

Republican presidential debate: The freak show at Quicken Loans Arena

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The first Republican presidential debate of the 2016 campaign, held Thursday night at the Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio, was a spectacle of such debasement and filth that it stands as a milestone in the degeneration of American capitalist politics.

The ten candidates who assembled on the stage, headed by billionaire Donald Trump, represented and appealed to everything rotten and backward in American society: racism, misogyny, anti-immigrant chauvinism, religious bigotry, militarism and the worship of accumulated wealth.

Appropriately, the event was broadcast by Fox News, the propaganda mouthpiece of the US ultra-right and flagship of the media empire of billionaire Rupert Murdoch. Three multi-millionaire representatives of Fox News, supposed journalists, served as “moderators,” or, more accurately, instigators and facilitators of political pornography.

The audience in the arena, where the Republican nominating convention will be held next summer, was as foul as the candidates and the questioners. They cheered for torture, for war, for cuts in essential social services, for attacks on democratic rights. These are truly the dregs of American society.

The tone was set from the beginning by Trump, the real estate developer and reality TV host who has been heading up polls of likely Republican voters. He gives the lead with his demeaning sneers against women, immigrants, his rivals and just about everyone in the universe who is not Donald Trump. The others on the platform attempted to keep up with him in promoting the most prejudiced and backward views.

It was not a debate so much as a political freak show, with the bizarre vying with the reactionary. Yet it was treated as a legitimate, even entertaining, exercise in democratic politics, not only by ultra-right organs such

as Fox, but by the *New York Times* and other major daily newspapers and television networks.

A few snapshots suffice to convey the stench of the affair.

Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, a demagogue in the style of Joe McCarthy, denounced Obama’s alleged refusal to pronounce the words “radical Islamic terrorism” and declared that the US needed “a president that shows the courage [of] Egypt’s President al-Sisi.” This is the military butcher who has killed thousands of his own citizens after overthrowing the elected president and crushing strikes and protests.

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who recently expressed a desire to give public school teachers “a punch in the nose” for opposing school privatization and budget cuts, denounced any restriction on the NSA and other government spy agencies. Christie demonstrated his “toughness” at the expense of the elderly by demanding an increase in the retirement age for Social Security from 67 to 69, together with the imposition of means testing.

Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee went further, demanding that Social Security and Medicare be funded by a consumption tax. He argued that this would hit “illegals, prostitutes, pimps, drug dealers, all the people that are freeloading off the system now.” He added that the next president should defy the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade*, declare every fetus a person from the moment of conception, and use executive authority, including federal troops, to shut down abortion clinics.

Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin, who came to national prominence through attacks on workers’ rights that sparked statewide protests in 2011, sought favor with the religious right by calling for an absolute prohibition on abortion, even in cases of rape, incest or

danger to the life of the mother. “Would you really let a mother die rather than have an abortion?” he was asked. Walker answered in the affirmative.

Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson, asked whether he favored waterboarding prisoners in terrorism investigations, gave an enthusiastic thumbs up.

It was left to Trump to express most crudely the class position of all the capitalist politicians on the stage. He dismissed a question about his use of bankruptcy laws to close companies, default on loans and wipe out thousands of jobs, saying he was only doing what any corporate executive in his circumstances would have done—perhaps the only true statement uttered all evening.

He gloated about his success in draining money out of Atlantic City, New Jersey, now plunged into depression by the collapse of the hotel-casino boom. “I’ve gotten a lot of credit in the financial pages,” he boasted, because “seven years ago I left Atlantic City before it totally cratered, and I made a lot of money in Atlantic City, and I’m very proud of it.”

The other candidates cringed before the billionaire blowhard. Asked directly about Trump’s racist diatribe against Mexican immigrants, in which he called them rapists and criminals, Ohio Governor John Kasich praised him for “hitting a nerve in this country.”

Not one candidate criticized Trump for attempting to buy the election. That is because they are all dependent on billionaires no less reactionary, bigoted and ignorant to finance their own campaigns.

It would have been more fitting if Fox News, instead of putting the names of the candidates on cards in front of their podiums, had put the names of the billionaires who are bankrolling them. Instead of Ted Cruz, for example, hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer; instead of Marco Rubio, auto mega-dealer Norman Braman; instead of Scott Walker, TD Ameritrade boss Joe Ricketts, and so on.

The Cleveland debate presented the spectacle of a ruling elite that has lost its head and is incapable even of addressing, let alone resolving, the social and economic crisis gripping the country. American capitalist politics is spiraling out of control.

The Republicans’ Democratic rivals offer nothing different in substance, although they seek to cover their political nakedness with populist rhetoric about defending “ordinary Americans” and the “middle

class.”

Leon Trotsky once wrote that Nazi propaganda reduced political thought to the level of “the dog’s bark and the pig’s grunt.” Something similar is happening in the disintegrating capitalist political system of the United States.



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