

Biden's new dawn: Illusion and reality

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30 April 2021

Behind the proclamations of a new dawn in the United States, Biden's speech Wednesday night to a joint session of Congress provided a portrait of panic, crisis and desperation on the part of the American ruling class.

And more significant than the various calls for reform measures, a far more important and sinister strategic perspective was elaborated throughout: to create the political framework for a confrontation with China to maintain, if necessary through war, the global hegemony of American imperialism.

After decades in which it has become ritualistic for presidents to declare in their annual addresses to Congress that "the State of the Union is strong," Biden presented a frank admission that the social situation in the US is nothing less than catastrophic: "The worst pandemic in a century. The worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The worst attack on our democracy since the Civil War." If one simply isolated the sentences in which Biden depicted the reality of American society, it provides an appalling portrait of poverty, hunger and desperation facing millions of workers in the US.

The listener may have been surprised to hear Biden speak of the massive concentration of wealth, as if he were reading from an article on the *World Socialist Web Site*. "Twenty million Americans lost their jobs in the pandemic, working- and middle-class Americans. At the same time, roughly 650 billionaires in America saw their net worth increase by more than \$1 trillion, in the same exact period."

Moreover, while he referenced his first 100 days in office, more revealing of the real state of American society is the 114 days since the January 6 fascistic insurrection that nearly resulted in the overthrow of the government. Even as he spoke, the streets around the Capitol building were closed and patrolled by police and National Guard troops.

According to Biden, the situation has already drastically changed in just his first 100 days in office. "I can report to the nation, America is on the move again. Turning peril into possibility, crisis into opportunity, setbacks into strength." Millions, however, are still being infected by COVID-19 and face the threat of death. Millions are still jobless and poverty-stricken. And none of those politically responsible for the

attack on the U.S. Capitol have been brought to justice. On the contrary, they occupied nearly half the seats in the audience Biden addressed, referred to by Biden as "my friends across the aisle."

Aware of the deep social anger building up in the United States, Biden promised two multitrillion-dollar programs he called on Congress to adopt. The "American Jobs Plan," he claimed, would "help millions of people get back to work and back to their careers," including through major infrastructure projects. The "American Families Plan," he said, would ensure a good education for everyone, including two years of free community college; quality, affordable child care for all parents; 12 weeks of guaranteed paid medical leave; and the expansion of child tax credits.

There is a lot less to Biden's proposals than meets the eye, and even less that will ever actually be implemented, if anything passes through Congress.

Biden's politics is the politics of the golden mean—everything for everyone. Inequality will be combatted, he promised, while proclaiming at the same time, "I think you should be able to become a billionaire and millionaire." All the changes Biden is proposing will somehow be achieved without any inroads into the wealth of the financial oligarchy or changes in the forms of property ownership.

He pointed to the gross inequality of the 2017 Republican tax cut, with 55 of the largest corporations paying zero federal tax although they made \$40 billion in profit. But his solution was raising the corporate tax rate from 21 percent to 28 percent (reversing only half of Trump's tax cut) and restoring the income tax rate for the super-rich to the level that prevailed under George W. Bush (up from 37 percent to 39.6 percent).

All of these proposals were framed around the essential issue: to defend the global position of American imperialism.

A major theme of the speech was that the measures Biden proposed were necessary for America to "win the 21st century" from other powerful countries and, above all, China. "There is simply no reason why the blades for wind turbines can't be built in Pittsburgh instead of Beijing,"

Biden said, in one of half a dozen references to Chinese economic competition.

Under President Xi, China was “deadly earnest about becoming the most significant, consequential nation in the world,” Biden said. He sought to enlist working people in the imperialist war drive, constantly invoking American nationalism. Under his legislation, he declared, “American tax dollars are going to be used to buy American products made in America to create American jobs.”

When one cuts through the acoustical changes in tone and rhetoric, Biden’s economic nationalism, trade war measures and militarist buildup, targeting China in particular, largely conforms to Trump’s own slogan, “America First.”

Within the ruling class and its thinktanks, the overriding concern is to establish the domestic political framework for American imperialism. The most recent edition of *Foreign Affairs* is devoted to this question. In “The Home Front: Why an Internationalist Foreign Policy Needs a Stronger Domestic Foundation,” Charles Kupchan and Peter Turbowitz worry that despite Biden’s pledge that the US is again “ready to lead the world,” the “political foundations of US internationalism [that is, US imperialist hegemony] have collapsed.”

The authors state, “What Biden needs is an ‘inside out’ approach that will link imperatives at home to objectives abroad. Much will depend on his willingness and ability to take bold action to rebuild broad popular support for internationalism from the ground up.”

Biden’s “bold action” will, in the end, amount to little. It is well known that Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society was wrecked by the Vietnam War. In the decision between “guns and butter,” the ruling class decided for guns. Who can believe that under Biden, under conditions of a vast erosion in the global position of American capitalism and as the ruling class is preparing war on a far greater scale, that the result will be any different?

Biden is attempting to create a political framework within the US to wage war abroad. This is the essential significance of his administration’s aggressive promotion of the official trade unions, which are to be incorporated into a “national labor front” based on economic nationalism and militarism.

In the first direct appeal for legislation in the course of his speech, Biden declared, “So that’s why I’m calling on Congress to pass the Protect the Right to Organize Act—the PRO Act—and send it to my desk so we can support the right to unionize.” The PRO Act has nothing to do with securing the interests of workers and everything to do with institutionalizing the official “unions” as corporatist instruments of the ruling class and the state.

The trade unions have for half a century worked systematically to isolate and suppress every manifestation of

working class opposition to inequality and exploitation. Over the past year, they have opposed any struggle against the homicidal policies of the ruling class in response to the pandemic, collaborating in the reopening of factories and schools.

Now, the executives that control these organizations are to be even further integrated into the state apparatus. As Trotsky noted in the founding document of the Fourth International, “In time of war or revolution, when the bourgeoisie is plunged into exceptional difficulties, trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers.”

Last week, the Biden administration announced that it was forming a White House “task force” to encourage the institutionalization of the trade unions, in line with the administration’s aggressive backing of the union campaign at Amazon. The task force will include Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and the Treasury Secretary and former Fed Chairman Janet Yellen. That is, it will include the two chief representatives of American imperialism and finance capital.

The reformist pretenses of Biden will, sooner rather than later, be exposed. The outbreak of class struggle will be met with ferocious political repression. Biden and the Democrats hope that they can suppress the class struggle and restore the supremacy of American imperialism to “win the 21st century.” Their efforts will prove futile.

For the working class, the critical question is to develop a counteroffensive against the policies of all factions of the ruling class. At its May Day Rally on Saturday, the International Committee of the Fourth International will motivate its call for the formation of an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to unify workers throughout the world against all efforts to pit worker against worker, nation against nation.

The development of a powerful counteroffensive must be connected to the building of a socialist leadership in the working class. We urge all of our readers to join this effort and register today to attend the International May Day Rally.



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