

What Biden leaves out about Trump's January 6 coup

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President Joe Biden's speech last Friday in Pennsylvania was delivered on the eve of the third anniversary of the failed coup attempt by Donald Trump, the first time that any American president sought to overturn an election in which he was defeated. Biden described in some detail the violence of the attack on Capitol Hill and Trump's own role in summoning and inciting the mob that sought to block congressional certification of the 2020 presidential election.

But Biden's speech left out two central issues related to January 6: The role of the Democratic Party before, during and since the coup attempt, and the objective source of the mounting danger to American democracy.

In his speech, Biden indicted Trump for remaining silent for hours as the mob broke through police lines, stormed the Capitol and poured through its halls, sending US senators and members of the House of Representatives, as well as Vice President Mike Pence, fleeing for their lives.

"As America was attacked from within, Donald Trump watched on TV in the private small dining room off the Oval Office," Biden said. "The entire nation watched in horror. The whole world watched in disbelief. And Trump did nothing."

This begs the question: What was President-elect Joe Biden doing? He made no public denunciation of the attack on Capitol Hill. He sounded no alarms. He made no warning to the American people to be on their guard, let alone issue an appeal to the population to take action to defend their democratic rights. When he finally appeared on camera, it was, incredibly, to appeal to Trump, the chief coup plotter, to call off the mob which he had himself brought to Washington.

There is little doubt that Biden, a highly experienced state operative, spent those hours seeking to contact top officials in the military-intelligence apparatus, trying to determine the prospects of the coup. Only after he was assured the coup was failing did Biden come before the television cameras and urge Trump to send his supporters home.

This stance was in keeping with the conduct of the Democratic Party throughout the months leading up to

January 6, 2021. Biden himself had said, during the summer of 2020, that his worst nightmare was Trump refusing to vacate the White House after an election defeat. But he expressed confidence that should that happen, the military would quickly remove the erstwhile commander-in-chief and escort him into retirement.

Throughout the fall campaign, Biden and the Democrats dismissed Trump's repeated threats that he would not accept an election defeat, claiming there was no danger from that quarter and the American people could look forward to another peaceful transfer of power. These reassurances were intensified during the months between the election and January 6, as Biden publicly mocked any suggestion that Trump was serious about remaining in power.

After January 6, operation cover-up began, with Biden moving rapidly to protect the Republican Party. Barely one day after the majority of congressional Republicans voted not to certify the presidential election result, effectively adopting the position of the rioters who had attacked the Capitol, Biden declared, "We need a Republican Party. We need an opposition that's principled and strong."

This became a mantra not only for the Biden White House, but for the Democratic leadership in Congress. They wanted to prevent a collapse of the two-party system, a key bulwark of big business politics, which gives the capitalist class an effective political monopoly in America.

The various hearings into January 6 meandered on and off, in fits and starts. The investigation by the House Select Committee into the events of January 6 played a critical role in the cover-up of the role of state agencies in the coup attempt.

While valuable evidence was brought forward about the events leading up to January 6, the committee refused to examine the role of the Pentagon, the Department of Homeland Security and other state agencies, even as reports surfaced of top generals blocking the dispatch of the National Guard to defend the Capitol. In its public hearings and final report, the committee portrayed the attack on the Capitol as an event for which Trump himself was personally

responsible, but only Trump—a one-man coup. Biden echoed this narrative in his speech Friday.

He combined silence on the wider responsibility for the coup with silence on its deeper social causes. It is perfectly true, as Biden said in Friday’s speech, that if Trump succeeds in returning to the White House as result of the 2024 election, he will revive his plans for dictatorship:

Trump plans to invoke the Insurrection Act, which would allow him to deploy—which he’s not allowed to do in ordinary circumstances—allow him to deploy US military forces on the streets of America. He said it. He calls those who oppose him “vermin.” He talks about the blood of Americans being poisoned, echoing the same exact language used in Nazi Germany.

But Biden was silent on the most important question posed by this reality. How is it that a twice-impeached ex-president who sought to overthrow the Constitution is in a position to return to power?

The Democrats have certainly contributed to the revival of Trump’s political fortunes by blocking any serious investigation into January 6. Trump should be in jail, not on the campaign trail, along with many high-level co-conspirators.

Biden’s claim to make the defense of democracy the axis of his administration and his reelection campaign is a transparent lie. The central focus of his administration has been war, first the proxy war with Russia in Ukraine, and now the genocidal Israeli onslaught on Gaza. Both wars, carried out in the interests of American imperialism, are being waged without any democratic mandate and in the face of growing popular opposition.

Biden, no less than Trump, is unalterably committed to the defense of the American ruling class and its worldwide interests. To carry on these wars, Biden requires the bipartisan support of the Republican Party, even as it prepares to nominate the fascist Trump in the 2024 election.

And as part of this war drive, Biden is continuing Trump’s attacks on democracy, although with different rhetoric. Migrants are still jailed in camps and deported in the millions, but without gloating speeches from the White House. The wars in Ukraine and particularly in Gaza are accompanied by an assault on the right to dissent, now focused on college campuses, with bogus claims of fighting “antisemitism.”

In its New Year’s statement, published in four parts January 3-6, the WSWs International Editorial Board has

provided a comprehensive analysis of the crisis and breakdown of capitalist democracy, which is taking place worldwide, not just in the United States.

The statement traces this collapse to the underlying social and economic roots: the increasing domination of society by a handful of giant financial institutions and the extreme social tensions generated by an unprecedented growth of social inequality, with a tiny handful of billionaires owning more wealth than the majority of the population. The statement explains that democratic rights are incompatible with the domination of society by a clique of capitalist oligarchs:

All talk about defending democracy and fighting fascism while ignoring the fundamental question of class and economic power—and, therefore, recognizing the necessity for the mobilization of the working class on a global scale for the overthrow of capitalism—is cynical and politically impotent demagoguery. The wealth of the billionaires must be expropriated and the gigantic corporations must be transformed, without compensation to the large shareholders, into publicly controlled utilities, run on the basis of social need, not private profit. The anti-democratic institutions and repressive organs of the capitalist state (the professional military, police and intelligence agencies) must be abolished and replaced by organizations of workers’ control and power, to establish a democratic and planned economy on a world scale.

Such a socialist program, the basis upon which democratic rights can be defended, can only be achieved through the independent political mobilization of the working class against both the Democrats and Republicans.



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