

Biden washes his hands of responsibility for mass evictions

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After allowing the federal moratorium on evictions to expire over the weekend, exposing millions of hard-pressed renters to the danger of forcible removal from their homes, loss of their belongings and homelessness, the Biden White House issued a statement Monday afternoon effectively disavowing any responsibility for the vast social misery its actions are helping to cause.

The statement issued on “eviction prevention efforts” acknowledges the horrific impact of mass eviction, particularly “given the rising urgency of containing the spread of the Delta variant,” which will run like wildfire through homeless shelters, tent camps and overcrowded apartments where multiple families will live doubled-up and tripled-up.

But while promising that “President Biden is taking further action to prevent Americans from experiencing the heartbreak of eviction,” the actions amount to a laundry list of appeals for other people to do something about the crisis. The statement reads like a satire on indifference thinly disguised by political doubletalk.

Biden directs his own White House to discuss with other federal agencies “whether there are any other authorities to take additional actions to stop evictions,” given that the right-wing majority on the US Supreme Court struck down the anti-eviction order which was issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last September, on public health grounds, and extended several times for three-month periods.

He calls on state and local courts to pause eviction proceedings until tenants and landlords can access Emergency Rental Assistance, the federal program established to provide assistance to workers thrown out of their jobs because of the pandemic and unable to pay their rent. Some \$47 billion has been appropriated for this program, but only \$3 billion has been paid out, largely because of foot-dragging by state and local

governments and landlords.

Biden calls on state and local governments to stop the foot-dragging, without offering any reason why that should be expected to happen, since it is driven by political resistance among capitalist politicians to do anything to assist tenants against landlords, who comprise a substantial social interest in both parties.

The president calls on landlords to “hold off on evictions for the next 30 days” and even appeals to “utilities providers to work with State and local governments ... to avoid cutting off services for those behind in payments due to the pandemic and at risk of eviction.”

Biden, a devout churchgoer, does not include an appeal for Satan to cut off his claws and his tail and for the lion to lie down with the lamb, but he might as well do that as plead with landlords and utility companies to give their working class customers a break.

This rigmarole was accompanied by a round of finger-pointing among the Democrats in Washington, with the White House and congressional leaders criticizing each other, and various factions of the House Democrats suggesting that their inner-party opponents are to blame for the failure to pass legislation by the July 31 deadline set by the Supreme Court ruling.

It is certainly true, as Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Representative Cori Bush and others charge, that a sizeable faction of “moderate,” i.e., right-wing House Democrats refused to support a bill presented Friday morning by the House leadership to extend the eviction moratorium through October 18. Some of them threatened to board planes to go back to their districts during the August congressional recess rather than allow the measure to come to a vote.

But Ocasio-Cortez, Bush and others in the “left” of the Democratic caucus have devoted their political

careers to upholding the viability of this right-wing party of imperialism and Wall Street as a vehicle for social reform. They can hardly express shock that their colleagues care more for landlords than they do for tenants about to be made homeless.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and others in the Democratic congressional leadership faulted the White House for waiting until last Thursday to announce there would be no extension of the moratorium without congressional action. But the July 31 deadline was well known throughout Washington, as well as the inevitability of a Senate filibuster to block any action, given the refusal of the Democrats to change the filibuster rule.

The truth is that the eviction moratorium was allowed to expire because there is no significant support within the US ruling elite for social reform measures, let alone actions that would impinge on the profit interests of landlords, who include not just so-called “mom-and-pop” owners of a few properties, but giant financial concerns that control real estate empires.

Now the consequences will be felt, unevenly at first, because there is a patchwork of state and local restrictions on evictions, many also enacted during the pandemic. Renters in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, California, Oregon and Washington have some limited protections for a limited period of time, at most a few months.

In many areas, however, the wave of evictions will begin immediately, perhaps as soon as this week. There were 600 families said to be threatened with eviction in Detroit, according to one local survey.

In St. Louis, the sheriff’s office said it was preparing to execute 126 eviction orders that had reached the final stage, and would be adding staff to the teams of officers assigned to this brutal task. Sheriff Vernon Betts said his office would begin to enforce 30 evictions per day starting August 9, and he said after working to “clean up” the backlog, he expected hundreds of new eviction filings by landlords who had been biding their time. He told a local news outlet, “Once the moratorium is over, I’m thinking it’s going to be, ‘Katy bar the door.’”

Renters have the worst prospects in the Southern states, according to a survey in the *Wall Street Journal*, with higher-than-average rent debt loads in Mississippi, South Carolina and Georgia, and laws so reactionary that Mississippi tenants can lose an eviction case and be

on the street the same day, while Arkansas landlords can seek criminal charges against tenants who don’t pay rent.



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