

Trump's Operation Dictatorship: What the debate exposed

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The degenerate spectacle of Tuesday night's debate between Donald Trump and Joseph Biden will be remembered in history as the United States' moment of truth. The myth of an invulnerable and eternal American democracy has been shattered. Political reality has burst through the countless layers of deceitful propaganda of the corporate-financial oligarchy and exposed the undeniable fact that the White House is the political nerve center of a far-advanced conspiracy to establish a presidential dictatorship and suppress constitutionally guaranteed democratic rights.

The grunts and barks emitted by Trump on Tuesday night leave no doubt about his intentions. Trump is as serious about the threats he made during the debate as Hitler was about those he wrote down in *Mein Kampf*. Trump views the November election as a continuation of the political coup d'état that began last June in Washington, D.C., when he unleashed military and police forces against peaceful protesters.

Trump's political strategy is fairly obvious and can be summed up with the infamous phrase: "Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war." The conspiracy will unfold as follows:

First, during the remaining month of the election campaign, Trump will do everything he can to discredit the voting process with the intention of delegitimizing the counting of the ballots, which, as he fully expects, will show that he lost the election by millions of votes. He will use fabricated allegations of ballot fraud to incite fascist thugs, assisted by police and unidentified federal agents, to intimidate voters and carry out violent acts at polling stations.

Second, on election night Trump will declare that he is the winner, claiming that all ballots cast through the mail are illegitimate. He repeated during the debate his claim that the only way that he can lose is if the election is "rigged," through the destruction of ballots and other forms of fraud. Even though he trails heavily in the polls, Trump is counting on a delay in the tally of mail-in ballots to give him the opportunity to declare victory in key battleground states.

Third, Trump will use the 10 weeks between Election Day on November 3 and the Inauguration on January 20 to mobilize his followers in the streets, while turning to a stacked Supreme Court to decide the election in his favor. On Tuesday he again said that he was "counting" on the court to "look at the ballots." He has the full support of the Republican Party, which is pressing forward with the rapid confirmation of Trump's Supreme Court nominee, Amy Coney Barrett, so that she will be in a position to cast a deciding vote in any court decision on the election.

Trump is also counting on support within the police and sections of the military, as well as his control over the Department of Homeland Security. The *Washington Post* reported Tuesday that DHS acting

Secretary Chad Wolf, a Trump crony, is preparing immigration raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in "sanctuary cities," such as Denver and Philadelphia, this month. Federal paramilitary forces will be mobilized in many major metropolises in advance of the election.

Finally, and most critical of all for the success of his conspiracy, Trump has factored in the spinelessness of the Democratic Party. He fully expects that the Democrats, apart from mouthing a few empty threats, will do nothing to stop him.

The abject bankruptcy of the Democratic Party was on display on Tuesday night. While Trump personified the viciousness of a ruling class moving toward fascism, Biden—frail and frightened—epitomized bourgeois democracy on its death bed. Though endlessly intoning, "This is the deal," Biden spent the 90 minutes of the debate evading the fact that his opponent is preparing for civil war and dictatorship. He mindlessly declared that once the votes are counted, the political crisis will be over, and everything will return to normal.

The role of the Democratic Party is to do everything it can to downplay and cover up reality, in order to prevent any popular mobilization against Trump. Biden went out of his way to declare that he is not opposed to Supreme Court nominee Amy Barrett. He complimented her as "a very fine person," even though Barrett, once on the Court, will be one of those who will drive a nail into Biden's political coffin.

When Trump goaded Biden by declaring that the Democratic Party candidate supports the "far left manifesto" of Sanders, Biden responded by repudiating any association with left-wing politics: "I beat Bernie Sanders ... by a whole hell of a lot."

Biden did not even respond to Trump's verbal salute to the fascist Proud Boys. He pledged to demand that his own supporters "stay calm" as the election is contested, while Trump urged that they mobilize and challenge the results.

To believe that dictatorship can be averted by supporting the Democratic Party is to close one's eyes to reality. The Democrats' actions are determined not by an abstract devotion to democracy but by the interests of the class that they represent.

Any strategy to counter the threat of dictatorship must base itself on a correct understanding of the underlying causes of the political crisis. Trump is the expression of a far deeper disease, whose origins and character must be properly understood.

There are several interrelated factors at work.

First is the far-reaching decay of American capitalism. In little more than a decade, the United States has been devastated by two major crises, first in 2008 and now in 2020. In both cases, the ruling class resorted to a massive and unsustainable inflow of funds—essentially,

the printing of money—to keep the financial markets afloat. The historically unprecedented transfer of wealth to the rich must be paid for through an intensification of the assault on the working class.

Second, arising from the economic weakening of the United States, is the precipitous decline in the global position of American imperialism. Despite 30 years of unending war, the American ruling class has been unable to maintain its position as the global hegemon. Now, it sees in the rise of China an existential threat. All the resources must be diverted to prepare for global warfare with China, of which the conflict with Russia is one element. The American working class must be put on rations.

Third is the staggering concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny layer of society. The 400 richest individuals in the United States now control \$3.2 trillion, and the richest one percent have more wealth than the bottom 40 percent. A recent RAND Corporation study calculated that the stagnation of income over the past four decades for the bottom 90 percent of the population created an aggregate net loss of income of \$47 trillion. Democracy cannot survive under conditions of such enormous levels of inequality.

All of these underlying conditions have been intensified by the pandemic, which has revealed in the starkest way the dysfunctionality of American society. Trump speaks and acts on behalf of a criminal financial oligarchy that will stop at nothing to protect its wealth. Its response to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated its contempt for the lives and welfare of the population. Its demand for the reopening of schools is an essential component of its program of “herd immunity,” which has already led to the deaths of more than 210,000 people in the United States. While the federal bailout has sent share values on Wall Street soaring, tens of millions are unemployed, and the major corporations are planning mass layoffs.

The ruling class knows that it confronts mass social anger that will take an explosive and potentially revolutionary form. This is what imparts to Trump’s actions their frenzied and reckless character. Terrified of the development of social opposition, he sees in every protest and manifestation of opposition the danger of the “radical left” and “socialism.” The growth of working class militancy, already apparent in the wave of strikes, has convinced a substantial section of the ruling class that they have no way out except through violence.

The lessons of the rise of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s are of burning contemporary relevance. The examples of Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy and Franco in Spain demonstrate that the turn to fascism and dictatorship comes when the ruling class is no longer able, for reasons embedded in the character of capitalist society, to resolve its crisis through democratic means.

In the aftermath of Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, Leon Trotsky warned that the Nazi regime was not a uniquely German phenomenon:

In all countries the same historic laws operate, the laws of capitalist decline. If the means of production remain in the hands of a small number of capitalists, there is no way out for society. It is condemned to go from crisis to crisis, from need to misery, from bad to worse. In the various countries the decrepitude and disintegration of capitalism are expressed in diverse forms and at unequal rhythms. But the basic features of the process are the same everywhere. *The bourgeoisie is leading its society to complete bankruptcy.* It is capable of assuring the people neither bread nor peace. *This is precisely why it cannot any longer tolerate the democratic order.* It is

forced to smash the workers by the use of physical violence. [Whither France, November 9, 1934]

The working class must resist Trump’s coup plotting with its own program and its own methods.

First, this requires an absolute break with the Democratic Party and all political forces that work to subordinate the struggles of the working class to the capitalist system.

Second, workers must reject every form of politics that seeks to divide the working class along national, racial or gender lines. The fight is not between “white America” and “black America,” but between the working class and the corporate-financial oligarchy.

Third, the class struggle must be expanded and unified. The logic of the crisis raises the necessity for workers to prepare a political general strike through the formation of popular organizations and committees, controlled by workers, and independent of the pro-capitalist unions and the political parties of the ruling class.

Fourth, the fight for democratic rights is inseparable from the fight against the capitalist system. The many forms of social protest throughout the country—especially the multiracial demonstrations against police brutality and the growing rank-and-file movement against the life-threatening demands for a return to work—must be unified as a class-conscious movement against capitalism.

Fifth, and most critical of all, American workers must recognize that their struggle within the United States is part of a global movement of the working class against the international capitalist system. The workers of every country, including those of China and Russia, are their class brothers and sisters. They, too, are engaged in struggle against their capitalist rulers.

The weeks to come will be used by the Socialist Equality Party’s presidential campaign to mobilize the working class and youth against the threat of dictatorship.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* make an appeal to all those opposed to Trump’s coup to draw upon the lessons of history, recognize the very real political dangers, and make the decision to fight back.

Support and utilize the Socialist Equality Party’s presidential campaign to develop an understanding of the present crisis and the necessity of revolutionary socialist policies. Circulate this statement as widely as possible in order to build up opposition to Trump’s Operation Dictatorship.

The American working class has the power to scuttle Trump’s conspiracy. But it requires a socialist program and genuinely revolutionary leadership.

Do not wait passively for events to unfold. If you understand the danger, take action to avert it. And the most effective action readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* can take is to become members of the Socialist Equality Party and fight to put an end to capitalism in the United States and throughout the world.



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