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United States: One year of Joe Biden's presidency

Biden and the Democratic Party disappoint sectors of the popular classes that supported them against Trump and the Republican candidacies in the fall of 2020.



Some commentators thought Joe Biden's presidency would be an opportunity for a Keynesian turning point in the United States. The same illusions and hopes had appeared at the beginning of Barack Obama's presidency in 2009.

In both cases, the elections took place while the United States was going through a serious crisis that could lead the government to crack down on decades of neoliberal policies.

Barack Obama's administration could have applied coercive measures against big capital and, in particular, against the big banks and investment funds, largely responsible for the huge crisis that exploded between 2007 and 2008. In addition, Barack Obama promised a

profound reform of the health system, social security, pensions and the implementation of a tax reform aimed at making the richest pay a little more taxes, starting with the richest 1%. It didn't.

In the case of Joe Biden, he announced that he would ask the largest and richest companies to pay more taxes, promised progressive measures in terms of access to health care, social protection and a legal minimum wage of \$ 15 per hour ...

These promises allowed him to mobilize in his favor important sectors of the youth and a part of the electorate that no longer went to the polls. At the beginning of his term, he appointed Bernie Sanders as chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, which seemed, to some, to be the guarantee of the will to actually implement progressive measures. Others, including me, saw it as a way to catch Bernie Sanders.

Summary

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Broken promises

It can be stated very clearly, after almost a year in office, that the promises of a progressive turn towards greater social justice have not been fulfilled.

Very quickly the minimum wage of \$15 was abandoned, and the minimum wage is still set at \$7.25.

No action has been taken to collect new taxes from big business and the wealthiest. Worse, the Biden Administration proposes an additional measure favorable to rich households and the last straw is that it allows a number of Republican congressmen to denounce the injustice and deception of the measure as favoring the rich [1]. It is about increasing from 10,000 to 80,000 dollars the amount that a taxpayer can deduct from their federal taxes for the payment of local taxes (either municipal or taxes paid to the State). According to an analysis by the Tax Policy Center, a nonpartisan organization, and the Center for a

Responsible Federal Budget, 94% of the proceeds from raising the income tax ceiling to \$80,000 would go to the top quintile of the nation's taxpayers, who earn at least \$175,000 a year, and 70% to the top five percent [2]. The loss of revenue for the Treasury would amount to \$275 billion a year.

The military budget has been increased to \$768 billion with the support of Republicans. This is the highest budget since World War II (despite the exit from Afghanistan).

In terms of public works, the Biden administration has approved, with the support of Republicans, a favorable budget for large construction companies.

"Very quickly the minimum wage of \$15 was abandoned, and the minimum wage is still set at \$7.25."

Recall that it has been in the United States where the coronavirus pandemic has caused the highest number of deaths in absolute numbers in the world: more than 835,000 deaths as of December 25, 2021.

Despite the extreme gravity of the situation, Joe Biden has not taken any action that could have contradicted the interests of the big pharmaceutical companies. While the government holds the primary patent for the production of messenger RNA vaccines, it refuses to use it and have the public sector produce vaccines in the United States or elsewhere (see box "Biden protects the interests of Big Pharma at the expense of the population of both the north and the south") All production is left in the hands of Big Pharma and the patents that companies do. Private have filed are not suspended. The Biden administration has also not offered the patent it holds to countries that could have benefited from it and that can produce vaccines on their own if given the opportunity. While he said in May 2021 that his administration wanted the [WTO](#) to lift patents as requested by more than 100 countries in the South, Joe Biden has not really acted to have that measure taken.

Box: Biden protects big pharma's interests at the expense of both North and South populations[3]

Pfizer (US) – BioNTech (All) and Moderna (US) mRNA vaccines, which have been put on the market in less than a year, are based in part on previous

patents. In particular, a technology designed by the University of Pennsylvania to manufacture a harmless messenger RNA for the organism, whose patent was filed in 2005. The innovative technique of stabilizing the spicule protein (also called spike protein) is also the result of public research. Indeed, the specific patent filed by the U.S. government — patent number 10,960,070, better known as patent '070' — refers to how the spike protein in the vaccine stabilizes, a technique that was developed by the Vaccine Research Center of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). , which is an agency of the United States government. According to the Washington-based radical American consumer association Public Citizen, thanks to the '070 patent mentioned above, the U.S. government would have been able and could produce mRNA vaccines on its own. It could also transmit the patent free of charge to States wishing to produce the vaccine for their population and, in a gesture of solidarity, for other peoples. This is an excerpt from a [November 2020 Statement from Public Citizen](#) commenting on Moderna's announcement of the production of the mRNA-1273 vaccine: "It's the people's vaccine.

(...) It's not just Moderna's vaccine. Federal scientists have helped invent it and taxpayers are funding its development. We all play a role. It should belong to humanity. The current administration [i.e., Trump's note from Eric T.] and President-elect Biden have the opportunity to make

this vaccine a free and accessible public good for all and contribute to increasing global production, in order to avoid medical rationing that could become a form of global apartheid on [vaccines](#)."[4] . In this case, it is not a question of lifting or abolishing the patent, it is enough to make it available to third parties. By refusing to do this, while organizations like Public Citizen are suing him, the Joe Biden administration clearly shows that it wants to protect the privileges of Big Pharma.

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Según un estudio muy convincente, publicado en mayo de 2021 por [Public Citizen](#), las autoridades públicas, comenzando por las de los países más ricos, podrían producir fácilmente miles de millones de dosis de vacunas a un costo mucho menor que las sumas pagadas hasta ahora a las grandes empresas farmacéuticas privadas. Public Citizen lo demuestra basándose en un estudio realizado por investigadores del Imperial College de Londres. El estudio demuestra convincentemente «que la comunidad mundial podría establecer centros regionales capaces de producir ocho mil millones de dosis de vacuna de ARNm para mayo de 2022. Esto sería suficiente para cubrir al 80 % de la población». ¿El coste? 9.400 millones de dólares para una vacuna tipo Pfizer – BioNtech, para 5 instalaciones, 17 líneas de producción y 1.386 empleados. Una cifra a comparar con las decenas y decenas de miles de millones que los Estados han distribuido a la

industria farmacéutica, para vacunar solo a los pueblos de los países ricos... y entregar dividendos a los accionistas [5].

Al igual que los países de Europa Occidental, los Estados Unidos están organizando la inyección masiva de una tercera dosis de la vacuna (incluso nos estamos preparando para una cuarta dosis como ya lo hace el Estado de Israel) y la vacunación de niños, mientras que la OMS pide que se dé prioridad a la vacunación de las poblaciones de los países del sur que solo tienen acceso a ella en cuenta gotas.

Desregulación financiera y abandono de programas de justicia social y defensa del medio ambiente

En términos de regulación financiera destinada a imponer cierta disciplina a los grandes bancos y otras grandes empresas financieras, no se ha hecho nada. Por el contrario, la laxitud se amplifica. Para indicar claramente su orientación favorable a los mercados financieros y al gran capital, Biden ha prorrogado el mandato del presidente de la [Reserva Federal](#), Jerome Powell, que había sido nombrado por Donald Trump. También nombró a Janet Yellen, la expresidenta de la Reserva Federal, para el cargo de Secretaria de Estado del Tesoro (el equivalente del Ministerio de Hacienda). Esta fue otra señal a favor del gran capital. A principios de diciembre de 2021, Saule Omarova, la mujer que se suponía que se haría cargo de la regulación bancaria al frente de la Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (la oficina de control de la Moneda), tuvo que renunciar a su cargo después de una campaña de desestabilización lanzada por Wall Street y los republicanos. El Financial Times escribió al respecto: «Tuvo que hacer frente a una reacción brutal de los republicanos y el sector bancario, con críticas centradas en su formación y carrera académica con propuestas que incluían un sistema de cuentas bancarias gestionado por el Estado» [6]. En realidad, no solo tuvo que enfrentarse a los ataques de los republicanos, sino que fue hundida por una serie de parlamentarios demócratas tan vinculados al gran capital como sus colegas.

Biden había prometido aprobar un importante programa de gasto para más justicia social y defensa del medio ambiente. Este programa «Build Back Better» (Reconstruir mejor), conocido por sus iniciales BBB, debería haber sido adoptado al mismo tiempo que el principal plan de gasto en obras públicas que gusta al Gran Capital. Biden y la presidenta del Congreso Nancy Pelosi finalmente dejaron que las dos votaciones se separaran,

mientras que la izquierda del Partido Demócrata rechazó esta separación. El plan de obras públicas fue adoptado con el apoyo de los republicanos y a pesar de la oposición de 6 parlamentarios de la izquierda demócrata, incluida Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Por el contrario, el programa «Build Back Better» está siendo sabotado por la derecha del Partido Demócrata y lo más probable es que sea abandonado.

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Este abandono del programa «Build Back Better» muestra la verdadera naturaleza de la política de la administración Biden que en gran medida, económica y socialmente, está en continuidad con la de los presidentes republicanos, ya sea G. W. Bush o D. Trump. En 1891, Friedrich Engels, en su introducción a los textos de Karl Marx sobre la Comuna de París, había descrito muy bien el sistema político de los Estados Unidos dominado por los partidos Demócrata y Republicano que se alternan en el poder y defienden el orden capitalista (ver recuadro a continuación).

Recuadro: [Friedrich Engels](#) sobre el sistema político de los Estados Unidos

No hay ningún país en que los «políticos» formen un sector más poderoso y más separado de la nación que en Norteamérica. Allí cada uno de los dos grandes partidos que alternan en el Gobierno está a su vez gobernado por gentes que hacen de la política un negocio, que especulan con las actas de diputado de las asambleas legislativas de la Unión y de los distintos Estados federados, o que viven de la agitación en favor de su partido y son retribuidos con cargos cuando éste triunfa. Es sabido que los norteamericanos llevan treinta años esforzándose por sacudir este yugo, que ha llegado a ser insoportable, y que, a pesar de todo, se hunden cada vez más en este pantano de corrupción. Y es precisamente en Norteamérica donde podemos ver

mejor cómo progresa esta independización del Estado frente a la sociedad, de la que originariamente debía ser un simple instrumento. Allí no hay dinastía, ni nobleza, ni ejército permanente -fuera del puñado de hombres que montan la guardia contra los indios-, ni burocracia con cargos permanentes o derechos pasivos. Y, sin embargo, en Norteamérica nos encontramos con dos grandes cuadrillas de especuladores políticos que alternativamente se posesionan del poder estatal y lo explotan por los medios y para los fines más corrompidos; y la nación es impotente frente a estos dos grandes cárteles de políticos, pretendidos servidores suyos, pero que, en realidad, la dominan y la saquean.

Fuente: Friedrich Engels, Introducción a los textos de Karl Marx sobre la Comuna de París, 1891 disponible en línea: (F. Engels, introducción de 1891 a La guerra civil en Francia, disponible en <https://www.marxists.org/espanol/m-e/1870s/gcfran/1.htm>).

La administración Biden tampoco ha tomado medidas, a pesar de los discursos bien intencionados, para reducir el [acceso a las armas de fuego](#), cuando la cantidad de homicidios está aumentando bruscamente (aumento del 30% en 2021). 400 millones de armas de fuego están en circulación en los Estados Unidos.

Relative to states like [Texas that have adopted hyper-repressive anti-abortion legislation](#), the Biden Administration is not taking steps to defend federal legislation that decriminalizes abortion and is content to voice its disagreement.

While states, including Texas once again, decide to amend election laws to limit the exercise of the right to vote by the popular classes and, in particular, their racialized parties, the Biden Administration does nothing.

On the rights of migrants and the reception of refugees, the Policy of the Biden Administration is not really different from that of D. Trump. [In September 2021, the US envoy to Haiti, Daniel Foote](#), resigned to protest against the "inhumane" expulsions by the US of thousands of Haitian migrants. His resignation was a blow to Joe Biden: his policy of mass deportation of Haitian migrants to his country is publicly denounced by his own emissary [\[7\]](#).

On migrant rights and refugee reception, the Biden Administration's policy is really no different from that of D. Trump.

In terms of international politics, the administration extends and confirms what Trump has adopted on central issues: full support for the Zionist regime; aggressiveness towards Cuba and Venezuela. Recently, a New York Times investigation revealed that the [use of drones in Syria](#), Iraq and Afghanistan had officially caused the deaths of more than 1,400 civilians. The actual figure is certainly much higher. From this point of view the Biden administration has pursued D. Trump's policy. At the end of August 2021 in Kabul 10 civilians were killed by a drone and it was learned in December 2021 that those responsible would not be punished. "There was no element strong enough to hold personal responsibilities," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said in Washington to justify the absence of [sanctions](#).[\[8\]](#) The Biden Administration also supports [Marshal Al-Sisi's](#) military regime in Egypt by providing his military with \$1.3 billion in aid annually. Similarly, [Biden maintains close relations with the ultra-reactionary Saudi regime](#).

A return to the Paris Climate Agreement and nuclear negotiations with Iran does not lead to crackdowns. On the contrary, Biden has just increased aid for oil and gas extraction in the United States in order to increase the volume of extraction. In relation to Iran, the United States is not making any real concessions, which contributes to the deterioration of the situation.

How to explain that there is no Keynesian turn?

The main factor is the situation of the class struggle. The working classes and, in particular, wage earners do not see their degree of organization and capacity to act increasing. This is different from the 1930s, when the labor movement was booming in the United States with a wave of strikes and factory occupations, especially in the automotive sector. The radical unions had the tailwind. Socialist ideas too. The USSR was a pole of

attraction, planning and public control of the means of production seemed to be a better solution than capitalist laissez-faire.

To complete the picture, we must add that in 2020-2021 the government (both Trump's and Biden's) massively greased the gears by paying significant aid to the popular classes and postponing the payment of a significant part of the debts (mortgage debts, student debts, rental debts ...). In 2020 and 2021, poverty decreased thanks to social assistance of different types. This has played a real role as a social buffer. The popular classes have not been compelled to take [action](#). It is true that some sectors have mobilized and in some cases have achieved victories, but this is far from representing a background wave.

The "social" measures taken by Trump and then by Biden are not structural, they do not constitute new rights, they are not perennial. If the "Build Back Better" program were adopted, some social progress could be considered to have been made, but obviously, at best, this will be very limited. This shows that we are not in a new Keynesian cycle in which the government and the capitalist class would be forced to make major concessions to the popular classes that would see their social rights progress and in which real wages would increase substantially.

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The capitalist class continues to enrich itself even if [the rate of profit is not at its best](#) and if a significant part of the accumulated capital is fictitious and can sink like a house of cards in the event of a new financial crisis.

Inequalities continue to rise with a greater concentration of wealth in favour of the richest 1%.

The question of debts

In the third quarter of 2021, the public [debt](#) of the United States exceeded 28,000 million dollars, that is, 125% of the country's [GDP](#). Both after 2008 to deal with the financial crisis and from 2020 in the face of the crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, US governments have sharply increased public debt. There have been no crisis taxes on big capital. So far, the rise in public debt has been painless because [interest](#) rates are close to zero. Currently, the real interest rate on public debt is even negative, as [inflation](#) exceeds 5%. The Federal Reserve will gradually raise interest rates, but there will be no serious

problems in the short to medium term. In the United States, the volume of public debt will continue to rise without causing major shocks.

The debts of households of the popular classes have increased in the last 10 years, but social aid in the form of cheques sent in 2020-2021 by public authorities has temporarily reduced the weight of their payment. In addition, both the Trump administration and the Biden administration have temporarily suspended payment of a number of debts: student debt, mortgage debt in some cases, some rental debts as well, not to mention some small business debts. But these measures will end and gradually the situation will become tense. Some maturities are known: May 2022 for student debts with a total amount greater than 1,600,000 million dollars. [Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are calling for the total cancellation. Movements in favour of decondon these debts are underway and in preparation.](#)

The question of debts abusively claimed from the working classes will become more important in the coming years.

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As for student debt, Barack Obama had made some partial cancellations (the cost of which was borne by public authorities and not by lenders), Biden can do the same. This will depend in particular on the mobilizations. A matter to be followed.

The debt of large private companies has risen sharply in recent years. In the event of a rate hike, bankruptcies are likely to occur and a new financial crisis may be triggered.

Conclusions

The policy of the Biden administration, beyond propaganda statements and broken promises, is largely in line with capital's offensive against the popular classes. There is no social turning point that is really underway that breaks with 40 years of neoliberal policies.

No one on the left is going to miss Trump, but from there to having illusions about Biden, there are boundaries that should not be crossed.

Biden and the Democratic Party disappoint sectors of the popular classes that supported them against Trump and the Republican candidacies in the fall of 2020. During 2021, in several by-elections, this disappointment was expressed at the polls and Republicans strengthened their position. The October 2022 elections risk leading to the loss of a

majority of Democrats in Parliament and the Senate, which will increase the trend toward continuity. A Republican victory in the 2024 presidential election is possible.

Will the left inside and outside the Democratic Party find a way to strengthen and break the two-party system so well described by Friedrich Engels 130 years ago? This is the great historical question. Will it be possible to consolidate the popular movement that in the United States has experienced very prominent moments, such as with Black Lives Matter or during feminist mobilizations? Will employees earn points against employers? Will youth enter a succession of struggles that prolong Black Lives Matter, that focus on the environment, debts...? The answers to these questions are open and of great importance to all the peoples of the planet.

Notes:

[1] <https://www.capito.senate.gov/news/in-the-news/editorial-to-keep-cost-of-bbb-down-take-out-the-salt-cap-increase> ; <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/17/high-income-households-could-get-a-tax-cut-under-build-back-better.html>

[2] Financial Times, 27-28 November 2021, "Democrats' tax relief plan leaves bitter taste for party leftwingers" <https://time.com/6128775/salt-cap-democrats-divided/> ; <https://www.ft.com/content/712d0a22-8aa1-4204-b93a-3653c1f5bb5e> "According to analysis by both the non-partisan Tax Policy Center and the fiscally hawkish Center for a Responsible Federal Budget think-tanks, 94 per cent of the benefits of increasing the Salt cap to \$80,000 would go to the top quintile of earners nationwide — who make at least \$175,000 a year — with 70 per cent going to the top five per cent."

[3] The contents of this box is an excerpt from Éric Toussaint, Coronavirus: Global Commons Against Big Pharma published in <http://www.cadtm.org/Coronavirus-Bienes-comunes-mundiales-contra-el-Big-Pharma>

[4] Public Citizen, « Statement : Moderna Vaccine Belongs to the People », published november 16, 2020, <https://www.citizen.org/news/statement-moderna-vaccine-belongs-to-the-people/>

[5] Public Citizen, «How to Make Enough Vaccine for the World in One Year», published on 26 May 2021, <https://www.citizen.org/article/how-to-make-enough-vaccine-for-the-world-in-one-year/>

[6] Financial Times, 9 December 2021. Excerpt from the FT article "What worries Wall Street banks is that I'm going to be an independent, strong-spirited regulator, that I'm not one of their own, that I don't owe them anything," Saule Omarova told the FT. (...).

Jon Tester, a Democratic senator from Montana, and Mark Warner of Virginia have expressed concerns in the course of the hearing about Omarova's earlier criticism of certain aspects of a 2018 bill they had both championed that had loosened regulations for community banks. Tester has also called into question his proposal for a state-supported national investment authority which, in his view, could decide to which sectors of the economy to lend money."

[7] <https://www.france24.com/fr/amériques/20210923-l-émissaire-américain-en-haïti-démissionne-et-dénonce-des-expulsions-inhumaines-de-migrants>

[8] Nouvel Observateur, « Bavure américaine de fin août à Kaboul : pas de sanctions, colère de la famille des victimes »
» <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/20211213.AFP5613/bavure-americaine-de-fin-aout-a-kaboul-pas-de-sanctions-colere-de-la-famille-des-victimes.html>

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