

Whitmer refuses to confront far-right politics of Dixon in Michigan gubernatorial debate

Kevin Reed
17 October 2022

On Thursday evening, the Democratic governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer, and far-right Republican Party candidate Tudor Dixon engaged in a televised debate hosted by WOOD-TV in Grand Rapids.

The politics of the event were chiefly characterized by the efforts of both Whitmer and Dixon to pitch their respective right-wing agendas and compete for support from corporate and financial interests in the state.

The choice of location reflected the avoidance by both parties of any discussion of the reality facing the working class in the state, which is concentrated in the southeast region. The City of Detroit was barely mentioned.

Workers in Michigan have still not recovered from the Great Recession of 2008, and the impact of the social and economic devastation from the coronavirus pandemic remains present in the lives of the working class population in all areas of the state. Statewide unemployment is 4.1 percent—greater than the national average of 3.5 percent—and in Wayne County, which includes Detroit, it is 4.6 percent. Some counties in Michigan, such as Oscoda County in the northern part of the lower peninsula, have an unemployment rate above 8 percent.

Aside from abstract references to “jobs,” neither candidate discussed these issues. Nor did they speak about the erosion of incomes by an inflation rate of 8.2 percent while the minimum wage in Michigan stands at the below subsistence rate of \$9.87 per hour.

In the hour-long debate, the candidates gave short opening statements and then answered questions posed by the moderator, WOOD TV8 political reporter Rick Albin. The questions reflected what the corporate media deems to be the main political issues in Michigan.

Albin avoided any mention of national or

international questions, including the coup attempt by Donald Trump and his fascist mob on January 6, 2021 and Joe Biden’s US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, which threatens to become a world war with nuclear weapons.

The refusal of debate moderator Albin to raise the ongoing assault on democratic rights spearheaded by the fascist right was a gift to Dixon, who is an election-denier and supporter of various conspiracy theories associated with Trump and others like Qanon advocate Marjorie Taylor Greene. Dixon attempted to tone down her advocacy of far-right political positions and both the moderator and Whitmer assisted her in doing this.

In her opening statement, Whitmer said nothing about Dixon’s connections with far-right and fascist politics. Instead, in keeping with the line of President Biden and the Democratic Party, the governor said she was a committed advocate of bipartisanship. “I will work with anyone who is serious about solving problems,” she said, adding that “there is more that unites us than divides us.”

When it comes to attacking the wages, social conditions and democratic rights of the working class, there is, indeed, a basic unity between the two parties of big business.

Although she had many opportunities to pursue the issue, Whitmer barely mentioned the fact that Michigan supporters of Trump had plotted to kidnap and kill her in the leadup to the 2020 elections. Exposing and disrupting what was intended as a dress rehearsal for the violent January 6 assault on Congress and the US Capitol, federal and state authorities two years ago arrested 14 men and charged them with conspiracy to kidnap Whitmer. The plan was to put her on “trial” and execute her for implementing emergency lockdown measures in Michigan during the first months of the

pandemic.

For her part, Dixon started off with a bogus claim that she is a “worker.” She said, “I used to work many hours on the shop floor of a steel foundry,” without mentioning that the firm she worked for, Michigan Steel in Muskegon, was owned by her late father, Vaughn Makary, who was also at one time the president of the Steel Founders’ Society of America.

The first question from Albin was on abortion rights in Michigan. Whitmer attempted to take credit for the widespread opposition in the state to the reactionary decision of the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade* last June, saying her lawsuit was the only reason that a woman’s right to choose in Michigan was not eliminated by the state legislature, both houses of which are controlled by the Republicans. When asked specifically her views on restrictions to abortion, Whitmer refused to answer.

Dixon falsified her own record on abortion rights, denying that she previously stated that women seeking an abortion should be charged with a felony. It has been widely reported that last August Dixon stated her support for the 1931 Michigan law which criminalizes abortion even in cases of rape or incest.

When Albin asked about what the governor “might have done differently” in hindsight during the pandemic, Whitmer essentially apologized for what were limited and inadequate stay-at-home orders in the spring of 2020, as though they were a mistake. She said, “If I could go back in time with the knowledge we have now, sure, I would have made some different decisions.”

Dixon had nothing to say about the 39,000 people who have died from COVID. She said she would have advocated the reopening of restaurants and schools in the fall of 2020, when workers, students and teachers were being infected amid the winter COVID-19 case surge.

On the question of supporting the police and advocating “law and order” policies, the alignment of the two candidates came across loud and clear. In response to a question about racial bias in law enforcement and the criminal justice system, Whitmer would only say “there is more work to do.” She said nothing about systemic police violence against working class and poor people of all races.

Instead, Whitmer said, “As a former prosecutor, I

have sat with our law enforcement. I have worked arm in arm with them and that’s why the budgets I have written have focused on supporting.”

She boasted about being endorsed by one of the statewide police organizations as well as by prosecutors and sheriffs. She added that she had just signed a bipartisan funding bill for “secondary road control,” and called for support for “good cops.”

Dixon claimed Whitmer supported “the spirit of defund the police,” and added, “It’s hard for our police officers.” She called for bringing police “into our schools to make young people comfortable with being around them.”

When Whitmer said Dixon had “rushed to judgement” in the execution-style shooting death of Patrick Lyoya by a Grand Rapids officer last April, she failed to point out that the Republican candidate had come out immediately and denounced those who “glorify” criminals and “criminalize” the police.

In covering the debate, the corporate media is emphasizing the differences between the candidates. CNN, for example, referred to “sharp differences” on abortion rights and “stark differences” on gun rights. The reality is that Whitmer did everything she could to prove that her program is not “radical,” as Dixon claimed, but very much in defense of the interests of the corporate and financial elite and the institutions of the state.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact