

Clinton and Trump laugh it up with New York's aristocrats at Al Smith Dinner

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In the midst of an election campaign that has exposed the rotted out, corrupt character of American democracy as no other, the presidential candidates of the two corporate-controlled parties took time out from the campaign trail to entertain the New York elite at the traditional Al Smith charity dinner on Thursday night.

The white-tie event, named after the quasi-populist Democratic governor of New York State and Democratic presidential candidate in 1928, is a fundraiser for Catholic charities. It was held at the Waldorf Astoria.

The once-every-four-years pre-election affair has long been an occasion for the richest of the rich and their political and media spokespersons to trade jokes and jibes and, in general, revel in their wealth and power. The basic joke that gets the crowd going is the official pretense that there are insuperable differences between the Democrats and Republicans and that the people, by choosing between the candidates of the two capitalist parties, determine the policies of the next government.

This year's gathering of millionaires and billionaires, whose ranks include the candidates themselves as well as the bulk of the media notables and politicians in attendance, was bound to be particularly foul. All the more since the revelry takes place in the context of a massive escalation of the US-directed bloodbath in the Middle East, with the launch of the siege of Mosul, and a relentless campaign of provocations against Russia that threatens to explode into a war between the world's biggest nuclear powers.

Donald Trump, the billionaire New York real estate speculator, spoke first. He, of course, knew many on the dais and in the hall. He had long connived with the financial, media and political elite of the city, Democratic and Republican, to amass his fortune.

He immediately ruffled not a few feathers in the crowd, overwhelmingly supporting his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton, by reminding them of their past ties. "The politicians," he said, "they've had me to their homes... They've asked for my endorsements and they always wanted my money... But then they suddenly decided when I ran for president as a Republican that I've always been a no-good, rotten, disgusting scoundrel."

Similarly, he pointed to the immense wealth of the Catholic hierarchy when he turned to Timothy Dolan, the archbishop of New York, who was strategically seated on the dais between himself and Clinton. "Cardinal Dolan and I have some things in common," he quipped. "For instance, we both run impressive properties on Fifth Avenue."

He got a fair share of laughs, including when he alluded to the sordid relations between his opponent and Wall Street. "This is the first time ever that Hillary is sitting down and speaking to major corporate leaders and not getting paid for it," he said.

But the mood in the hall turned sour when Trump violated the "decorum" of the event by hitting out too hard with damning revelations contained in Clinton campaign emails leaked by WikiLeaks. When he called Clinton "so corrupt," he was met with boos, and again when he cited her closed-door admission that she had divergent public and private positions on issues, and when he alluded to the role of the Clinton Foundation in exploiting the 2010 hurricane in Haiti to further plunder the impoverished island country.

Clinton, for her part, made light of her own corruption, evoking laughter with the line: "It's a treat for all of you, too, because I charge a lot for speeches like this." She went on to joke about the irony of "this magnificent room full of plutocrats celebrating [Al

Smith's] legacy.”

She continued in the same vein, calling out the names of richly paid media “news” personalities on the dais, including Charlie Rose, Maria Bartiromo, Chris Mathews, Gayle King, Norah O’Donell and Katie Couric. This was followed by a list of Democratic and Republican politicians, including Charles Schumer, Andrew Cuomo, Mike Bloomberg, Bill de Blasio, David Dinkins and Rudy Giuliani.

Clinton did not skip the opportunity to reinforce the Democratic Party’s efforts to outflank the fascistic Trump from the right by baiting him as a puppet of Russian President Vladimir Putin and burying the devastating exposures contained in the WikiLeaks revelations by attributing them, without presenting a shred of evidence, to Russian government hacking.

Trump is “as healthy as a horse,” she declared. “You know, the one Vladimir Putin rides around on.” At another point she said Trump had trouble reading from a teleprompter because he had to translate from the Russian text.

The media, almost universally supporting Clinton, generally panned the event for its ill humor, focusing its ire on Trump. But the filthy affair above all was a demonstration of the boundless hypocrisy of the entire political establishment and its utter subservience to the American corporate-financial oligarchy.



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