

Biden Is No FDR

At this point, Joe Biden doesn't look any more like Franklin Roosevelt than he does like Donald Trump.

by Conrad Black



Given my consistent but never uncritical support of President Trump and his administration and my frequent expressions of skepticism about Joe Biden over many years, it has seemed appropriate to ease gently into coverage of the new administration and to give it a pass as much as I can. In this spirit, it must be said that the administration has scored well on what must be its primary objective: providing a quieter and calmer atmosphere than obtained throughout the Trump years.

This is in the nature of the two presidents and more particularly of the press response to them: rabid hostility to the point of rank defamatory fabrication toward Trump, and a

hallelujah chorus of obsequious laudations for Biden. The partisanship and unprofessionalism of the national political media are as nauseating now as they were in the five years of their relentless assault on the former president. But at least they achieve the principal goal of the majority of American voters: a quieter, less contentious, and less combative ambiance around the president. In elevating a more tranquil regime the voters have been overachievers.

Beyond that, we don't have a great deal to show for Biden's promise of an exciting first 100 days. He adopted that slogan from the beginning of the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, for whom Biden's admiration has been highlighted by moving his portrait to the central place in the Oval Office, though still surrounded by paintings of the nation's principal founders.

Roosevelt's Rapid Response

Roosevelt was inaugurated on March 4, 1933, and famously said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." He assumed the headship of a country whose economy and morale had collapsed. Banks had been closed in 46 states for some days and withdrawals were severely restricted in the remaining two states. All stock and commodity exchanges had been closed *sine die*. There were 17 million unemployed in a population of 130 million, about 30 percent of the entire workforce, and there was no direct relief for them. Bank deposits were not guaranteed, banks were collapsing daily, millions were in danger of being evicted from their homes, and agricultural price levels were beneath survival levels for most farmers.

Biden has proclaimed that he would reorient the entire country and reverse unsuccessful policies in his first 100 days of which a third have now passed. In Roosevelt's case, he summoned a special session of Congress and kept it in session for 104 days. Only after that were its accomplishments celebrated and its comparative brevity emphasized with the

description "The Hundred Days." (This was itself an adaptation from the period between Napoleon's return from Elba and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.)

In FDR's first 33 days, he enacted the Emergency Banking Relief Act, under which banks were reopened in stages as the local Federal Reserve thought appropriate, were merged under the authority of the Treasury to strengthen them, were assured liquidity by transfusions of special currency in the event of continued runs on banks, and strengthened by shareholder equity from the federal government as a redeemable preferred shareholder where appropriate. About 10 weeks later, the federal government began to guarantee deposits. The banks began reopening at once, runs on banks ended, and confidence in the financial system was very substantially restored within a few days—including the reopening of stock and commodity exchanges, following the first of Roosevelt's many and highly successful "Fireside Chats."

Roosevelt also imposed taxes on alcoholic beverages which were about to become legal again, as Prohibition ended and control of the greatest industries in the country was wrested back from such flamboyant industrialists as Al Capone and other famous gangsters. And Roosevelt started his absorption of the unemployed into his vast and very practical workfare programs with the Civilian Conservation Corps which gave work to an initial 250,000 unemployed young men in projects of reforestation, prevention of soil erosion, creation of national parks, and flood and drought control schemes all under the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers. In the next eight years, the CCC would employ over 2 million people. In the first 33 days, further programs were enacted to raise wages and reduce work hours.

Biden's Triumphal Falsehoods

The Biden Administration in the first 33 days has focused correctly on the COVID-19 pandemic, the closest equivalent to

the Great Depression of Roosevelt's time. Biden has established a COVID plan, a COVID task force, a COVID committee, and a COVID probe, starting with the triumphal falsehood that he was filling a vacuum left by the previous administration.

Trump did not handle the public relations on the COVID-19 pandemic well; he oscillated between highly concerned and slightly dismissive. But he always assisted governors in getting what they needed and advanced the schedule for development and deployment of a vaccine by over a year and does not deserve to be denigrated as he has been by his successors.

Biden has folded like a three-dollar suitcase before the teachers' unions, who gave the Democrats \$43.7 million in the last election and obviously are seeking an indefinitely extended paid vacation and to hell with the children they are supposed to be teaching. It has not been an impressive performance compared to that of his predecessor—a stark contrast with the Roosevelt Administration's relief efforts compared to the Hoover Administration that it replaced.

In the balance of his first 100 days, Roosevelt put through the Agricultural Adjustment Act by which farmers voted by categories to restrain production in order to sustain prices and refinance farm mortgages. He passed the Federal Emergency Relief Act which provided for workfare projects in which up to about seven million Americans at a time would be employed in the coming years as unemployment was reduced to nothing at the end of the decade. He also set up the Tennessee Valley Authority, which provided rural electricity and thorough water management and reduced electricity costs in seven states; the Glass-Steagall Act which reorganized banking, and the National Industrial Recovery Act, which set up the framework for increased pay scales, collective bargaining, cartelization to increase prices and profitability for employers, and uniform compensation levels and working conditions in the principal

American industries.

Much of it proved to be overambitious and unconstitutional, but it did assist in swiftly reducing unemployment and raising living standards, and in creating an atmosphere of participation for the whole country in the great crusade to escape the Great Depression.

The Honeymoon Won't Last Forever

It is to President Biden's credit that he has said nothing about the absurd second Trump impeachment which, like its precursor, has come and gone with almost no attention paid to it. But he will be expected to show some leadership in ending Fort Pelosi's \$500 million redundant deployment of the National Guard in Washington to deal with no known threats to the capital's security. And he is going to embarrass himself severely if he and the vice president keep toing and froing about whether the whole country should all be wearing one mask or two in one or six or 11 months.

The COVID relief bill at \$1.9 trillion is an obscenely extravagant pork barrel: an underground railway in San Francisco, economic assistance to abortion in developing countries, and an impractical minimum wage have nothing to do with combating COVID-19.

The media war on the previous administration was so fierce and relentless that Biden will be given a pass for a while longer. But he is going to have to come out of the White House closet soon either as a radical Sandersite leftist or a member still in good standing after 50 years of the school of bipartisan compromise. Slagging off his predecessor and drearily repeating clichés and confusion about targets for school reopening (spuriously defined as one day a week) won't fly much longer. At this point, Joe Biden doesn't look any more like FDR than he does like Donald Trump.

First published in