

Towards a Year of Crisis and Uncertainty

January 19, 2021



This article was written for L'Anticapitaliste, the weekly newspaper of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) of France.

As the country awaits the inauguration of President Joseph Biden on January 20, Washington, D.C. has been turned into a fortress, protected by tens of thousands of police, National Guard, and Army Reserve troops, streets blocked by tall fences, and check-points. All of this is the result of the attempted coup by Trump followers and rightwing extremists that took place on January 6 and led the House of Representatives to impeach Trump a second time, now for inciting insurrection against the U.S. government, the trial to begin almost immediately. Because of the COVID pandemic, the traditional parade is cancelled. Rightwing groups have been mobilizing their forces to carry out armed marches and violent actions at both the national and state capitals. The country is on alert.

The recent events have created uncertainty, and many now crave stability, so is there at this moment a place for the left in national politics?

President Biden will face a nation in deep crisis. In the background looms the climate crisis: 2020 was the hottest year on record. The pandemic continues to ravage the nation. We now have 400,000 dead and people are dying at a rate of nearly 4,000 per day, overwhelming hospitals in many states. Public health measures have closed businesses, putting 27 million people out of work while many others face reduced wages. Surveys show that about 13% of Americans, or 27.4 million people, sometimes or often do not have enough to eat. Some 18 million Americans have been unable to pay their mortgage or rent and about six million believe they face eviction. And week after week, police continue to kill black men and women in situations that do not justify violence.

We should add to these issues, the enormity of the political crisis of Trumpism and its spawn. Trump won 74 million votes and most of those people believe he won the election and should be the president. Some 147 Republican Representatives and 8 Senators voted not to recognize Biden's victory and most state Republican officials support Trump. Among Trump supporters, are tens of thousands of racist, white supremacists, groups such as the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters, the

Proud Boys, and the Boogaloo Boys. All want to overthrow the government and the latter calls for a new civil war. We are entering a period with great potential for volatility and violence.

Biden and his Vice President Kamala Harris, the first female person of color to hold executive office, promise to address the pandemic, the climate crisis, the economic depression, and the country's racial justice issues. Biden has said that in his first 100 days, the government will vaccinate 100 million Americans, while also pressing for all to adopt masking and social distancing. With the Democrats having very narrow majorities in the House and Senate, Biden is putting forward a \$1.9 trillion "American Rescues Plan," with \$1 trillion in direct aid to people, \$440 billion for business, and billions more to rebuild the economy. Upon taking his new post, Biden will also issue executive orders to overturn policies of the Trump administration regarding the environment, immigration, health care, abortion, race relations and civil rights, gay rights, military spending and foreign aid. But there will also be pressure on Biden, because of the insurrection, to pass a new domestic terrorism law, a possibility that justifiably worries the left.

Given the current political atmosphere, it's difficult to predict what will happen in the coming year. Biden, a neoliberal and political moderate, has chosen a cabinet made up largely of people who served in the Obama administration where he was vice-president. Biden's is a government of the Democratic Party establishment, long accustomed to serving the financial and corporate power elite. The left will be pushing him to create a single-payer health insurance system, to end carbon fuels, and to crack down police violence. The Democratic Socialist of America has launched a national tax-the-rich campaign. But will the left be seen as jeopardizing the desire for a period of stability after the insurrection? Will Black Lives Matter demonstrations seem too extreme? Or might the depth of the crisis combined with pressure from the left push Biden—as Franklin D. Roosevelt was pushed in the 1930s—to adopt more far-reaching progressive economic and social policies?