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USA

The U.S. hurtles toward political crisis

- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV594 - July 2024 -

Publication date: Friday 19 July 2024

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Ashley Smith analyzes the impact of the attempted assassination of Donald Trump on the deepening political crisis in the U.S. and the ever growing weakness of the Joe Biden campaign.

The United States was already headed for one of the most acute political crises in recent memory. Then former president and convicted felon Donald Trump was nearly assassinated at a rally in Pennsylvania. Having survived, Trump has consolidated his base and cornered the Democrats by blaming them for the attack.

Trump will now position himself as a strong man and survivor over a debilitated Biden campaign. He has an inside track to victory in the election with a clear advantage despite being widely despised.

Even before the attempted assassination of Trump, President Joe Biden's catastrophic debate performance had thrown his candidacy into doubt with the bourgeois press, the Democrat's capitalist donors, and centrist politicians, all calling for him to pass the baton to another nominee.

GOP Capitalizes on Assassination Attempt

The attempt against Trump has drowned out all other issues. The image of him bloodied, defiant with fist raised, and chanting "fight, fight, fight" has been plastered across the media and will no doubt end up on t-shirts at this week's GOP Convention in Milwaukee.

At this point we don't know much about the shooter, Thomas Matthew Crooks, except that he was a twenty-year-old, white, registered Republican who donated to the Democrat's PAC, Act Blue, after Biden's election. His motives and politics remain unclear, although reports paint him as a loner with a history of being bullied in school.

But Trump and his minions have already blamed the Democrats for the assassination attempt. Vice Presidential candidate J.D. Vance exclaimed, "The central premise of the Biden campaign is that President Donald Trump is an authoritarian fascist who must be stopped at all costs. That rhetoric led directly to President Trump's attempted assassination."

Cornered by these accusations, the Democrats immediately condemned the attempted assassination, and pulled their campaign advertisements across the country, something of course not reciprocated by the Republicans. The reeling Democrats are already muting their sharpest criticisms at least for now, while the Republicans have doubled down on their attacks on Biden and the Democrats.

Amid their spiraling conflict, both parties have united on one thing—blistering condemnation of "political violence." Their hypocrisy on this point is plain for all to see. Both parties have jointly funded the Pentagon's war machine to the tune of nearly \$1 trillion a year, armed Israel to carry out genocide in Palestine, and unleashed their militarized police to enforce the racialized class inequalities of U.S. capitalism.

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Contrary to the current bipartisan political theater, political violence is a systematic feature of U.S. society. It is as American as apple pie.

And it is getting worse. Capitalism's long-term global slump is deepening inequality, fueling political polarization, opening space for the far right including fascist forces, and intensifying social and political violence.

Even Biden admitted this in his national address when he listed just a few recent examples like Trump's January 6th "beer gut" putsch, the attack on then House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband, and the plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Rhetorical pleas by Biden and especially Trump for national unity will not dampen down such violence, which is the product of a deep socioeconomic crisis and intractable political polarization.

The beneficiaries of the assassination attempt will be Trump's campaign, the far right, the security state, the military, and the police. They, along with the, at best, qualified support of the Democrats, will whip up a moral panic about "extremism" to justify a law and order crackdown.

As a result, we are likely to see even further erosion of our already endangered democratic rights to organize, speak out, protest, and strike. Regardless of the identity, motive, and politics of the shooter, the target of this crackdown will be the Left, progressive movements, unions, and especially people of color. In particular, this will strengthen the attacks on the Palestine solidarity movement, which is already subject to a McCarthyite witch hunt.

The Times of Israel reports that Biden campaign officials stated, on condition of anonymity, that, "Rather than verbally attacking Trump in the coming days, the White House and the Biden campaign will draw on the president's history of condemning all sorts of political violence including his sharp criticism of the 'disorder' created by campus protests against Israel over the war in Gaza with Hamas."

Crisis in the Democratic Party

While the Republicans capitalize on the assassination attempt, the Democrats are in a full blown political crisis. Their standard bearer, Biden, has confronted eroding support from young voters as a result of his unrelenting political, economic, and military support of Israel and its genocidal war on Palestine.

His position has put him to the right of most Democrats, and repulsed almost all Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims. Biden is widely and rightly called "Genocide Joe" by young activists.

On top of that, his policies have failed to alleviate the crisis in the lives of workers and the oppressed. His pandemic funding has ended, state and local governments are now turning to austerity to balance their budgets, and workers wage increases have failed to match inflation, particularly in housing costs particularly for renters.

For most oppressed people conditions have deteriorated over the last four years. Abortion has been massively curtailed, racist police brutality and murder have continued apace, and deportation of migrants has dramatically risen under Biden. Unsurprisingly, voters, even before the debate, had little enthusiasm for the Democrats.

In that faceoff, Biden had two tasks—prove that he was mentally competent to run and focus the electorate's attention on Trump and the Republicans' authoritarian and reactionary program. He failed on both counts. This caused panic among the Democrats who were confronted with a candidate who was simply unfit for office.

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The Republicans sensed blood in the water. One senior GOP strategist crowed, "Joe Biden is an anvil wrapped around the neck of every Democrat candidate and incumbent. Republicans should be praying nonstop he stays in the race."

That led centrists in battleground districts as well as donors and the bourgeois media, which have clearly leaned toward the Democrats, to call for Biden to withdraw from the election and support either Kamala Harris or some process to select a competent nominee. Rather than listen to reason, however, Biden has dug in, touting his record, denying his obvious age-related clinical frailty, and pointing to national polls that show him in a dead heat with Trump.

But his record is for most people, despite this or that minor reform, a lead balloon. And his repeated flubs in almost every unscripted appearance only confirm his incapacity.

And national polls are irrelevant. We do not live in a democracy. U.S. elections do not turn on the popular vote, but on states and their apportioned delegates in the undemocratic electoral college. That actual race turns on seven battleground states in which Biden trails Trump.

In fact, most election analysts think that Biden's opportunity to win has narrowed to just three states—Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Without those he will lose, and after the assassination attempt his odds, especially in Pennsylvania, look terrible.

Biden and the Democrats are to blame for this disaster. While Trump may be a malignant narcissist, Biden has proved himself to be, at best, an arrogant narcissist, more concerned with promoting himself than defeating Trump and the Republicans.

The entire party shares responsibility for promoting a candidate that is unfit for office, including its so-called progressive wing. Neither competent establishment candidates nor progressives challenged him in the primary, leaving Biden a clear path to lock up the nomination. And, now in the wake of the assassination, he and his handlers will defend his candidacy in the name of stability and try to block any attempt to dislodge him from the top of the ticket.

Progressives Front for Genocide Joe

The possibility, if not likelihood, of a Trump victory has precipitated panic and desperation throughout the liberal and social democratic Left. The Black political establishment, union bureaucracy, as well as Sanders and the so-called Squad with the notable exception of Rashida Tlaib have for the most part doubled down on support of Biden.

As Biden's candidacy appeared to be in serious jeopardy, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez rushed to his defense, declaring, "The matter is closed. He is in this race, and I support him." Rep. Ilhan Omar, whose daughter was part of the encampment at Columbia University protesting the genocide, chimed in, "He's been the best president of my lifetime, and we have his back."

Even worse, Bernie Sanders who has repeatedly called Biden the "most progressive president since FDR" penned a column in The New York Times that plumbed the depths of the lesser-evil argument for supporting Biden. While admitting that he opposed Biden on many questions including his support of Israel's war, Sanders claimed that Biden

was “a good and decent Democratic president with a record of real accomplishment.”

The precondition of the Squad and Sanders making such claims is deprioritizing opposition to genocide. But that is nothing new. They have dressed Biden’s administration in sheep’s clothing since Sanders lost the contest for the Democratic Party nomination in 2020.

In reality, the Biden administration was always a wolf, one with a strategy of co-opting the Left with an imperialist Keynesian program of modest liberal reforms, shoring up U.S. hegemony, and confronting its great power and regional rivals, especially China and Russia. Biden’s support of Israel’s genocidal war on Palestine has ripped off the sheep’s clothing and exposed him as not just a supporter but an architect of genocide.

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That, in turn, has generated the radicalization of the best of a whole generation, most dramatically expressed in the encampments on college campuses against Biden and the Democratic Party as a whole. As a result, in the eyes of these Palestine solidarity activists, Sanders and the Squad will be looked upon as accomplices, not opponents, of Biden’s regime and its genocidal war.

These politicians are prepared to risk alienating Palestine solidarity activists based on the fantasy that in supporting Biden, they have influenced him over the last four years and that by working for his victory in the election, they can save him from defeat and thereby secure even greater influence in his second term. In reality, the capitalist establishment backed Biden to defeat Sanders and his followers in the 2020 primary.

He then used them to corral DSA and the broader Left, social movements, and union officialdom, into supporting his program, not ours. As the recent book, *The Internationalists* details, Biden’s program was created by his own imperialist brain trust with no consultation with progressive Democrats let alone socialists.

Instead of trumpeting our program and mobilizing forces to fight for it, Sanders and the Squad adopted Biden’s program and became the best salespeople for it against centrist Democrats and Republicans. As a result, out the window went Card Check, Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, codifying Roe, immigrant rights, and countless other demands.

Moreover, even if Biden defies all the odds and wins, there is no reason to think that he would adopt anything like our program of reforms. In reality, if reelected, Biden will double down on his own program. Thus, Biden has blocked the Left in the Democratic Party, neutralizing and co-opting its elected officials as spokespersons for his regime at the moment of its greatest crisis and possible impending defeat in November.

The Self-Defeating Logic of Lesser Evilism

To justify their strategy, Sanders, the Squad, and many on the Left are yet again making all the classic lesser evil arguments, even if the last four years have definitively disproved their case. The most honest of them do not try to dress up Biden as anything but evil. They admit that readily. They actually argue that the only way for us to stop Trump and what they see as fascism is to campaign for a candidate carrying out genocide.

The basis of the argument is that Trump is the immediate danger, that he must be stopped, and that the only way to

The U.S. hurtles toward political crisis

do that is to support Biden. They argue further that conditions under a second Biden administration will be more auspicious for the growth of the Left, social movements, and trade unions.

In reality, the last four years disprove their arguments. The Left's broad support for Biden in 2020 and after has weakened organized socialists, dampened down class and social struggle, and failed to stop the rise of the right. It has tied us to a class enemy at home and its imperialist project abroad.

Before Sanders' capitulation to Biden, DSA was an expanding organization with at least some part of it openly discussing how to build a mass socialist alternative to the Democratic Party establishment and the GOP. But instead, it followed Sanders, AOC, Jamaal Bowman, and others in rallying to support the Biden administration.

The talk of organizing a dirty break, building a surrogate party, or even realigning the Democratic Party and turning it into a social democratic party has evaporated. All that was replaced by trying to elect progressive Democrats and lobbying the establishment to adopt their demands. Of course, that yielded next to nothing.

The first crisis DSA suffered was unsurprisingly over U.S. imperialism and Palestine. When the Palestine Working Group protested DSA member Jamaal Bowman's support for Israel, the working group was disciplined, not Bowman, leading to an exodus of Palestine solidarity activists from the organization.

Moreover, faced with the general impasse of the Left inside the Democratic Party, DSA has lost tens of thousands of members, its chapters have become largely inactive, and its remaining members are mostly inactive. Pointing to this or that electoral victory just covers up the obvious crisis the organization has suffered. It is no longer the dynamic, vibrant expression of radicalization it promised to be.

It is time to face the hard reality that lesser evilism has never worked to advance the Left, working class struggle, and the liberation of the oppressed. The last four years proves it beyond a shadow of a doubt.

The same result has been faced by most social movements under Biden. Popular struggle on most fronts from climate to migrant rights and even reproductive justice remain at a low ebb. But perhaps the worst setback suffered was to Black Lives Matter, which the Democratic Party and the Black political establishment convinced to retreat from the streets and instead to campaign for Biden in 2020.

While that tremendous uprising has left a profound political radicalization in its wake, it is no longer an organized political force across the country. Both parties are rolling back any reforms, funding not defunding cops, and re-instituting racist repressive measures across the country.

The one social movement that has scored significant ideological victories and a few institutional reforms—the Palestine solidarity movement—has done so in defiance of liberal university bureaucrats, Democratic Party elected officials, and the Biden administration. These are all opponents of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions and the entire struggle to free Palestine from Israel settler colonialism.

What gains the labor movement has won was not the result of Biden being elected or lobbying him in office. Few to no gains have been won that way. And there have been massive defeats at the hand of his administration like breaking the strike of railway workers. The only real victories have been won by organizing and staging strikes like the UAW's standup strike against the Big Three automakers.

But most damning of all, support for Biden in the last election and over the last four years has failed to stop the electoral resurrection of Trump and the far right. In fact, while deeply unpopular and widely condemned for January

6th, they are more organized than four years ago.

Trump and his minions have taken over the GOP as well as traditional Republican think tanks, driven out so-called moderates from the party, developed a far more comprehensive program for authoritarian nationalist rule laid out in Project 2025, and built a united cabinet in waiting ready to try and implement it upon victory. Even worse, Steven Bannon with his War Room podcast along with others in this right wing ecosystem are organizing, in Bannon's words, "an army of the awakened" prepared, according to Kevin Roberts, the leader of Project 2025, to carry out a "bloodless" revolution if possible, but implicitly a violent one if necessary.

It is time to face the hard reality that lesser evilism has never worked to advance the Left, working class struggle, and the liberation of the oppressed. The last four years proves it beyond a shadow of a doubt. Our forces are weaker, more disoriented, and unprepared to carry out the fight. The only exception is the Palestine solidarity movement that knows in its bones that Biden is our main enemy right now.

Building Resistance to the Right and Establishment

Whichever party wins in November, the U.S. seems headed for a constitutional crisis. If Biden and the Democrats somehow manage to win, the GOP will not recognize their victory and will attempt to implement their far right program in the states they control, establishing separate and unequal laws for the oppressed and exploited. The judiciary, both state and federal, and especially the Supreme Court, have proven themselves just as subject to this partisan manipulation and polarization, and incapable of mitigating the constitutional crisis.

If the GOP wins these elections, it will attempt to implement Project 2025 at the federal level. That will be opposed by the Democrats in the states they control, leading to open conflict between them and the Trump administration.

Such polarization and radicalization has led even mainstream news outlets like CNN to ask whether the U.S. is headed for another civil war. Neoconservative Robert Kagan in his book, *Rebellion*, fears that a far-right revolt—a counter-revolution against the existing constitutional order—is a real and imminent danger.

Faced with this looming crisis, it is time to bring an end to the cycle of illusions on the Left. All those who followed Sanders into the Democratic Party now have a choice to make: Either continue speeding down this dead end or begin the hard process of building an alternative to both the Democratic Party, which is now the main party of U.S. capital, and its far right opponent, the Trumpite GOP. It is time to chart a different course forward.

Regardless of what individuals do at the ballot box, the Left must not spend our time, money, and energy on campaigning for Biden and the Democratic Party. Instead, we must build our social and class struggles, especially the movement in solidarity with Palestine against Israel's genocidal war. Our alternative must be primarily committed to building class and social struggle and only running candidates on an independent platform and with the aim of being tribunes and builders of independent mass movements for progressive demands.

There are no shortcuts, as the last few years have proved. But we must be honest about the challenges we face in this alternative strategy. First our infrastructure of resistance—our democratic organization of social and class struggle—remains very weak. We must overcome that in order to build the kinds of disruptive mass movements and strikes that will be necessary to win even our most modest demands for reform.

The U.S. hurtles toward political crisis

Second, we must face the fact that our forces face an emboldened and increasingly dangerous right. They will not be blocked by the capitalist establishment in the Democratic Party and, in fact, will only gain momentum if the Democrats are seen as the only political alternative. Our forces on the Left must be smart in this context: We must defend our democratic rights, lend maximum solidarity to each other's struggles, continue to protest for our demands against both the establishment and far right, and use tactics designed to reach out to the widest ranks of the working class and oppressed.

In this moment, we should also remember that however temporarily emboldened the right may be, it will not be able to create a stable regime in the U.S. or anywhere else for that matter. They have no solutions to capitalism's systemic crises that they are exploiting politically and no answers to the demands of the vast majority of our society. Neither does the capitalist establishment, whose regimes in the U.S. and globally are also unstable. The Left must begin to build an independent pole that can offer an actual alternative for humanity.

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