

Biden’s “Mission Accomplished” speech on the coronavirus pandemic

Niles Niemuth
13 March 2021

On May 1, 2003, then-President George W. Bush delivered a televised speech on the USS Abraham Lincoln just two months into the bloody invasion of Iraq. Under a banner that read “Mission Accomplished,” Bush proclaimed that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended.” His proclamation was followed by an imperialist occupation that resulted in the deaths of one million Iraqis and nearly 4,500 American soldiers.

US President Joe Biden’s prime time speech Thursday evening, on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of the coronavirus pandemic, had a similar character. Striking the pose of kindly old grandfather, Biden presented the pandemic as if it were now under control with the Democratic Party at the helm. He reassured Americans that they were on track to defeat COVID-19, encouraging Americans to “mark our independence from this virus” by gathering with their friends, families and neighbors on July 4.

Biden made these remarks as scientists in the US and around the world were raising the alarm about the need to take action to halt a deadly new wave of the pandemic, as more infectious and lethal variants spread and limited global vaccination efforts threaten a “hurricane” surge. However, governments all over the world, including the Biden administration, are removing whatever restrictions are still in place to stop the spread of the virus.

“Look,” Biden declared, “we know what we need to do to beat this virus: Tell the truth.” However, his entire speech was based on a series of misleading, distorted and outright lying claims.

First, Biden said almost nothing about what produced this catastrophe. In his only hint that anything or anyone might have been responsible, he said, “A year ago, we were hit with a virus that was met with silence and spread unchecked, denials for days, weeks, then months.”

Who did the denying and in whose interests? Of this, Biden said nothing. He did not once even refer to the

policies of his predecessor, Donald Trump. The devastating toll is the outcome of a conscious policy pursued by governments around the world, conservative and liberal alike, which allowed the virus to spread. No measures were allowed—such as full lockdowns with compensation for workers and small businesses—that would interfere with the piling up of profits by the superrich.

In the United States, both the Democrats and Republicans participated in the implementation of this homicidal policy. Early on, the Democrats and Republicans in Congress were briefed on the dangers posed by the highly contagious novel coronavirus, but both parties kept silent and made no serious warnings to the public.

Second, Biden claimed that the pandemic had a devastating impact on all layers of society. “While it was different for everyone, we all lost something—a collective suffering, a collective sacrifice.”

In fact, some people have not only lost nothing, but have gained a great deal. Since the beginning of the pandemic one year ago, US billionaires have increased their wealth by \$1.4 trillion. When the market did crash in March, Congress quickly passed the CARES Act to distribute trillions of dollars to Wall Street.

“Finding light in the darkness is a very American thing to do,” Biden declared, perhaps saying more than he intended. The ruling class lives by the motto, “Never let a good crisis go to waste,” and this is certainly true of the pandemic.

Third, Biden claimed that his own administration was doing everything it could to stop the further spread of the virus. “I’m using every power I have as the president of the United States,” Biden claimed, “to put us on a war footing to get the job done.” He boasted that he would make all adults eligible to be vaccinated by May 1, before admitting that this “doesn’t mean everyone’s going to

have that shot immediately, but it means you'll be able to get in line." Tens of millions will be left waiting months before getting inoculated.

Far from taking measures to stop the virus's spread and protect workers and their families while the population gets vaccinated, Biden is spearheading the reopening of schools for in-person learning, which is already resulting in major outbreaks across the country. He boasted Thursday that reopening the majority of K-8 schools by April was the "number one priority" of his education secretary.

Fourth, as part of Biden's generally rosy picture of the state of the pandemic, he presented the crisis in entirely national terms. Listening to his remarks, one would hardly know that there were other countries in the world, outside of his threat to foreign leaders never to "bet against" the United States.

The truth is that the pandemic is a global crisis that does not have a national solution. Developments around the world will come back to hit the US. Globally, the daily case rate is once again rising rapidly, hitting a seven-day average of more than 413,000 new cases per day. Nearly 8,500 deaths are being recorded every day.

The surge is currently being led by Brazil, which is now in the middle of its worst stage of the pandemic so far, with more than 78,000 new confirmed cases and 2,207 deaths on Thursday. Cases are once again surging in Europe, pushing hospitals to the brink in Poland and the Czech Republic. Germany is now well into its third wave of infections after the reopening of schools without any restrictions. Throughout the continent the distribution of vaccines has been a debacle, as governments compete for access to a limited supply of doses. Vaccination rates in most countries remain in the single digits.

As for the United States itself, approximately 1,500 people are still succumbing to COVID-19 every day, a rate that is significantly higher than the second wave of deaths in the summer, and the decline in new cases has dramatically slowed. Even as the national vaccination effort has ramped up to more than two million doses per day—hitting Biden's goal of 100 million "shots in arms" by the end of his first 100 days in office several weeks early—only 10 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated.

Finally, toward the end of his remarks Biden made the clearest and most direct falsification of all. "Over a year ago," he said, "no one could have imagined what we were about to go through."

In fact, scientists and epidemiologists have long warned

precisely about the danger of a pandemic of this character. It was only a matter of time before it erupted in the way that it did. Moreover, one year ago, it was already clear that without emergency action the coronavirus pandemic would have devastating consequences for the population of the entire world. This was documented in the statement of the World Health Organization when it declared a pandemic and in countless statements on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Over a year ago, on March 6, 2020, the Socialist Equality Party (US) published a statement indicting the negligent and incompetent response of the world's governments, above all, the United States, to the pandemic. The deaths of millions of people could be avoided, it declared, if aggressive action was taken in line with the recommendations of epidemiologists:

In responding to this dangerous disease, one principle must guide us: that human need is primary. Combating an epidemic that threatens millions of lives cannot be subordinated to considerations of private profit.

The response of the institutions of capitalist society was to sacrifice life for profit, condemning millions of people to die in the interests of Wall Street.

What has been exposed by the pandemic over the last year is the fundamental contradiction between the interests of society as a whole and those of the ruling elite and the capitalist system. As with all other threats to humanity, there is no progressive solution to the pandemic under capitalism and the nation-state system. It is only the international working class, fighting on the basis of a socialist program to overthrow capitalism and reorganize society in its own interests, which can take humanity forward. That is the ultimate truth that Biden, of course, will not speak.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact