

Corporate media promotes Republican ultra-right

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The Republican presidential debate held September 12 in Tampa, Florida was co-sponsored by a major television network and an ultra-right group, Tea Party Express, one of a half-dozen organizations, lavishly financed by right-wing multi-millionaires, that posture as the “grass roots” of the Republican Party.

The debate was the first time that one of the main television networks had formed a formal partnership with sections of the Tea Party movement, who invariably demonize the media as “liberal”, except for the openly right-wing and pro-Republican Fox News.

The effect of the whole presentation was to appeal to those who would once have been considered the lunatic fringe of American politics and to portray them as a legitimate and even “mainstream” trend. It is these forces, which represent a tiny minority of the population, that set the tone for policy, not just in the Republican Party, but in the entire political establishment.

The event was deliberately staged as a celebration of patriotism and American nationalism, with the singing of the national anthem at the beginning, and the eight Republican candidates brought on stage one by one with the announcer identifying them and giving a capsule description. As several media critics noted, CNN brought the production values of a professional football game to the debate.

CNN linked the debate broadcast to satellite feeds from three other Tea Party meetings, in Virginia, Ohio and Arizona, where local ultra-rightists gathered to pose questions to the candidates and voice their reactions.

It was all the more sinister because the CNN debate feed was picked up and rebroadcast over the Armed Forces Network, the Pentagon’s in-house television network for troops on bases in 175 countries, and on Navy ships at sea. In other words, the military brass made a decision to promote to a captive audience of soldiers in Afghanistan, Iraq and other overseas locations the Republican presidential candidates making their appeals to a far-right audience.

Sal Russo, a co-founder of Tea Party Express, told the *New York Times* that the CNN partnership was important in

promoting the group. “The fact that they’re broadcasting and partnering with us shows that they understand it’s a broad-based political movement and that it isn’t fractured and narrow,” he said.

CNN also selected the date of the debate, September 12, originally chosen two years ago by television commentator Glenn Beck as a day for demonstrations against the Obama health care plan.

In the course of the two-hour debate, the eight Republican candidates largely repeated their performances from five days earlier, at the Reagan presidential library in California, where each sought to outdo his or her rivals with criticism from the right.

Texas Governor Rick Perry, the current frontrunner in Republican polls, reiterated his claim that Social Security was a Ponzi scheme, but he refused to answer repeated questions about whether he stood by the view that Social Security should never have been adopted, a claim he made in a book published last year.

All of the candidates called for privatizing either Social Security or Medicare or both, while pretending that such schemes amounted to “preserving” the programs for those now in them.

Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, founder of the congressional Tea Party caucus, was given much more air time in the CNN-Tea Party debate than in the previous one, and she concentrated her attacks on Perry, her main rival.

She denounced the conception that “the federal government would be taking care of people’s prescription drugs, their retirement, their health care, their housing, their food,” claiming that these needs should be taken care of by “individual responsibility.”

In other words, what little remains of a social safety net in America should be abolished, and tens of millions of people thrown back into the type of dog-eat-dog struggle for survival that characterized the epoch of the Robber Barons in the 19th century.

Each of the candidates adhered to this basic standpoint,

singing the praises of untrammelled capitalism and denouncing any form of environmental or safety regulation as an unwarranted restriction on the market.

In one revealing remark, Governor Perry criticized Obama on the grounds that he “does not understand how to free up the small businessmen and women or, for that matter, Wall Street.” That this could be said without the slightest contradiction, three years after the biggest collapse on Wall Street since the Great Depression, was remarkable.

Similarly, Bachmann called for a huge handout to corporate America, saying that the \$1.2 trillion in profits being held by American companies overseas should be repatriated to the United States by offering these corporations “a zero percent tax rate.”

Texas Congressman Ron Paul attacked Perry from the right, claiming that since he succeeded George W. Bush as governor of the state, “our taxes have doubled since he’s been in office. Our spending has gone up double. Our debt has gone up nearly triple.”

Perry in turn sought to ingratiate himself with the Tea Party crowd by repeating his claim that the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Ben Bernanke, was pursuing policies that were “almost treasonous,” by allowing the dollar to depreciate in value.

The biggest conflict during the debate, and the one that sparked controversy throughout the week, was the attack on Perry by several of his rivals for mandating the vaccination of Texas school girls against the human papilloma virus, a leading cause of cervical cancer.

The vaccination has been opposed by Christian fundamentalist groups on the grounds that inoculating preteen girls against a sexually transmitted disease will somehow make them more likely to have sexual relations.

Bachmann voiced this criticism by describing herself as “a mom of three children. And to have innocent little 12-year-old girls be forced to have a government injection through an executive order is just flat out wrong.” The overwrought language is typical of the religious frenzy promoted by the ultra-right.

One incident in the debate took the measure, not so much of the candidates, as of their right-wing audience. CNN moderator Wolf Blitzer asked Ron Paul, a practicing physician, a hypothetical question: “A healthy 30-year-old young man has a good job, makes a good living, but decides, you know what? I’m not going to spend \$200 or \$300 a month for health insurance because I’m healthy, I don’t need it. But something terrible happens, all of a sudden he needs it. Who’s going to pay if he goes into a coma, for example? Who pays for that?”

Paul responded by condemning “welfarism and socialism,” where someone “expects the government to take

care of him.” He said that the government should take no responsibility.

“Are you saying that society should just let him die?” Blitzer followed up. At that point, according to press accounts, “Several loud cheers of ‘yeah!’ followed by laughter could be heard in the Expo Hall at the Florida State Fairgrounds in response to Blitzer’s question.”

This echoed an interchange at the previous debate, where a question to Perry about his record of approving more executions than any other US governor touched off a spontaneous round of applause.

This vicious reaction is characteristic of a thin layer of the ultra-right, those whose attitude to the victims of American capitalism—the unemployed, the poor, the sick, the elderly—has more than a touch of fascism.

Such layers are deliberately promoted and inflated by the media and the Democratic Party as a mechanism for shifting the entire political establishment even further to the right. From the moment he took office, President Obama has done everything to rehabilitate the Republicans—who suffered a crushing defeat in the 2008 elections—by insisting on the need for “bipartisanship.”

That the Republicans can generate any electoral support—outside of the most right-wing and unstable elements—is only testimony to the reactionary pro-business character of the Obama administration and its indifference to tens of millions who are falling victim to the economic disaster.

On the questions most central to the interests of the ruling class—particularly the attack on federal health care programs and Social Security—the differences between the Republicans on the one hand and the Obama administration on the other are one of degree, not principle.



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