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Trump Labor Day press conference: Empty boasts and fascistic threats

The Labor Day press conference held by President Trump at the White House was a spectacle of snarling ferocity, lies and appeals based on nationalistic frenzy. All that was missing to complete the picture of Trump as a cornered rat was a declaration that “you’ll never take me alive.”

The US president began by boasting of what he called the “spectacular” performance of the American economy, which he claimed was outperforming that of every other nation. “We are rebounding much more quickly from the pandemic,” he said. “We have added a record-setting 10.6 million jobs since May.”

Since the US economy lost 21.2 million jobs officially in March and April—plus another 10 million or more when contractors, the self-employed and other contingent workers are included—this Trump claim merely demonstrates the gulf between the real conditions of life for working people and the fortunes of the superrich, which have fully recovered and in some cases risen sharply because of the pandemic.

Hailing the creation of one-half or one-third the number of jobs wiped out by the COVID-19 pandemic is like cheering the dispersion of flood waters after Hurricane Katrina: The damage has been done, and the wreckage stretches as far as the eye can see.



President Donald Trump speaks during a news conference on the North Portico of the White House, Monday, Sept. 7, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky)

As always, Trump celebrated the stock market, which he said was “setting records. The NASDAQ has set 17 records already.” He pledged a new round of tax cuts to boost “growth,” modeled on those enacted in December 2017, which overwhelmingly favored the wealthy.

As he continued through the 45-minute session, Trump’s tone became more and more strident and his threats about the consequences of a Democratic victory November 3 more apocalyptic.

He warned Wall Street, “Joe Biden and radical socialist Democrats would immediately collapse the economy. If they get in, you will have a crash the likes of which you have never seen before.”

Actually, however, both the stock exchange and the major banks are favoring the Democrats with the lion’s share of their campaign funds, in part as insurance because they see the Democrats as more likely to win, in part because the financial elites view the present occupant of the White House as a spent force who is provoking increasing popular opposition that endangers the profit system as a whole.

Trump denounced any suggestion that his administration was timing the rollout of a new vaccine for electoral purposes, although he referred several times to the likelihood of doing so in October or “before that special date” of November 3. No serious scientist believes that a vaccine will be safe to distribute in less than two months’ time.

But according to Trump, “Biden wants to surrender our country to the virus. He wants to surrender our families to the violent left-wing mob, and he wants to surrender our jobs to China.”

Throughout his presentation, Trump sought to identify the Democratic candidate with the Chinese government, declaring that Biden had supported China’s entry into the World Trade Organization, the shipping of “millions of jobs” from the United States to China, and was guilty of what he called “economic treachery.” He declared, “If Biden wins, China wins, because China will own this country.”

Trump strongly suggested that if reelected in November he will act on his frequent claims that China deliberately unleashed the COVID-19 virus in order to target the United States. “I’m not happy at all,” he said, referring to Beijing. “Frankly, I don’t want to set the world, necessarily, to thinking too much about it right now.”

He said that his strategy towards China was “decoupling” the US and Chinese economies, currently tightly interlinked. He concluded ominously, “We will hold China accountable for allowing the virus to spread around the world.”

While hinting at mounting economic and military conflict with China, Trump denounced his own generals and military planners as warmongers and sought to portray himself as opposed to “endless wars.”

After noting, accurately enough, that the Obama-Biden administration, among others, had “sent our youth to fight in these crazy wars,” he continued, “I’m not saying the military is in love with me; the soldiers are. The top people in the Pentagon probably aren’t because they want to do nothing but fight wars so that all of those wonderful companies that make the bombs, who make the planes, and make everything else stay happy.”

This is a statement which has no parallel in modern American history and reflects the deepening crisis in the White House. Trump clearly resents the political damage inflicted by the recent report in the *Atlantic* magazine about his disparaging references to US war dead as “losers” and “chumps,” and he blames the Pentagon, both for the original leaks to the media, and for the ongoing refusal of the military brass to come to the defense of the “commander-in-chief” over this issue.

Throughout the press conference, Trump combined nationalistic denunciations of China and the Democratic Party with the claim that he was defending “American jobs” against what he called, using the language of his fascistic former counselor, Steven Bannon, “one coldhearted globalist betrayal after another.” Citing the occasion of Labor Day, he

reiterated his opposition to trade agreements and doubled down on the economic nationalist perspective he shares with the American trade unions.

In taking questions from the media, Trump vilified reporters who were wearing masks, claiming they could not be understood. A reporter from his favored ultraright outlet, One America News, asked a question about the popular protests against police violence, framed in such a way that Trump was invited to deliver a law-and-order rant. He duly obliged.

It is particularly significant that twice in the course of this response, Trump spoke of the necessity for “retribution” against protesters, without ever referring to “justice.” He hailed the shooting death of antipolice protester Michael Reinoehl, effectively confirming that he had given the order to the US Marshal service to kill him.

“US Marshals went in, and they were not playing games,” Trump said. “If somebody is breaking the law, there has got to be a form of retribution.”

This is not a call for the operation of the legal system—arrest, trial, conviction and punishment—but rather summary execution of anyone targeted by the Trump administration and the fascist right.

Significantly, Trump proceeded directly from hailing the police killing of Reinoehl to threatening to imprison his Democratic opponents, including Biden and former President Obama. “They spied on my campaign,” he claimed, adding they should “have been in jail for 50-year terms for treason and other things.”

He concluded with a complaint that only reveals his own sense of the wide popular hatred of his government. The Democrats were “dirty fighters,” he said. “They are just sending 80 million ballots all over the country, 80 million ballots, non-requested, I call them unsolicited. That’s going to be the dirtiest fight of them all.”

With this language, the president is clearly indicating that he does not intend to accept a repudiation at the polls. He is laying the groundwork for a preemptive intervention against such an outcome by claiming that the massive number of mail ballots—cast because millions are concerned about the risk of coronavirus—is the result of vote fraud by his political opponents.

Trump is preparing to defy the outcome of the election and appeal to his armed ultraright supporters, the police and sections of the military to retain his grip on power.

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