

White House Correspondents' Association dinner

## The CIA Democrats and their media courtiers celebrate the “end” of the COVID pandemic

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The WSWS has on a number of occasions commented on the annual dinner of the White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA), which brings together thousands of corporate journalists, politicians and Hollywood and Wall Street figures in an annual celebration of the subordination of the media to the CIA and capitalist politics.

As a rule, the event is one of utter conformity, but on infrequent occasions reality breaks through and the millionaire pundits and news anchors are confronted with some criticism of their subservience to the war criminals in the White House. As a rule, this happens only when the war criminal is a Republican.

In 2006, Stephen Colbert delivered a pointed attack on both President George W. Bush and the media apologists for the Iraq war—with Bush himself glowering within a few feet of him. We noted both the cold response in the media coverage of the event and the shift the following year, when the WHCA brought in the impersonator Rich Little as the entertainer, assured that his bland performance would arouse no ire in the White House.

In later years, we noted the complete subordination of the assembled press corps to the Obama White House, even as Obama carried out the most intense crackdown on leaks to the media of any administration in US history, including the prosecution of several journalists.

When comedian Michelle Wolf skewered both the Trump administration and the media with some effectiveness in 2018, declaring, “you pretend like you hate him, but I think you love him,” we noted the hostile press response. There were even suggestions that in branding Trump aide Kellyanne Conway and White House press secretary Sara Huckabee Sanders as liars, Wolf had somehow committed an assault on the female sex.

A year later, we commented on the utter hypocrisy of the claims that the corporate media defends press freedom, when the assembled journalists were silent on the imprisonment of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, the army private who leaked devastating information about US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

These tendencies of conformity, hypocrisy and subservience to the Democratic Party and the capitalist state were on full

display Saturday at the 2022 edition of the White House Correspondents' Association dinner, with the added feature that it was the first to be held in three years because of interruptions forced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was also the first to be attended by the US president in six years, because Donald Trump boycotted the event throughout his term in office, denouncing the media as the “enemy of the people” and the purveyor of “fake news.” With a Democrat in the White House, presidential participation was resumed, and the assembled media pundits were predisposed to provide a sympathetic audience.

In his opening remarks, a relatively brief recitation of lame jokes prepared by White House speechwriters, President Joe Biden remarked, “We’ve come here to answer an important question on everyone’s mind: Why in hell are we still doing this?” He was referring to the danger of infection after last month’s Gridiron Club dinner, a similar but smaller Washington event, resulted in 10 percent of those attending being infected with COVID-19.

Comedian Trevor Noah, the evening’s host, raised the same issue. “It is my great honor to be speaking tonight at the nation’s most distinguished superspreader event,” he said, adding, “No, for real, people: What are we doing here?”

If the Gridiron Club precedent holds, the WHCA gala, attended by 2,600 people, will result in close to 300 COVID infections. But despite the question marks by Noah and Biden, the likelihood of mass infection is actually considered a positive feature of the event, not a defect.

The assembled millionaire journalists and their multi-millionaire and billionaire bosses have access to the best health care money can buy, including expensive therapeutic drugs. They can assume that they are in no real danger even if they contract the infection, which is nonetheless deadly to the broader population, which cannot afford such treatment. They will, of course, spread the virus far and wide if they do contract it, causing untold suffering and possible death to others.

The Biden administration and the US ruling class as a whole have declared that the pandemic is over. They have shut down even the most timid efforts at mitigating the impact of the virus.

All schools and workplaces have been reopened so that the process of extracting surplus value and profit from the working class can be resumed full blast.

The White House Correspondents' Association dinner was meant to underscore that there is to be no further concern with a pandemic that has already infected 80 million Americans and taken more than a million lives. This under conditions of a fresh surge in infections across most of the country from a new, more infectious and more virulent variant of SARS-CoV-2.

In this case, the message of indifference to the pandemic is aimed not at the American public, which pays little attention to this Washington gala, but at the media elite—a means of reinforcing the instructions they have already received to stop covering the pandemic as an ongoing threat.

Biden tried to have it both ways. He did not attend the dinner itself, supposedly to avoid exposure to the crowd, who could not be masked while eating. But he sat at the head table throughout the after-dinner activities, without a mask, for 90 minutes of skits, jokes, speeches and award presentations, in front of a crowd that was similarly unmasked.

The brief portion of Biden's remarks that was serious consisted of hailing the "free press" because it has lined up and saluted the US war drive against Russia in Ukraine. There is not a single dissenting voice in official Washington, and there was none in Saturday night's crowd. Not one media pundit has raised the danger of nuclear war brought on by the massive arms shipments from the NATO countries in response to the Russian invasion.

The most cynical moment of the night came in Biden's conclusion, when he introduced Trevor Noah as the evening's host, with the words, "Now you get to roast the president, and unlike in Moscow, you won't go to jail."

This from the head of a government that is pursuing the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange with the aim of imprisoning him for life. Unlike the assembled stenographers for the CIA and Pentagon, who take dictation from the military-intelligence apparatus and transform it into newspaper articles and television coverage aimed at mobilizing public opinion behind the crimes of American imperialism, Assange is an actual journalist.

He has courageously exposed the crimes of American imperialism, and for that he has been subject to a decade of isolation followed by three years of imprisonment in a maximum-security British prison hellhole. He now faces imminent extradition to the United States, where the Biden administration plans to put him on trial for alleged violations of the Espionage Act that carry a prison sentence of up to 175 years.

The American corporate media has dropped even the most perfunctory expressions of concern about the precedent being set by the persecution of Assange, but his prosecution, conviction and imprisonment in the United States would amount to a death sentence for press freedom.

Of course, as far as the media is concerned, Assange has violated one of their cardinal principles. It is the "right" NOT to publish when asked by the CIA, Pentagon or White House to withhold information from the American people that relates to "national security," i.e., the ongoing conspiracies and crimes of the military-intelligence apparatus.

The rest of Biden's remarks can be summed up briefly. He made a joke out of the pandemic, which has taken 20 million lives internationally. He made a joke out of the January 6, 2021 attempt by Donald Trump to overturn the results of the presidential election and maintain himself in power. And he made a joke about the role of Fox News and other ultra-right media, which are fomenting the emergence of a fascist movement in the United States, with Trump at its head.

None of this offended his audience, which shares both his unseriousness and his desire to prevent the American people from having access to truthful information about the implications of the pandemic, the ongoing disintegration of American democracy, and the threat of nuclear war.

Around the dinner itself, a major feature of the weekend was the endless round of parties and galas hosted by various media moguls, billionaires and Washington socialites. It is worth citing those in attendance at one dinner, hosted by David and Katherine Bradley, multi-millionaire former owners of the *Atlantic* and other media properties, and Laurene Powell Jobs, the billionaire widow of Apple founder Steve Jobs, who bought the *Atlantic* from them.

Those "spotted" there by *Politico* included an array of national security officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, CIA Director Bill Burns, Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco and homeland security adviser Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, along with White House press secretary Jen Psaki and several other cabinet officials. Those joining them from the media included Judy Woodruff, Jake Tapper, Wolf Blitzer, Jonathan Capehart, Katty Kay, John Dickerson, Jeffrey Goldberg, David Frum, arch-warmonger Anne Applebaum and dozens of others.

This list gives the flavor of the entire affair, in which the CIA, its political advocates in the Democratic Party and their media courtiers join hands in an obscene celebration of what passes for "democracy" in America.



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