

Donald Trump: The ugly face of capitalist politics

Patrick Martin
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The rise of billionaire Donald Trump to a leading position in the Republican presidential race is proof that scum floats to the top of the pool. But Trump is not an aberration, or a distraction, or a “disgrace,” as some media commentators have claimed—except in the sense that American capitalist politics as a whole is a disgrace.

The *Des Moines Register* lambasted Trump in an editorial calling for his withdrawal from the presidential race, calling him “a feckless blowhard who can generate headlines, name recognition and polling numbers not by provoking thought, but by provoking outrage.” An appropriate description, but one that applies to all the other capitalist politicians in the race for president, to a greater or lesser degree. Not one of them, Trump included, tells the truth to working people or has any genuine mass following.

Trump personifies the backwardness and decay of the American political system and the American financial aristocracy. He first came to prominence in the real estate boom that followed the near-bankruptcy of New York City in 1975. After the city was bailed out through massive concessions by the unions, including the looting of workers’ pension funds to fuel speculative investment, the conditions were created for the transformation of parts of Manhattan into gated communities for the extremely rich.

The scion of a real estate family of middling wealth, Trump cashed in through investments in luxury apartments for ultra-high-net-worth individuals, as in his eponymous Trump Tower. A 91-page financial report filed with the Federal Election Commission this week confirms that the self-styled “master builder” is mainly engaged in servicing the vices of the super-rich, specializing in casinos, golf courses and luxury resorts. He is a parasite on the parasites. There is virtually no

productive activity associated with the 515 enterprises in which he is involved, including 391 bearing his name.

In the past two decades, Trump has built his wealth by promoting himself through a variety of media ventures, beginning with “The Apprentice.” The dubious character of his claim to a \$10 billion fortune is demonstrated by his valuation of his “brand” alone at \$3.2 billion. But such valuations are not out of place in the Wall Street of 2015, where financial speculation and skullduggery are preparing an even greater crash than in 2008.

Trump’s egomania is coupled with broad, undifferentiated ignorance of politics and issues of state. He recently told an interviewer, explaining his reluctance to read books, “One of the problems with foreign policy is that it changes on a daily basis.”

That said, Trump has a sharp eye for the main chance and a ruthless grasp of the nature of his opponents, both Republican and Democratic. His public announcement of the cellphone number of Senator Lindsey Graham was not just a publicity stunt, but a demonstration that he has taken the measure of the South Carolina Republican. Graham denounced Trump this week as a “jackass,” but was rather more conciliatory when he called the billionaire a few years ago pleading for a campaign contribution and assistance in getting back in the good graces of Fox News.

Trump was equally cutting (and accurate) in his assessment of the likely Democratic nominee, noting Hillary Clinton’s maneuvers in response to the challenge from Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. “Hillary is going way left, and I sort of laugh because I know Hillary very well,” he told the *Hill*. “The interesting part about Hillary is that her donors are all the hedge fund guys and the business guys and the real

estate guys. And they're all saying, 'Do you think she means it?' And I say, 'Of course she doesn't mean it — you know her.'"

The combination of Trump's celebrity and his presumed wealth, as well as the crudeness of his bigoted and right-wing pronouncements, have propelled him, at least for now, into the leadership of the Republican presidential field, with 24 percent support, compared to 13 percent and 12 percent respectively for Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. His standing is a measure of the insignificance of his opponents and the lack of popular enthusiasm for the array of reactionaries and political hucksters who make up the Republican field.

The demographics of his support, as reported in recent polls, show Trump's likely voters as generally younger, lower income and less ideologically conservative than the Tea Party faction that has dominated Republican Party primaries in recent years. By fomenting anti-immigrant bigotry, Trump is seeking to make an appeal to the latter ultra-right layer as well.

There is no reason to think that Trump believes anything he says about any political issue. He has been for and against universal health care, abortion, expanding Social Security benefits, and tax increases on the rich. He contributed to the political campaigns of Hillary Clinton and at one point pronounced himself a Democrat before shifting to the Republicans in the past decade.

Trump is thus no different than the typical American capitalist politician or CEO, albeit more cartoonish. But he can hardly be said to be the most disgusting political figure in a country whose president publicly boasts of his assassinations, listing the men he has killed with evident relish, and whose rivals include the aforementioned Lindsey Graham, who recently threatened that he would authorize drone missile strikes on any American who even thinks of joining ISIS.

As for the faux media outrage over Trump—from newspapers and networks that have happily profited from the billionaire's enterprises—what do they offer as a counterpoint? *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni is a case in point: presenting the self-confessed Vietnam War mass murderer, former Senator Robert Kerrey, as the voice of moral condemnation.

One study showed that the media itself is the main

generator of Trump's political rise. Before his announcement of candidacy, the billionaire was mentioned in only 4 percent of articles covering the Republican campaign. From the day he entered the race, this figure shot up to 30 percent and has remained at 20 to 30 percent ever since.



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