

Biden at one year: A government of mass death and political crisis

Patrick Martin
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The press conference by President Joe Biden Wednesday, held to mark the end of his first year in office, was a two-hour demonstration of the social chasm that separates the White House, the corporate media, and the entire US political establishment from the actual concerns of the American population.

At the beginning, Biden spoke for several minutes before taking questions. He took no notice of the more than 2,374 Americans who had died that day from COVID-19—a staggering number, one of the worst days since the current surge driven by the Omicron variant began. He could have begun by calling for a moment of silence but chose instead not to call attention to clearest evidence of the failure of his administration.

Whatever their political differences, the Democratic president and his Republican opponents share the same indifference to mass death. They represent and defend the interests of the American capitalist class, and the billionaires do not propose to allow consideration of human life and safety to interfere with their continued amassing of unprecedented levels of profit and wealth. That is what drives the policy of keeping open workplaces and schools in the midst of a terrible pandemic.

Biden claimed “remarkable progress” during the first year of his administration, boasting of record job creation, a drop in the official unemployment rate and a successful campaign of mass vaccinations. There was a powerful element of self-delusion in this presentation, under conditions where the vast majority of the American people are feeling the consequences of the greatest public health crisis in 100 years, in which they have lost grandparents, parents, friends, co-workers and, increasingly, children.

The president did not have the decency to mention the 475,000 Americans who were alive when he was inaugurated on January 20, 2021, but who are now dead, killed by COVID-19. Nor did he mention the hundreds of

thousands more expected to die this winter as a consequence of the spread of the Omicron variant, which has driven up infections to staggering levels and begun to overwhelm the hospital system—and soon the morgues.

No one at the press conference raised the question of mass death. They might have recalled Biden’s criticism of Donald Trump, in a presidential campaign debate on October 22, 2020. He pointed to the 220,000 Americans who had died up to then of coronavirus, and declared, “Anyone who’s responsible for that many deaths should not remain as president of the United States of America.” The death toll today is approaching four times that level.

In that same debate, Biden postured as a defender of teachers, saying that Trump’s policy on the schools was essentially, “All you teachers out there, not that many of you are going to die, so don’t worry about it.” Today, after thousands of teachers have died, and a new COVID-19 variant has emerged that is far more contagious and dangerous to school children, Biden’s policy is Trump’s policy. “We’re not going back to lockdown,” he told the news conference. “We’re not going back to closing schools.”

When asked about the rising number of teachers’ strikes and other protests directed against the reopening of face-to-face classes in the midst of the largest ever surge of COVID-19 infections, Biden sneered that such opposition was not very significant, claiming that 95 percent of the schools are open for in-person instruction. His disdain for opposition from working people was one of his few displays of genuine emotion in the two-hour event.

The mounting US campaign against Russia was the primary focus of the news conference, with media representatives repeatedly pressing Biden for more belligerent statements in support of the unproven allegations that Russian President Vladimir Putin plans to invade Ukraine, and for more assurances of swift and massive US retaliation if he did so.

Biden said he thought Putin would invade, but when he said this was still uncertain and pointed out that an actual war between NATO and Russia had dangers, his questioners seemed dissatisfied. The negative reaction intensified when Biden tried to distinguish between a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, which would be met with all-out economic warfare, and a “minor incursion,” which might not.

Criticism of Biden for supposedly having given a “green light” to Putin to use force against Ukraine headlined news reports within minutes of the press conference, and White House aides were already issuing “clarifications” that any Russian attack on Ukraine would meet with an aggressive US response.

The most telling feature of the news conference was Biden’s confession that he did not foresee the degree to which the Republicans would seek to undermine and oppose his administration. “I completely underestimated the Republican Party,” he admitted.

What is there to “underestimate”? The Republican Party tried to overthrow the election. The entire congressional leadership went along with Trump’s pretense, extending over many weeks, that the outcome of the election was in doubt, despite Biden’s decisive victory in the popular vote and the Electoral College.

Two-thirds of Republicans in the House of Representatives voted against certifying Biden’s victory, even after the attack on the Capitol by fascist Trump supporters, which failed in its goal of taking hostages and forcing Congress to allow Trump to remain in the White House. The Republican Party is dominated by Trump, who denounces Biden as an illegitimate president. How can Biden be surprised that they oppose his policies?

Biden expressed disbelief at the degree to which the Republican Party has been subordinated to the personal authority of Trump, and the resulting unwillingness of Republican congressmen and senators to engage in the bipartisan horse-trading usual in capitalist politics. But he issued no warning to the American people about the danger to democracy posed by the transformation of the Republican Party into a fascistic movement under the dictatorship of the former president.

On the contrary, throughout the press conference, he sought to appeal to the Republicans—the very people who sought to overthrow him. He flattered Senate Republicans, praising Mitt Romney, describing Minority Leader Mitch McConnell as his friend, and invoking the name of John McCain as though this warmonger had been a saint. The only senator he disavowed by name was

Bernie Sanders. In response to a provocative question from Fox News, he denied that he was trying to “pull the country so far to the left.” He continued, “I’m a mainstream Democrat. ... I am not a socialist, I’m a capitalist.”

The sharpness of the political crisis broke through at one point, when Biden pointed to the rapid transformation of society under the impact of revolutionary developments in technology. “In 10 years, we’ll be living in a different world,” he said, adding there would be more change in the next decade than in the previous half century. “Can we maintain the democratic institutions here and around the world?” he asked. His answer: “It’s going to be hard.”

The world is on the precipice of radical change, the US president admits. This change will explode over the next 10 years, he forecasts. Will democracy survive? Biden scratches his head. “Who knows?” This remarkable colloquy is an indicator of underlying nervousness, even fear. Biden no doubt fears the fascist threat. But he cannot speak its name. That is because he, and the class he represents, has a greater fear: a movement from below, from the great masses of the working class, who are moving to the left, not to the right.

The issue is not the survival of what the leader of the most powerful imperialist country calls “democracy.” He really means capitalism, the profit system, which has produced a level of economic inequality that is entirely incompatible with any genuine democracy. Instead, it is generating fascist movements all over the world, which aim to abolish all democratic rights and subject the working class to the naked dictatorship of the rich.

The issue is socialism or barbarism. The working class must mobilize its forces on an international basis, break with all the institutions that support capitalist rule, including the Democratic Party and the corporate-controlled trade unions, and build a mass political movement for socialism. This is the task undertaken and led by the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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