

Biden's picks don't treat capitalist disease

written by John Parker
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City Hall in Austin, Texas, April 2020.

If the treatment for a symptom exacerbates the underlying illness, unleashing far

more dangerous symptoms, then that “cure” would be considered a failure — especially if it accelerates the death of the patient.

The disease of racism, capitalism’s primary tool to keep our class divided, has many symptoms. One of these is the lack of representation by oppressed peoples in all aspects of leadership in society. This is most glaringly seen in Washington, D.C., where people of color and women make up a small percentage of those in the highest offices of government compared to the dominance of white men.

That’s the symptom in government. The capitalist establishment’s preferred way of treating this symptom is like the pharmaceutical companies that gave us Oxycontin, now considered the source of the current opioid epidemic: combating the symptom of pain related to an illness even though it would exacerbate the underlying illness with a deadly addiction.

For the sake of profit, the ruling class uses the symptom of exclusion and lack of diversity — which it is responsible for, and which must be taken on — in a way to actually erode working-class solidarity and unity, so that the capitalist system and imperialist war can continue, with no threat to the flow of profits derived from increased exploitation of our class here and abroad.

That’s what’s going on right now in regards to President-elect Joe Biden’s cabinet nominees. From the pages of the same book that saw the selection of the likes of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Barack Obama in the U.S., we again see the necessary fight against exclusion used cynically by capitalist politicians to advance the interests of the ruling class.

Role of capitalist state

Biden is breaking many records in his selection of the first Black woman as vice president, Kamala Harris, and in his Cabinet nominations, with appointments that

include the first woman to run the Treasury Department, the first Black deputy treasury secretary, and the first Black chair of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA).

It's therefore understandable that many will feel hopeful about these appointments. In terms of the war on poverty, the appointment of more liberal figures, like Heather Boushey and Jared Bernstein, proposed as members of the CEA, could be a turn away from the Trump administration — right?

Well, if they are actually interested in making real change, hopefully they won't wield the same kind of toothless powerlessness that civilian police review boards around the country have.

In that case, the problem arises from the fact that the capitalist state needs repression to maintain inequality and exploitation of our class, so police review boards are a façade meant to appease people, not to have any real control over the police. And the role of the state in regard to economics is to maintain capitalist profits and the exploitation that keeps us in poverty.

Biden made that clear during his campaign speeches in 2019, where he also showed his willingness to lie as blatantly as Trump. [Bloomberg News reported](#) that during a campaign event with wealthy donors at the Carlyle Hotel in New York City, Biden said that he would not “demonize” the rich. Then he pledged that “no one’s standard of living will change, nothing would fundamentally change.”

Worse, he made those comments after praising racist politicians, saying that he reaches “across the aisle” to bring about compromise. The problem is that his reach, in essence, only goes towards the right.

What makes this comment so Trump-like in its dishonesty? Shortly before, Biden had [addressed the Poor People’s Campaign Presidential Forum](#) in Washington, saying

that economic inequality was “the one thing that can bring this country down.” He listed several new programs to help the poor that he said he would fund if elected.

“We have all the money we need to do it,” he said.

Inequality and exploitation

Yet Biden’s picks for economic advisers are very diverse. Some are making pledges to bring jobs and make fundamental changes to economic inequality.

[Wally Adeyemo](#), chosen as deputy treasury secretary, was quoted speaking on the importance of combating income inequality. He said his motivation came from his childhood: “In California’s Inland Empire, where I had grown up in a working-class neighborhood, the Great Recession hit us hard,” he said. “We were one of the foreclosure capitals of the United States. The pain of this was real for me.”

However, Adeyemo was also senior adviser and deputy chief of staff during the Obama administration and helped create the Trans-Pacific Partnership proposal, which, like other imperialist “free trade” initiatives, would have increased economic inequality — which is why it was backed by transnational corporations and praised by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Biden’s promise to the rich of no real changes is even being pointed out by business publications like [Fortune.com](#), which had an article Dec. 7 about another Biden Cabinet pick, Janet Yellen.

“But some argue,” the writer notes, “that in an attempt to pull the U.S. out of its pandemic-adjacent slump, the President-elect’s administration has relied too heavily on the old guard, borrowing heavily from the Clinton and Obama administrations, instead of including new and progressive voices on the team that will shape economic policy for at least the next four years.”

Yellen is certainly not rocking any boats towards fighting economic inequality. Biden's pick as treasury secretary was chair of the Federal Reserve from 2014 to 2018. She was also chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisers during the Bill Clinton administration.

Fortune reports that Republicans have praised Yellen's qualifications and won the support of almost a dozen GOP senators in 2014, when she was nominated to head the Federal Reserve, an institution that maintained welfare for the banks, with bailouts and low interest for the financial monopolies.

Environmental devastation

Brian Deese, proposed director of the National Economic Council (NEC), is another former Obama economic aide, who helped create the 2009 bailout of the auto industry. In addition to prioritizing monopolies over workers in the bailouts, he and Adeyemo are also associated with BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, according to its website. The financial investment company came under scrutiny regarding its role in enabling climate change.

In response to news that Deese, then managing director at BlackRock, was a top contender for the head of the NEC under the Biden administration, the [Action Center on Race and the Economy \(ACRE\)](#) released the following statement in November: "BlackRock executives like Brian Deese are responsible for financing environmental devastation while profiteering from Black and Indigenous communities," said Vasudha Desikan, political director of ACRE.

"We are in the midst of a global pandemic that has devastated the economy and destroyed the lives of millions of people. We urgently need diverse leadership at powerful economic institutions like the NEC that is committed to economic policymaking that will prioritize people and the planet. ...

“The truth is he was a supporter of fracking and fossil fuel production. Under his watch at BlackRock, the firm paid lip service to racial and environmental justice, while continuing to vote against shareholder proposals that sought to address these issues, especially proposals related to corporate political spending disclosure and oversight.

“BlackRock has a long history of financing climate devastation, like the Amazon fires, and racist institutions like police foundations. BlackRock should not be given any power in economic policymaking by the federal government nor should any investment firm’s executives be considered to lead major public economic institutions.

“We demand that President-elect Biden rescind consideration of Deese and other private sector executives for economic positions, and instead, pull together a short list from the many qualified policymakers of color who will do right by people and the planet.”

The statement recognizes the need, not for corporate-minded people of color to fill those positions, but those who will “prioritize people and the planet” over profits.

Then there’s Center for American Progress President Neera Tanden, Biden’s pick to run the Office of Management and Budget, who was one of the most vocal critics inside the Democratic Party against the campaign platform of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders.

In 2012, Tanden proposed cutting Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid in an interview with C-SPAN: “If we’re going to have a deal to address long term deficit reduction,” she said, “we need to put both entitlements on the table, as well as taxes ... Some of our progressive allies aren’t as excited about that as we are.”

Record of war crimes

Like Deese, Biden's pick for national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, is a veteran of the Obama administration. He was adviser to Vice President Biden during that administration and also deputy chief of staff to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. That means Sullivan worked with two of the most visible forces in the Obama administration that oversaw the U.S.-supported coup in Honduras in 2009 and the 2011 war on Libya, in addition to other war crimes.

Regarding the national security of the ruling class and U.S. imperialist war, Biden's Cabinet picks include retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin to be U.S. Secretary of Defense. Austin was in the U.S. military for more than four decades and led the U.S. Central Command from 2013 to 2016. If confirmed, Austin will make history as the first African American secretary of defense.

Austin was in the U.S. military when, at the end of Obama's term, the Council of Foreign Relations reported that the U.S. dropped an average of 72 bombs every day — the equivalent of three an hour — in 2016. The council admitted that these numbers were low since they only had information on Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia and Afghanistan. Around the same time, a report from military officials admitted that twice as many civilians were killed as previously reported.

According to an article in [Mother Jones](#), "After retiring from the Army in 2016, Austin joined the board of a defense industry giant, set up his own consulting firm, and became a partner at a private equity firm that invests in defense and aerospace companies. He quickly cashed in, earning at least \$1.4 million since he joined the board of United Technologies Corp. in 2016.

"Earlier this year, UTC merged with Raytheon, giving Austin a seat on the board of one of the country's most powerful defense contractors. Last year, Raytheon received more than \$16 billion in federal government contracts, the fourth-most of any company."

Imperialist war, however, is also a domestic war waged against our class by means of economic deprivation. This pays for the profiteering of the military-industrial complex as it furthers imperialist terror around the world. And it pays for the repression necessary to keep our class in fear of the police, discouraging our fight for justice.

The case of Susan Rice

This may be why Susan Rice, former President Obama's ambassador to the United Nations and later his national security adviser, was chosen as Biden's pick for White House Domestic Policy Council. The job is supposed to, among other things, help fight racial injustice.

However, Rice, along with another Biden pick, John Kerry, pushed Obama towards bombing Syria. [As national security adviser](#), Rice was an integral part of Obama's use of drones for assassinations and admittedly pushed Obama toward the war and destruction of Libya.

According to the Guardian, Obama [increased drone strikes](#) by 10 times over his predecessor, George W. Bush. The strategy that allowed this increased use of drones came by categorizing all males of military age in these regions as combatants, "making them fair game for remote controlled killing."

If Rice was part of and encouraged this type of racial profiling with the use of military weapons abroad, why would she be opposed to the profiling and frequent assassinations of Black and Brown children "of military age" here at home by police using tanks and other military equipment meant for the battlefield?

The extrajudicial killings and bombings during the Obama administration occurred largely in countries of East Africa and West Asia, including Somalia and Yemen, and ignored mounting tolls of civilians killed on the African continent by U.S. terrorism.

Again, if Rice couldn't challenge the racial injustice of U.S. imperialist war, why would she see it in Black and Brown occupied communities?

Business as usual

So far, we see that economic change is unlikely from Biden's picks, and imperialist war is also on the same trajectory as usual. What about another threat to all of humanity — climate change?

Unfortunately, the same "business as usual" approach — meaning continuing on the road to wiping out humanity — comes with the appointment of former Secretary of State John Kerry as the head of Biden's climate-change effort.

Biden has already rejected the Green New Deal for changes in the infrastructure to discourage the use of fossil fuels and slow down climate change. So it's not surprising that [Kerry told NPR](#) that he was going to rely on the same force that Trump relied on to miserably fail in supplying health and safety equipment during the pandemic: the capitalist market.

Trying to reassure the interviewer that things would change in the fight against climate change, Kerry said: "What is clear is that the marketplace itself, globally, is moving in this direction. ... I spoke with an airline's president, and he talked about what his airline is going to be doing — spontaneously, automatically. Real businesspeople, real leaders within the business world understand that this is an imperative. They also understand that there's money to be made in producing the products."

In "Capital," the historic three-volume work scientifically analyzing the workings of capitalism, Karl Marx quoted economist T.J. Dunning: "Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum.

"With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 percent will ensure its

employment anywhere; 20 percent certain will produce eagerness; 50 percent, positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 percent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged.”

The market is in search of profits, not saving humanity. And the two often have irreconcilable conflicts. So you can add to that list of things the ruling class is willing to do: the willingness to run humanity over the cliff of nonexistence with an irrational allegiance to capitalism and profit over people.

This explains Biden’s cabinet choices — predominantly made up of the enablers of capitalism’s many diseases, along with war criminals who belong in jail, not in office. Therefore, it will take a unified movement of our working class to promote and fight for socialism.

