

On the eve of the US election debate: The politics of the grotesque

Patrick Martin
26 September 2016

The debate tonight between Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump begins the final stage in the 2016 election campaign. The two main capitalist candidates will appear together for the first time, before a television audience expected to top 100 million people.

Even by the deplorable standards of American politics, the present elections take matters to a new low. The population of the United States is being presented with a degraded spectacle of a contest between two despised candidates, the most unpopular in modern American history: Trump, a fascistic billionaire and former reality show star, and Clinton, the chosen candidate of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus.

The event itself will not in any genuine sense be a debate, that is, an exchange of political ideas and arguments, but rather an assortment of stock phrases, rehearsed one-liners, verbal provocations and mudslinging. Moderator Lester Holt of NBC News will ensure that the issues discussed do not transcend the general consensus accepted by both parties.

A report in the *Sunday Times* of London gives a glimpse of the real feelings of the public towards the two candidates. The newspaper commissioned a focus group conducted among voters in the Virginia suburbs of Washington DC, who felt, as the *Times* put it, that “It was the candidates, not the voters, who were the real deplorables.” When asked to describe Clinton, the terms used included “deceitful,” “entitled,” “unpleasant,” “untrustworthy,” “liar,” “corruption,” “uninspiring” and “crooked.” Trump’s name produced such responses as “crazy,” “unstable,” “arrogant,” “megalomaniac,” “vindictive,” “unbalanced,” “dumb,” “charlatan,” “bigot” and “hateful.”

Tens of millions of people will be watching tonight

not out of any love for the candidates involved, but more as witnesses to a horrible train wreck. At the same time, there is an understanding that the elections, whoever ends up in the White House, mark a significant milestone in American politics.

To understand what will come out of these elections, one has to understand the conditions in which they are taking place. Even as the media builds up a circus-like atmosphere around the debate, it is avoiding any discussion of the serious issues facing the American people, regardless of who is elected in November.

Internationally, the world is closer to a global conflict than at any point since the years leading up to the Second World War. The US is teetering on the brink of a massive military escalation in Syria. General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, acknowledged last week that the imposition of a “no-fly zone,” which Clinton supports, would mean war with Russia—that is, a conflict between the two largest nuclear-armed powers in the world. Both candidates, along with the media, are deliberately and systematically concealing from the American people how precarious the situation is.

And what is happening within the United States? There is an atmosphere of deep dysfunction, expressed in massacres at malls and other tragedies. The mounting anger over police violence, which has been inflicted not just on African-American men but on the entire working class, is a signal of what will become the hallmark of the next US administration, whether headed by Trump or Clinton: the outbreak of open class conflict in the United States. The Democrats’ insistence that things are “pretty darn great” is an attempt to ignore and cover up the reality of mass poverty, unemployment and economic distress.

The drive to war and the intensification of class

conflict are driven by an intractable crisis of the world capitalist system, demonstrated not only in the hundreds of millions of unemployed and underemployed workers in the major industrialized regions of the world, but in the evident perplexity of capitalist politicians and central bankers, who have no solution to the prolonged economic stagnation that has followed the 2008 Wall Street crash. Last week the US Federal Reserve again postponed a planned interest rate hike, for fear that such a move would trigger a panic in US and world financial markets on the eve of the elections.

The debate itself will tackle none of these issues, for which neither of the candidates have any solution.

The effort to present the elections as a contest between diametrically opposed candidates conceals the fact that Trump and Clinton share far more in common than their relatively minor tactical differences. The two are drawn from the same social layer, the millionaires and billionaires who constitute the top one-tenth of one percent of American society.

As far as the financial aristocracy is concerned, Hillary Clinton is the near-unanimous choice, as demonstrated by the fact, reported by the *Wall Street Journal* Saturday, that not a single CEO of the Fortune 100 largest corporations is backing Trump, while many are supporting and have contributed financially to Clinton. She has the support of the dominant sections of the military-intelligence apparatus and endorsement of the vast bulk of the US media, while not a single major daily newspaper has endorsed Trump.

The concern of the ruling class is not that Trump would be too reckless, but that his professed admiration of Russian President Vladimir Putin cuts across the war plans directed against Russia and China which have been developed over the past decade under both Republican and Democratic administrations. Moreover, there is concern that the election of Trump could set off uncontrollable social conflict.

Given this near-unanimous ruling-class support, it is reasonable to ask the question, posed by Clinton in remarks last week, “Why aren’t I leading Trump by 50 points?” The candidate herself had no real answer. Nor did the *New York Times*, which made its predictable endorsement of Clinton in a lengthy editorial published in its Sunday edition.

While acknowledging that the “2016 campaign has

brought to the surface the despair and rage of poor and middle-class Americans,” the *Times* expresses a certain befuddlement over the inability of Clinton to “connect” with working-class voters. The answer, however, is straightforward. Masses of people recognize in the Democratic Party an institution no less committed to the interests of the corporations and wealthy than the Republicans.

The critical question is to prepare for what is to come. This is the central purpose of the Socialist Equality Party’s election campaign of Jerry White and Niles Niemuth for president and vice president. Disgust with American politics is not enough. A political leadership of the working class must be built, based on an understanding that the crisis facing workers and youth in the US and internationally is rooted in the capitalist system. As the US election enters its final stage, we call on all workers to support our election campaign, and join and build the SEP.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)