

Biden on the economy: Economic nationalism and anti-China militarism

By Barry Grey
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On Thursday, former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential candidate, gave what was billed as a major speech on economic policy. Biden's remarks, delivered at McGregor Industries near Scranton, Pennsylvania, were dominated by economic nationalism, with a focus on attacks against China.

Speaking in a battle-ground state that was narrowly won by Donald Trump in 2016, Biden attempted to present himself as a "blue-collar" partisan of the "hard-working middle class." The 77-year-old political windbag has been a fixture in American politics for nearly 50 years, having been first elected in 1972, at the age of 30, to the US Senate, where he served for 40 years before spending eight years as vice president under Barack Obama.

The man who presents himself as "middle-class Joe from hard-scrabble Scranton, Pennsylvania" is implicated in virtually every crime and atrocity committed by US imperialism against the people of the world over that period, as well as the social counterrevolution of the past four decades, which has produced unprecedented levels of social inequality and financial parasitism. That includes the Obama-Biden administration's role in the bailout of Wall Street in 2008-2009 and the biggest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top to that point in US history.

In his speech, Biden offered no opposition to the administration's brutal "back-to-work" drive, which is being implemented by Democratic and Republican governors and mayors alike, and which has already resulted in an explosion of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations, along with a new surge in deaths.

Nor did he propose measures to restore the millions of jobs permanently lost during the pandemic. He was silent on the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street and big business enacted in March with the near-unanimous votes of the Democrats in Congress. He did not even address the looming cutoff of the \$600 weekly federal unemployment benefit, which threatens to plunge tens of millions of workers into homelessness and destitution.

Instead, he pledged that a Biden administration would

continue the economic nationalist, trade war policies enacted by Trump. Calling for an expanded "Buy American" program, he sought to attack the incumbent president from the right, claiming that Trump was insufficiently aggressive in cracking down on Chinese imports and bringing global supply chains back to the US.

The speech was laced with the standard pseudo-populist pablum of American capitalist politics, such as the promise to build "an economy where every American has a chance to get a fair return for the work they put in, an equal chance to get ahead." At one point, Biden called for an end to "shareholder capitalism," meaning a return to a mythical capitalist past when corporations recognized that "they have responsibility to their workers, their community, to their country."

He got to the main point when he called for a future that is "made in America, all in America." He proposed to double the tax on foreign profits and said he would allocate \$400 billion in his first year to buy American products. This would constitute a \$400 billion taxpayer handout to major US corporations.

Biden's plan also calls for eliminating loopholes and waivers to "Buy American" requirements and affixing "Buy American" labels on products produced by US-owned corporations.

The *Wall Street Journal* cited a Biden campaign adviser, who said in advance of the speech that it would "serve notice to American trading partners that, even if Mr. Trump loses in November, allies shouldn't expect Washington to return to the embrace of economic globalization that had defined the policies of the Obama-Biden administration and two decades of Republican and Democratic presidents who preceded it."

After proclaiming his own "America First" credentials, Biden launched into attacks on China, as well as denunciations of Trump for being "soft" on Beijing. "The Chinese are spending multiple billions of dollars trying to own the technology of the future while we sit with our thumb in our ear," he declared. "This means fighting unfair

trade practices, curbing the theft of intellectual property by countries like China.”

Of Trump, he complained, “He promised to buy American, then let federal contractors double the rate of offshoring jobs in his first 18 months... He praised the Chinese government, even as the virus was coming to our shores because he was so afraid that they’d walk away from his trade deal...”

At another point he denounced “the way [Trump] coddles up to Putin and others.”

This was combined with praise for the trade unions, bastions of national chauvinism and protectionism and key instruments for suppressing working class opposition to the homicidal back-to-work drive. “The unions built the middle class,” he proclaimed.

Other proposals announced by Biden include a research and investment program of \$300 billion over four years “to sharpen America’s competitive edge in new industries where global leadership is up for grabs, like battery technology, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and clean energy”—that is, another subsidy for corporate America.

He pledged to raise the corporate tax rate from the 21 percent established in the Trump tax overhaul to 28 percent, which is still a substantial reduction from the 35 percent that prevailed prior to the December 2017 measure.

He listed the most minimal of social reforms, including a \$15 dollar minimum wage, a raise in Title One teacher pay to \$60,000 a year and financial incentives for “black, brown and Native American entrepreneurs.”

The Democratic Party’s embrace of the extreme economic nationalism promoted by Trump is in large part motivated by fear of the emergence of a united mass movement of the American and international working class against capitalism. The US corporate oligarchy is well aware of the growth of socialist sentiment among workers and rising struggles by workers internationally against the brutal and incompetent response of capitalist governments to the pandemic. In recent weeks, for example, Mexican workers at auto parts sweat shops along the US border have refused to return to work and appealed for support from American autoworkers, disrupting supply chains and plans to reopen US assembly plants.

Economic nationalism and trade war go hand in hand with militarism and shooting wars. Biden and the Democrats are no less committed to preparing for war against Washington’s “great power” rivals, first and foremost China and Russia, than Trump and the Republicans.

Earlier this month, *Defense One* published an article titled “How Biden Would Wage Great Power Competition,” which asserted that, regardless which party wins in November, the National Defense Strategy published in the

beginning of 2018 will remain the basic national security doctrine. That document declared that US military strategy had shifted from the “war on terror” to great power “competition” against China and Russia, two nuclear-armed powers.

The article, which reflects the thinking of significant sections of the military-intelligence establishment, compared Biden’s ability to execute and manage this strategy favorably to that of Trump. “Trump’s commitment to great power competition is a matter of debate, the author wrote, adding that “the president’s actions contrast starkly with the president’s words, particularly on Russia and President Vladimir Putin.”

The article continued: “The United States is in the process of updating its Cold War-era arsenal of nuclear bombs and delivery vehicles. Biden has boasted about the money that the Obama administration put toward modernization... Biden might spend less on nuclear weapons than another Trump administration, but not by much...”

“No matter who is president, the money will continue pouring into things like hypersonic missiles and next-generation aircraft like the F-35, which Biden has described favorably. Biden has also signaled a willingness to spend more on key areas of defense he has described as overlooked, including ‘cyber, space, unmanned system, and artificial intelligence.’”

As for Biden’s “blue-collar” credentials, through 2018, Biden and his wife, Jill, had cashed in on Biden’s years as second-in-command to the president to the tune of \$15 million after leaving office two years earlier. Between multi-million-dollar book deals, business ventures and \$100,000-a-pop speaking engagements, the Bidens are estimated to be worth at least \$9 million.

Little wonder that in a speech to large donors in New York in June of last year, Biden said: “What I’ve found is rich people are just as patriotic as poor people. Not a joke. I mean, we may not want to demonize anybody who has made money.”

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