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## Ruling Class Joe and the Essence of American Politics



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It's a damn good thing that the demented pandemo-fascist oligarch Donald Trump no longer sits in the White House and that his Republifascist Party no longer holds the majority in the U.S. Senate. But make no mistake: Americans continue to live under an unelected dictatorship of money and empire. Just because that class dictatorship isn't quite ready for Door #1, open fascist rule, don't look for Door #2, neo-New Deal reformist social democracy, anytime soon. No, we are still getting slammed in the face with Door

#3, a neoliberal corporate-imperial authoritarianism that cancels #2 while setting us up for a harsher version of #1 in the not-so-distant future.

### **Status Quo Joe**

Biden is showing us that he is what many of us who paid attention knew and warned he was: the Weimarian Third Way/Door. Biden has the full legal authority to cancel all federal student debt. He pledged to use that power if he became president. Now he is refusing to honor the promise. As leading student debt abolitionist [Astra Taylor](#) notes:

“At his recent town hall, Joe Biden made a series of convoluted and condescending comments about American student debt...Biden’s rambling justification of the status quo was peppered with straw men, invocations of false scarcity and non-solutions. He pitted working-class Americans against each other, implying that people who attend private schools aren’t worthy of relief, as though poor students don’t also attend such schools. He said that money would be better spent on early childhood education instead of debt cancellation, as if educators aren’t themselves drowning in student debt, and as if we can’t address both concerns at once. He suggested relying on parents or selling a home at a profit to settle your debt, a luxury those without intergenerational wealth or property cannot afford. And he touted various programs, including Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), that have totally failed borrowers: over 95% of PSLF applicants have been denied...As he rambled on, Biden gave the distinct impression that he preferred not to have the power to do so. That way he could blame Congress should his campaign promises go unkept.”

Then there’s the pathetically low federal minimum wage. Labor and civil rights activists have long called for the national wage floor to be raised to \$15 an hour, which translates (assuming 40 hours a week for 50 weeks) to \$30,000 a year, equivalent to less than a quarter of the Economic Policy Institute’s (EPI) no-frills [Basic Family Budget](#) for a family of two parents and two children in the New York City borough (and New York State county) of Queens.

Candidate Biden promised to honor this demand. He’s doing no such thing as president. Biden and his fellow multi-millionaire Democrats in his old dollar-drenched stomping ground, the now majority Democrat U.S. Senate, cannot bring themselves to include the \$15 minimum wage (phased in by 2025) in their coming COVID-relief stimulus bill. “Oh,” they say, “we tried, but the rules won’t let us” – a reference to the [Senate parliamentarian’s ruling](#) last week that the proposed minimum wage hike is not immune

from Republican filibuster because “it doesn’t meet the budgetary requirements of reconciliation.”

This is an excuse. If these corporate Democrats were serious, they’d fire the parliamentarian, as Rep. Ilhan Omar recommends. In 2001, when Senate Republicans didn’t get the reconciliation rulings they liked, they replaced him.

But nobody in Congress to the right of the Squad (who reside in the House, not the Senate) and the progressive Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders backs this obvious solution.

Biden could also direct the Senate Democrats to overrule the parliamentarian, as Reps Japyal (D-WA) and Khana (D-CA) advocate. This too has been rejected by the White House, which says that it “respects the parliamentarian’s decision and the Senate’s process.”

Translation: Biden will not use his power to force an overdue significant if woefully inadequate rise in the federal minimum wage in a savagely unequal, poverty-ridden - nation where millions of people, including full-time workers, rely on food pantries while the top tenth of the upper One percent possessed nearly as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent even before the upwardly distributive corona recession.

Meanwhile, in other news, mass deportations continue under Biden, contrary to his campaign promises.

### **Why Study History Reason 102**

Progressives can whine all they want about these betrayals, but they have no business being surprised.

It’s important that Biden isn’t a maniacal fascist pig and that he is being considerably more competent and decent than Trump on COVID-19. It’s nice if elementarily civilized that Biden extended the CDC on evictions and foreclosures to March 31<sup>st</sup>. It’s good if elementarily decent that Biden will let migrant families separated under Trump re-unite in the U.S., Who is against that? (Well, who besides your friendly online 50- to 70-something white male Trumpenleft dunce-cap donner who thinks that being glad to see changes like this is a sign that one is a Dem-loving liberal practitioner of bourgeois identity politics who thinks that electing Democrats is the answer to all our problems).

Still, anyone who has expected much more in a seriously progressive way from corporate Joe hasn’t been paying much attention to his long wealth- and power-serving career. It pays to know a president’s pre-presidential history before getting all hopey-dopey about his supposed eagerness to do progressive things. You might learn that you must join others in organizing for something more militant and revolutionary than trying to “push” a deeply

conservative ruling class functionary “to the left.” That was the essential lesson of my 2008 book *Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics*, which examined Obama’s biography and career to successfully predict the corporate and imperial trajectory of Obama’s arch-neoliberal presidency and that presidency’s Weimar role in hatching a neofascist successor.

**“No Empathy” Joe: “No One’s Standing of Living Will Change”**

Do progressives not recall the anti-Bernie Biden telling a *Los Angeles Times* interviewer in 2018 that he had “no empathy, give me a break” for the plight of Millennials in the savagely unequal and eco-cidal world he’d helped create over decades of Congressional service to corporate and financial America?

Are progressives unaware of his long corporatist and slavishly pro-Wall Street record in Congress? This record includes:

- + votes to rollback bankruptcy protections for college graduates (1978) and vocational school graduates (1984) with federal student loans.
- + Working with Republicans to pass the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act, which put “clean slate” Chapter-7 bankruptcy out of reach for millions of ordinary Americans (2005)
- + Voting against a bill that would have compelled credit card companies to warn customers of the costs of only making minimum payments.
- + Honoring campaign cash from Coca Cola by cosponsoring a bill that permitted soft-drink producers to skirt antitrust laws (1979).
- + Joining just one other Congressional Democrat to vote against a Judiciary Committee measure to increase consumers’ rights to sue corporations for price-fixing (1979).
- + Strongly backing the 1999 Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, which permitted the re-merging of investment and commercial banking by repealing the Depression-era Glass-Steagall Act. (This helped create the 2007-8 financial crisis and subsequent recession, which led to a massive taxpayer bailout of the rich combined with little for the rest of the population – a policy that Biden backed as vice presidential candidate and as Vice President).
- + Supporting the globalist investor rights North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which cost millions of US manufacturing workers their jobs.

Adding neoliberal insult to neoliberal injury, the Obama-, Citigroup-, *New York Times*-, *Washington Post*-, MSNBC-, CNN- and James Clyburn-appointed presidential candidate Biden criticized those who advocated a *universal basic income* (a fundamental need, in the

wake of the Covid-19 crash and the broader and ongoing specters of runaway automation) of “selling American workers short” and undermining the “dignity” of work.

(\*Here it is worth bearing in mind that fast food and other low-wage employers would likely respond to a significant increase in the minimum wage with increased labor-displacing automaton. We are dealing with capitalism, the profit-addicted commodification of everything and everyone, a system that is actively ending life on Earth, for what that’s worth.)

He opposed calls for supposedly “too expensive” universal Single Payer health insurance, going so far as to suggest he would veto a Medicare for All bill as president.

The anti-Bernie Biden defended Big Business and the rich from popular criticism, mocking those who “want to single out big corporations for all the blame” and proclaiming “*I don’t think five hundred billionaires are the reason we’re in trouble. The folks at the top aren’t bad guys.*” He did not speak one critical word about Trump and Congress’s taxpayer-funded bailout for the American capitalist “elite” and its top corporations and financial institutions in the wake of Covid-19 – a massive and largely unaccountable giveaway that puts no caps on executive compensation and elite profits while offering little more than a pittance to the nation’s working-class majority.

“*No one’s standard of living will change, nothing would fundamentally change*” when he became president. That’s what Biden told elite donors in Manhattan in 2019. It was a revolting thing to be caught saying in a nation where the top thousandth had as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent even before the upwardly distributive Covid-19 recession. The financial elite, conscious of his Wall Street-friendly record, believed him. His massive campaign finance take from the financial and securities and investment industries in the 2020 election cycle was \$196,794,532, nearly four times what the Republifascist incumbent received from those industries.

### **And Empire Too**

We should be no more surprised about Biden betraying progressive- and populist-sounding domestic policy promises and filling key posts with Wall Street operatives and allies than we should about his decision to spend millions of taxpayer dollars menacing Russia with B-1 bombers and launching a criminal, mass-murderous (at least 22 killed) air assault on Syria in “self-defense” and “retaliation” for alleged Iranian attacks on American military forces and a civilian contractor in Iraq (as if the U.S. has any right to maintain military forces in Iraq in the first place). Senator Biden didn’t just “go along” with George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003; he helped lead the charge on the Democratic side.

Biden's a cold-blooded Empire man. That's why he's making nice with Saudi Arabia, refusing to impose any serious sanctions on that deeply reactionary absolutist state even after his Director of National Intelligence released a report finding officially what every already knew: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin-Salman (MBS) ordered the 2018 murder-vivisection of a *Washington Post* journalist who was critical of the Riyadh regime. MBS himself will suffer no U.S. punishment of any kind. ("Biden Vowed to Hold MBS Accountable," screams a CNN headline, "Now He's Accused of Letting Him Get Away with Murder." The network should have dropped "Accused of" but didn't because Biden isn't Trump.)

It's called imperial realpolitik.

### **Comrades, Start Your Engines**

Maybe Bernie and the Squad will call for millions of workers and students to take to the streets and public squares and undertake large-scale strikes and other direct mass actions to fight back against capitalist economic terrorism and related military imperialism in the U.S.

Probably not. Don't hold your breath.

Maybe we should form a Left, the kind of popular movement that doesn't wait for signals from members of the political class to undertake mass resistance to capitalism-imperialism.

In the meantime, the Biden Dems may well re-demobilize the Democrats' majority progressive base (ala Rubin-Obama-Hillary 2009-2016) in ways likely to yield Republifascist wins in 2022 and 2024, opening the way for the white-nationalist revenge triple-impeachment of Biden in 2023 and a new and improved version of something closer to Door #1 in 2025. That's something to look forward to in a nation where nearly two-thirds (63%) of young adults are unaware that Hitler's Third Reich killed 6 million Jews, where nearly a quarter (23%) of young adults think the Nazi Holocaust is or may be a myth or exaggerated, here more than one in ten young adults think Jews caused the Nazi Holocaust, and where just 8 percent of high school seniors know that slavery was a central cause of the Civil War.

Rosa had it right: it's socialism – Door #4 – or barbarism/fascism, though we must add the critical ecological and eco-communist postscript for the age of what the radical Green political scientist Craig Collins rightly calls "catabolic capitalism": mere barbarism, fascism, and tribalism if we're lucky.

The barbarism is winning, but Biden's win may give up some breathing space to try to turn the tide the other way.

It's no small task. There's one helluva lot of organization and educational work required – we might start with a mass historical literacy campaign – if we're going to be “lucky” enough to avert fascism and ecocide in coming years.

Gentlepersons of the Left, start your engines: we need to blow the doors off of fascism, reformism, and neoliberalism before it's too late.

*Paul Street's new book is **The Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and Politics of Appeasement**.*

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