

Biden pleads with Republicans to break with “anti-democratic” Trump

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The speech by US President Joe Biden Thursday afternoon, and the statements by Republican presidential candidates the previous night, were demonstrations of the deepening political crisis in America. The Republicans adopt an increasingly belligerent and fascist stance, both Trump and those running against him, who debated in California. Meanwhile the Democrats, in the person of Biden, bewail the danger to democracy but propose absolutely no way to oppose it.

The main concern of Biden, as expressed in his remarks at the McCain Institute in Arizona, is the impact of Trump and his acolytes on the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. After 10 minutes of fond reminiscences of his close relations with the Republican warhawk for whom the institute is named, he turned to promoting his own brand of militarism. He warned that the turn towards ultra-right violence in the Republican Party was undermining the world position of American imperialism and disrupting the functioning of its gigantic military apparatus.

The speech at Arizona State University came at the invitation of Cindy McCain, widow of the longtime Republican senator, who died of brain cancer in 2018. Biden told a select bipartisan audience that he was there to speak about a threat to democracy, and began by citing the reactions among foreign leaders and governments to the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters.

He continued, “There’s something dangerous happening in America. There’s an extremist movement that does not share the basic beliefs in our democracy, the MAGA movement. Not every Republican, not even a majority of Republicans adhere to the MAGA extremist ideology. I know because I’ve been able to work with Republicans my whole career. But there’s no question that today’s Republican Party is driven and intimidated by MAGA Republican extremists. Their extreme agenda if carried out would fundamentally alter the institutions of American democracy as we know it.”

Biden went on to describe attacks on the media, on the right to vote, book banning, the threat to shut down the government. But he focused on attacks on the military, specifically the blocking of promotions of hundreds of military officers by “one senator from Alabama” (Tommy Tuberville), and then

denounced Trump for declaring General Mark Milley, outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a “traitor” who “in times gone by” would have been executed. Trump targeted Milley because he declined to support Trump’s efforts to seize power after losing the November 2020 presidential election.

Republicans in the House of Representatives, Biden said, were whitewashing the January 6 attack, praising the attackers, and calling for “destroying the FBI.” They were pushing for a shutdown of the federal government by blocking passage of a budget, which would lead to the suspension of military salaries.

While Biden’s indictment, if anything, understated the danger to democracy from the transformation of the Republican Party into a fascist organization, he offered as an alternative only “engagement” in the political process, especially by young people. In other words, while acknowledging the threat, at least in words, he proposed nothing but going to the polls to elect more Democrats, and especially himself, in November 2024.

He ended with the declaration that American society was “at an inflection point in our history, one of those moments that ... happens once in every eight or nine generations, where the decisions made in a short period of time we’re in now are going to determine the course of this country and the world for the next six or seven decades.”

Given such a statement, it is even more remarkable that Biden gave no explanation at all of the underlying causes of this crisis. Where did the MAGA movement come from? What is the basis of this deadly threat to democratic rights? Does this perhaps have something to do with the crisis of the capitalist profit system? What is the connection between that crisis and explosion of American militarism, including in Ukraine? Such questions are unwanted and deliberately suppressed, not just by the 80-year-old president, but by the Democratic Party as a whole, as well as the corporate media.

While Biden was appealing to non-Trump Republicans to repudiate the ex-president, the tendency at the second Republican presidential debate, held Wednesday night in southern California, was to attack Trump from the right, for his failure to accomplish such fascist promises as the building of a wall along the entire US-Mexico border, or not gutting federal spending on social services, or not being harsh enough in his anti-China policy.

The supposed debate was actually a contest of shouting and interruptions, with long periods of time during which nothing could be heard but a cacophony of voices. In the periods between interruptions, however, the proceedings actually went downhill.

Nearly every one of the seven candidates on the stage pushed a chosen fascist initiative to distinguish between themselves and their rivals, including Trump. Former Vice President Mike Pence, for example, said his answer to mass shootings in schools was to ensure swift application of the death penalty for the shooters, within months rather than years. He blamed Florida Governor Ron DeSantis for the fact that the Parkland shooter, who gunned down 17 students and teachers in 2018, is now serving a life sentence.

DeSantis, for his part, boasted of his state banning purchase of land by Chinese nationals and said this should be extended nationwide. He reiterated his support for school curriculum guidelines that declare that slaves in the American South learned useful skills from which they benefited. South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, who is African American, replied that slavery brought no benefits of any kind, but went on to suggest that the Great Society policies of Lyndon Johnson—which included the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act—were worse than slavery for black people.

Former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley went on a wild anti-Chinese rant, attacking Trump for being too weak on the Peoples Republic. She called for banning the Chinese-owned social media app TikTok and for “decoupling” the US and the Chinese economies. She attacked one rival, software businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, for investing in China and for being a TikTok user. “We can’t trust you,” she declared, as though the Trump acolyte was a Chinese agent.

Ramaswamy, in response, said he was trying to reach young people on TikTok with his pro-Trump message, calling Trump a “great president.” He made one of the foulest comments of a truly debased event, saying that all transgendered people should be treated as mentally ill. The parallel to the treatment of gay people by the Nazis was inescapable. He also called for cutting federal discretionary spending by 75 percent and the federal workforce by 50 percent.

Despite their wrangling and mudslinging, the candidates agreed on one basic proposition: the inflation which has devastated working class living standards is the fault of government spending, and the only solution is to eliminate that spending—not on the military or police, but on domestic social programs that benefit working people—and repeal environmental and safety regulations on business.

They all made paeans of praise to capitalism, and avoided the reality that the two major, documented causes of inflation are the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of big business and the banks by the Federal Reserve, and the profit-gouging by giant corporations which have jacked up prices—and executive salaries—by far more than the cost of wages.

It was particularly revealing that neither the candidates nor the moderators supplied by Fox News raised the issue of Trump’s attacks on democracy, including the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol, at which two of the candidates, Vice President Pence and Senator Scott, among many others, had to flee for their lives. Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who had made the issue the centerpiece of his campaign and raised it at the first debate, did not do so this time, simply blending in to the reactionary shout-fest, emphasizing his support for capital punishment and budget cutting.

Several of the candidates complained about Trump’s decision to skip the debate, as he did the first such event, when he cited his huge and continuing lead in polls of likely Republican primary voters. This time Trump chose to give a speech to a group of supporters at an auto parts factory in Clinton Township, Michigan, portraying it as an effort to win the support of the working class in a crucial 2024 state.

This appearance was as fraudulent as Trump’s real estate bookkeeping. The factory was a non-union plant whose owner made it available for the occasion. Many of those in attendance who held up signs “Autoworkers for Trump” were not autoworkers. Likewise, those with signs, “UAW members for Trump” were not union members. Trump’s speech differed little from his usual hour-long rants at campaign rallies, except that the venue and the audience were far smaller, and the candidate spoke using a teleprompter, suggesting that he, like Biden, is suffering the effects of aging (Trump is 77, only three years less than Biden).

As opposed to Biden’s plaintive pleas to a nonexistent majority of anti-Trump Republicans, Wednesday’s debate demonstrated that the Republican Party is being transformed into a fascist institution. The capitalist two-party system thus offers workers the “choice” of Republican fascists who want war against China, against Democratic militarists who are engaged in a war against Russia. Both are committed to escalation of conflicts that would lead inexorably to nuclear warfare and the destruction of civilization.



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