

In speech on voting rights, Biden acknowledges American democracy is at death's door

Barry Grey
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On Tuesday, President Joe Biden gave his first speech in response to the unprecedented assault on voting rights being carried out in Republican-controlled states in the aftermath of Donald Trump's attempted coup of January 6.

Biden's speech, delivered at the National Constitutional Center in Philadelphia, came two days after the conclusion of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Dallas, at which Trump railed against socialism, reiterated his "stab-in-the-back" lie of a stolen election and defended the violent assault on the US Capitol as a patriotic effort to "take back America" from the "radical left" Democrats.

Assessing the CPAC event, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned: "Donald Trump is consolidating power over the Republican Party, transforming it from a conservative bourgeois party into a fascist party with a personalist leader and a paramilitary wing."

In his remarks on Tuesday, Biden made the most direct and sweeping acknowledgment to date of the crisis of American democracy and its near overthrow on January 6.

"In 2020," he said, "democracy was put to a test. First by the pandemic, then by a desperate attempt to deny the reality of the results of the election, and then by a violent and deadly insurrection on the capitol, the citadel of our democracy."

Linking the assault on voting rights to the attempt to overthrow the 2020 election, he noted that since the November election, 17 Republican-controlled states have enacted 28 laws restricting ballot access for working class, poor and minority voters, and a total of 400 such laws have been introduced across the US.

The attempt to overthrow the Constitution and establish a dictatorship was continuing, he warned. "Hear me clearly," he said, "There's an unfolding assault taking

place in America today, an attempt to suppress and subvert the right to vote in fair and free elections, an assault on Democracy, an assault on liberty, an assault on who we are as Americans."

The US, he continued, would face "a new wave of unprecedented voter suppression and raw and sustained election subversion" in 2022 midterm elections.

"We are facing the most significant test of our democracy since the Civil War," he declared. "That's not hyperbole... The Confederates back then never breached the Capitol as insurrectionists did on Jan. 6. I'm not saying this to alarm you. I'm saying this because you should be alarmed."

These dire acknowledgements that American democracy is at death's door stood in the starkest contrast to the feckless and impotent character of Biden's proposals to defend it. They amounted to finger-wagging and moral appeals to "my Republican friends in Congress and states and cities and counties to stand up, for God sake, and help prevent this concerted effort to undermine our elections and the sacred right to vote."

"Have you no shame?" Biden plaintively asked.

Biden omitted any mention of Trump—or, for that matter, any of his Republican co-conspirators—by name. He said nothing about the threat of Texas Governor Greg Abbott, backed by Texas Republicans, to arrest 51 Democratic members of the Texas state House of Representatives who on Monday fled the state and flew to Washington D.C. to break a quorum and delay passage of a new voter suppression law.

The White House let it be known that Biden had no plans to meet with the Texas Democrats, who are pressing for the administration to endorse a change in the US Senate filibuster rule to allow passage of two bills that would outlaw many of the anti-democratic measures in

the Republican state laws and restore the key enforcement mechanism of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that was struck down by the US Supreme Court in 2013.

Republicans voted unanimously last month to block a floor vote in the Senate on a watered-down version of the “For the People Act” authored by Democrat Joe Manchin. Manchin and a handful of other right-wing Democrats are refusing to support a weakening of the anti-democratic filibuster rule so as to ensure passage of voting rights measures.

Biden’s spinelessness and insistence on “bipartisanship” and “unity” with supposedly “moderate” Republicans stands in the sharpest contrast to the political savagery of the Trump-dominated GOP. Abbott set the tone for the special legislative session called to push through his anti-voting rights bill by arresting and jailing a 62-year-old African American worker for voting last year while he was still on parole.

The only concrete action Biden announced in his Philadelphia speech amounts to tacit acceptance of defeat for the Democratic voting rights bills—which themselves would do little to stem the assault on voting rights and the accelerating drive of powerful sections of the ruling class toward dictatorship. Biden announced that he was allocating \$25 million for the Democratic National Committee to conduct a voter registration and education drive, based on the more onerous requirements included in the Republican measures.

The paltry sum of \$25 million gives an indication of the real priorities of the Biden administration and the Democratic Party—the oldest capitalist party in the world. Biden has proposed, with overwhelming support from congressional Democrats, a record military budget of \$753 billion. In other words, he wants to spend 30,000 times more preparing for war against American imperialism’s nuclear-armed rivals China and Russia, among other countries, than opposing what he acknowledges is a fundamental assault on democracy.

Neither party of American capitalism, nor any other official institution, can defend democratic rights against the rise of fascist forces and the growth of militarism. The rise of Trump and transformation of the Republican Party, along with the ever-more rightward trajectory of the Democrats, are the outcome of a protracted process of economic decline, whose most malignant expression is the staggering growth of social inequality.

Democratic rights are incompatible with extreme levels of social inequality and endless war. Already in 2000, the Democrats accepted without a fight the theft of the

election by the Supreme Court, which halted a recount in Florida and handed the White House to the loser of the popular vote, George W. Bush. After the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013, the Obama administration and the Democrats did nothing to pass legislation restoring it.

Now, the global pandemic has revealed before billions of people the incompetence of the capitalist governments and elites and their indifference to human life. The pandemic has intensified all of the contradictions of capitalism and brought social tensions to a boil.

The Biden administration has continued the herd immunity policy of Trump, costing hundreds of thousands of lives in the interests of corporate profit and increasing the concentration of wealth at the very top. According to Federal Reserve figures, since the start of 2020, the bottom 50 percent of the US population has gained \$700 billion in wealth, while the richest 1 percent has gained \$10 trillion.

The Democrats’ pleas for unity with Trump’s Republican Party are driven by fear that the working class will break the grip of the pro-corporate trade unions and the capitalist two-party system. They want a corporatist state to forcibly hold the working class in check. At the same time, they promote racial politics to divide and disorient the working class.

The growing wave of strikes in the US and internationally—at Volvo Trucks in Virginia, among coal miners, nurses and many others—is taking the form of an insurrection against the right-wing trade union apparatuses. These struggles will intensify. What is critical is that they acquire a conscious socialist perspective based on the struggle for workers’ power.

Workers will come to see that there is no democracy outside of the struggle for socialism. That means building the Socialist Equality Party as the new political leadership to establish the political independence and international unity of the working class.



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