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After the midterms, Biden sets course for bipartisan collaboration with Republicans on war and austerity

The US midterm elections have ended inconclusively, with control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate still undetermined more than 24 hours after the polls closed. Dozens of House seats remain within a few thousand votes, while one Senate seat has gone to a runoff and two more remain undecided.

Despite near-unanimous poll-driven predictions of a wave election that would deliver the Republican Party unchallenged control of the House and a narrow majority in the Senate, it appears likely that there will be only a narrow Republican edge in the House and a 50-50 tie in the Senate, giving the Democrats effective control with the vote of Vice President Kamala Harris. As of Wednesday evening, Republicans had made a net gain of 11 seats in the House, giving them a six-seat majority.



President Joe Biden speaks in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, Wednesday, Nov. 9, 2022. [AP Photo/Susan Walsh]

Whatever the final outcome of the tabulating, which could continue into the weekend in Arizona, Nevada and other states that count mail-in ballots postmarked by Election Day, the political consequences of the election are unmistakable. The Biden administration and the Democratic Party will move even further to the right, seeking bipartisan collaboration with the Republican Party less than two years after the Republicans sought to overthrow the US government and keep Donald Trump in the White House despite his overwhelming defeat at the polls.

Biden voiced this position at a press conference Wednesday afternoon at which he described the election as a triumph of democracy—merely because Trump-backed fascists did not succeed in disrupting it. This was surely the first time an American president has breathed a sigh of relief over the mere fact that polls were open and millions of voters had been able to cast their votes without being threatened, attacked or killed.

Biden made no further reference to this issue, saying nothing about the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, the wave of anti-Semitic violence and threats spawned by Trump and his allies, or the murderous attack on Paul Pelosi, husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The president dismissed the significance of the Republicans apparently winning control of the House, putting them in position to launch investigations of his administration and his family, to reject any legislative initiative from the White House, and even, as some in the ultra-right Freedom Caucus advocate, proceed to his impeachment.

Instead, he described the election as a popular rejection of “extremism”—because many candidates backed by Trump, particularly those denying the legitimacy of the 2020 elections, were defeated—and declared that the American people were “looking for bipartisanship.”

Biden refrained from any criticism of the Republicans for their support for Trump and his claims of a “stolen election” in 2020. He ended the press conference with a remark that he was soon to speak to Republican House leader Kevin McCarthy, now set to replace Nancy Pelosi as House speaker. McCarthy was one of 137 Republican members of the House who voted to deny certification of Biden’s Electoral College victory in the 2020 election, even after the violent attack on the Capitol instigated by Trump.

He said that he would “continue to work across the aisle” and boasted that he had signed more than 200 bipartisan laws since he became president. “Regardless of the final tally,” he said, “I’m prepared to work with my Republican colleagues. The American people have made clear that they expect Republicans to work with me.”

In other words, Biden has turned from warning that “the Republican Party today is dominated, driven, and intimidated by Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans, and that is a threat to this country,” as he said in a speech in September, to declaring that the highest objective of his administration is to collaborate with this same Republican Party.

A bipartisan agreement with the Republicans will be based on a common foreign policy of confrontation directed against both Russia and China, Biden indicated. He said that he was leaving on a trip to the Middle East and Asia, which would include a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G-20 summit in Bali. On his return, he said, he would invite both Republican and Democratic congressional leaders to the White House for a briefing.

Biden dismissed a question from one reporter about McCarthy’s remark that there would be “no blank check” for Ukraine going forward in the war with Russia. There would be bipartisan support for Ukraine, he said. There was no blank check for the Ukraine war under his administration, he said, citing the US refusal to send US warplanes to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, in order to avoid “World War III,” despite pleas from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In addition to the ongoing US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, both parties support the escalation of aggression directed at China, which is seen by US military strategists as the principal threat to US global economic domination.

Whatever the exact trajectory of American foreign policy, any bipartisan agreement with the Republicans would be based on a common determination to make the American working class pay the massive costs of imperialist militarism and war. While Biden made a show of rejecting the proposals by several Republican senators to cut spending on Medicare and Social Security, there is no question that the Democrats and Republicans will be united on the basis of cutting social spending and cracking down on struggles of the working class.

The immediate battleground is the impending eruption of a nationwide rail workers strike, as more than 60,000 engineers and conductors workers are voting on a sellout deal brokered by the White House. Workers in several unions have already voted down the deal.

Biden telegraphed his hostility to the working class in response to a reporter who pointed out that 75 percent of voters, interviewed in exit polls, think the country is going in the wrong direction. “What are you going to change?” he asked. Biden responded, “Nothing.”

Later, in response to a similar question about what impact popular hostility would have on a decision to run for reelection in 2024, Biden responded again, “Nothing.”

This arrogant response gives voice to the class hostility of the millionaires and billionaires for whom the Democrats and Republicans speak. They hate the working class and fear any intervention from below into the political crisis in the United States.

Over the past year, the real wage of a typical worker fell by three percent, as the prices of food and fuel surged by more than 10 percent. In the past 12 months, over 300,000 Americans lost their lives to COVID-19. Meanwhile corporate profitability soared to the highest levels on record.

By declaring that “nothing” will change, Biden is making clear that his administration’s policies of war, austerity and mass infection will continue.

The 2022 election has demonstrated once again that the two-party system is a political straitjacket for the American working class. It is impossible for workers to defend their economic and social interests—jobs, living standards, schools, health care—within a political system entirely controlled by the financial aristocracy. Nor can workers fight the dangers of imperialist war and escalating threats to democratic rights, coming from both the Republicans and the Democrats.

The decisive question is for millions of workers to recognize this political reality and make the decision now to develop and build a mass political alternative to capitalist politics, through the building of a new working class political party based on a socialist perspective. That party is the Socialist Equality Party in the United States and its international co-thinkers throughout the world.

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