive eruption of class conflict. The strike of more than 1,400 workers at Hunts Point Produce Market this week in the Bronx is just an initial indication of much broader social anger. This must be developed in opposition to capitalism.

None of the problems confronting the working class, from the disastrous pandemic response to growing levels of economic and social inequality, can be addressed without breaking the grip of the financial oligarchy over every aspect of society. Workers must draw the lessons of their experiences with the Democratic Party: an independent, revolutionary socialist path must be forged to save lives and put an end to inequality and war. All those who seek to reorganize society to meet human need and not the demands of Wall Street should make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party today.



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