

Biden infrastructure bill targets China

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President Joe Biden signed into law Monday afternoon an infrastructure bill presented as a boon to America's workers which is actually a boondoggle for giant corporations and an effort to prepare the United States for growing strategic and ultimately military conflict with China.

While the bill is being touted as \$1 trillion devoted to rebuilding roads, bridges, airports and seaports, as well as expanding rural broadband and providing other necessary repairs to crumbling physical infrastructure, only \$550 billion is new money. The rest was already appropriated last year under the Trump administration and is being redirected.

In terms of the actual infrastructure needs of a modern, 21st century society, the bill provides only a drop in the bucket. The \$1 trillion is spread out over ten years, for an average of only \$100 billion a year, far less than the typical infrastructure legislation for roads and bridges alone in previous decades.

The bill-signing ceremony on the White House lawn was carried out with a great deal of pro-worker fanfare; this was based on the "big lie" that identifies the unions with the working class. A union official, Heather Kurtenbach, was featured as a speaker, giving remarks boasting about the "diversity" of her local union, with half its apprentices female or minority, then introducing Biden, hailing him as the main author and driving force of the infrastructure bill.

The business agent, organizer and political director of Ironworkers Local 86 in Seattle, Washington, Kurtenbach was chosen for the ceremony because she is female and a former prison inmate (she overcame a methamphetamine addiction), and because she had previously appeared at a White House function during the Obama administration and was therefore politically reliable. Not a hint about the seething discontent in the working class with both the unions and the Biden administration would pass her lips.

Kurtenbach said nothing about the wave of strikes in the United States, including the recent walkout by thousands of carpenters in her home city, which was sabotaged and

then shut down by the Carpenters union leadership, as well as isolated as much as possible by the other building trades unions, including the Ironworkers. After passing this test, she can undoubtedly look forward to rising further in the union hierarchy. Seven officials of Local 86 have six-figure incomes, with the top official, Chris McClain, her principal sponsor in the union, taking in more than \$140,000 a year.

In his remarks, Biden gave "special thanks to organized labor," naming the AFL-CIO, the United Auto Workers, several of the building trades, and the National Education Association, to which his wife Jill belongs as a community college instructor. He declared that the bill would pour billions into "good union jobs," although as millions of workers know, this term has long ceased to have the meaning it might have had half a century ago.

Workers in UAW-represented plants, for example, frequently take home starting wages worse than those at the local McDonald's, and in most companies are subjected to two-tier or three-tier systems, negotiated and enforced by the union, which keep them permanently at low pay. This is true not only at parts plants like Dana Inc., but at major auto plants run by GM, Ford and Stellantis.

Biden is well aware of this, since the Obama-Biden administration, as part of its bailout of the auto industry in 2009, pushed through the slashing of wages for new hires, as well as the elimination of pensions and cutting of other benefits. His invocation of "good union jobs" is not the product of the faulty memory of an aging political hack. It is an effort to provide political cover for the unions, which his administration is enlisting to suppress the class struggle and protect the interests of the financial aristocracy.

These class considerations underline the entire structure of the legislation Biden signed into law Monday. While some money is being thrown at the most critical and glaring indications of societal decay—\$15 billion to replace outmoded and hideously dangerous lead pipes in many cities, and a larger sum to prevent the politically

embarrassing collapse of freeway bridges and overpasses—the bulk of the actual spending is tailored to prepare America for the shock of a military conflict with China.

This includes substantial repair of the outmoded network of airports, docks and roadways that will be required to ship military supplies and troops in the event of a full-scale war with a country with the world's largest population and second-largest military establishment (as well as the third-largest arsenal of nuclear weapons).

While at the signing ceremony Biden struck a populist pose, promoting the bill as a pro-worker exercise, both the president and his top aides made it clear that it was primarily directed against China, although they sought to frame this as economic competition, rather than a full-scale military conflagration.

According to the report in the *New York Times*, published barely an hour after the ceremony, Biden said it “would better position the United States against China and other nations seeking to dominate the emerging industries of the 21st century economy. Hours before a virtual summit with President Xi Jinping of China, whose infrastructure initiatives have helped vault China to global leadership in advanced manufacturing and other areas, Mr. Biden said the bill showed democratic governments can deliver for their citizens.”

“This is not designed to be stimulus,” Cecilia Rouse, who chairs the White House Council of Economic Advisers, told the *Times*. “It’s designed to be the most strategic, effective investments so that we can continue to compete against China and other countries that are making bigger investments in their infrastructure.”

Biden, Rouse, Brian Deese, head of Biden’s National Economic Council, and other administration representatives have emphasized the need to modernize those parts of the infrastructure where the US lags behind China the most, particularly ports and airfields.

The political framing of the legislation also deserves comment. Biden staged the ceremony as a celebration of bipartisanship, sharing the stage with the Senate co-authors of the legislation, Democrat Kyrsten Sinema and Republican Rob Portman, and repeatedly declaring his belief in cooperation between the two major capitalist parties.

This is despite the fact that the Republican Party is politically dominated by the fascist former president Donald Trump, whose supporters sought to block Biden’s taking office by storming the Capitol on January 6 to halt the certification of Biden’s victory in the Electoral

College.

Trump denounced the passage of the infrastructure bill, singling out the 19 Republican senators and 13 Republicans in the House of Representatives who voted for the legislation for vilification. Trump supporters have flooded the offices of the 13 representatives with calls labeling them as traitors and making death threats.

Sinema is one of two Senate Democrats who has been blocking passage of the somewhat larger social spending bill that is the other half of Biden’s legislative agenda. The Build Back Better Act, as it is called, is set to be approved by the House this week, but its fate in the Senate, where Sinema and West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin have stalled it, remains highly uncertain.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer indicated Monday that the Senate would not take up the Build Back Better legislation as soon as it passes the House, using the “reconciliation” process that allows the bill to pass with a simple majority that is not subject to a Republican filibuster. This indicates that Sinema and Manchin have still refused to commit their support.

Instead, the Senate will take up the National Defense Authorization Act, which provides a record \$778 billion for the Pentagon. This is a single year’s funding, but it approaches the amount being spent on physical infrastructure for the next ten years, an indication of the real priorities of the Biden administration, the Democratic Party, and the American capitalist class as a whole.

Schumer said that the NDAA would be combined with a long-stalled bill, the United States Innovation and Competition Act, passed by the Senate earlier this year and directed mainly at supply-chain and technology promotion issues involved in the US conflict with China. This underscores the turn by US imperialism to conflict with China as the axis of foreign and military policy.

Only once these two bills, either in succession or in combination, are passed and sent to the White House, will the Senate then begin to take up the social spending bill. Manchin has hinted that Build Back Better could be postponed until next year, which would effectively kill the legislation.



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