

What the neo-Nazi debacle in Washington showed

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The turnout at the Washington neo-Nazi rally Sunday gave a glimpse of the real character of the fascist and white supremacist forces in the United States. Amid a blare of media publicity, grossly exaggerating the popular support for the ultra-right, less than two dozen people turned up for the “Unite the Right 2” rally in Lafayette Park, across from the White House.

The entire affair should be described as a state-sponsored provocation rather than an actual rally. The handful of neo-Nazis were given their own private car on the Washington Metro, separated by police from other passengers. They rode through subway stations patrolled by more police, were escorted from the Foggy Bottom Metro station through a private exit, escorted by still more police on the walk to Lafayette Square, and protected there by hundreds of riot police, who kept away anti-fascist protesters who outnumbered the neo-Nazis at least a hundred to one. After the rally, the fascists boarded white vans, supplied either by the police or Metro, and were whisked away to safety.

At every point, the neo-Nazis were outnumbered by the journalists covering the non-event. Dozens of reporters trailed Jason Kessler, the organizer of the rally, recording his every word. As for the scale of the media hype, the number of hours of cable television coverage proved to be greater than the number of neo-Nazis in attendance.

And this was not primarily Fox News, which was somewhat embarrassed by the pro-Trump character of the white supremacist rally. CNN and MSNBC provided virtually unlimited airtime, and National Public Radio granted Kessler a seven-minute-long interview to spew his racist filth virtually uninterrupted to a nationwide audience. The effect was to build up the neo-Nazis as a potentially formidable force, out of all proportion to their actual support among the American people.

Kessler called the rally to spit on the memory of Heather Heyer, the anti-fascist protester murdered by a

white supremacist in Charlottesville, Virginia, exactly a year before, during the first “Unite the Right” rally in that university town. But it was clear that he miscalculated. While Charlottesville in 2017 was the scene of a full-scale fascist riot involving hundreds of torch-bearing racists, ostensibly defending Confederate statues from planned removal, Lafayette Park in 2018 was a debacle.

Many of the racist groups that took part in Charlottesville decided not to come to Washington, at least in part because of the planned left-wing counterprotests. Also, much of the Virginia-based ultra-right is engaged in the campaign of Republican Senate candidate Corey Stewart, who is openly appealing to racism and anti-immigrant bigotry and is being shunned by the Republican Party establishment, although not by Trump, who has effusively endorsed him.

It is worth pointing out that efforts to organize counterprotests to “Unite the Right 2” were censored by Facebook, on the thoroughly bogus grounds that they represented an artificial movement supposedly instigated by the Russian government to set Americans against each other. Facebook shut down one website promoting the counterprotest claiming that it showed signs of “inauthentic activity.”

In reality, thousands of young people and working people turned out for the counterprotest, with some traveling from New York City or even further to show their hatred for the fascists as well as their hostility to the Trump administration, which they clearly regarded as the moral author of the neo-Nazi rally, if not the actual sponsor.

It was “Unite the Right 2” which better deserved the label “inauthentic” since it was made possible only by state and media manipulation, attracted almost no one, and had no genuine popular support.

The debacle in Lafayette Park does not mean that neo-Nazis and white supremacists can be dismissed or

ignored. But it showed where the real danger lies: not as yet in any significant mass support for their ultra-reactionary politics, but in the systematic promotion of such forces by the capitalist state, both by the Trump administration and through police forces at every level, from ICE and the Border Patrol down to the local cops.

Fascist elements are promoted to intimidate popular opposition to the Trump administration, and to create the impression that there is significant support for its right-wing rampage against immigrants and its all-out backing of police violence and brutality against the working class.

A particularly foul role is played by the corporate media, backed by sections of the pseudo-left, who present the white supremacist groups as having widespread support, in keeping with their habitual slanders of white workers as being incorrigibly racist.

For nearly two years, the Democratic Party and its media allies have peddled a racist explanation for the election of Trump and the right-wing policies being pursued by his administration. According to this narrative, Trump won the presidency because of a white racist vote in the working class in states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

The claims that America is awash in racism, and that Trump's election proves it, have been repeatedly disproven by serious analyses of the voting patterns in 2016 (see: "The myth of the reactionary white working class").

It is especially absurd, given that the same states voted twice for Barack Obama, the first African-American president, and several were won by Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries over Hillary Clinton. It was only the right-wing campaign of Clinton, who made not the slightest appeal to the working class, that drove down turnout among both white and black workers and gave Trump the opening to win support on the basis of economic nationalism and populist demagoguery.



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