Democrat Stacey Abrams advances right-wing agenda in Georgia gubernatorial debate

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The debate on Monday night in Atlanta between three candidates for governor of Georgia—Republican incumbent Brian Kemp and challengers Stacey Abrams for the Democrats and Libertarian Shane Hazel—demonstrated the increasingly rapid rightward trajectory of the entire American political establishment.

The televised debate was dominated by discussion of support for law enforcement, attacks on public education and public health measures to fight COVID-19, the promotion of racialist and American nationalist politics and support for pro-corporate economic policies.

The event took place on the day that early voting began in Georgia, with reports that as many as 100,000 voters went to the polls to cast their ballots. The 2022 gubernatorial election is a repeat of the 2018 race between Abrams and Kemp—in which the Republican won by a slim margin of 55,000 votes with nearly 4 million people voting—except for the presence of Libertarian Party candidate Hazel.

Hazel has stated his intention to force the election into a runoff. According to state law, if no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote on November 8, the selection of governor will be decided by a runoff election four weeks later—on December 6—between the top two vote-getters.

With polls showing Kemp ahead of Abrams by 6 or 7 points—and the votes for Hazel tending to increase this margin—Abrams made every effort to promote herself as a more effective defender of corporate interests and the state apparatus than her Republican opponent.

The hour-long debate was hosted by Georgia Public Broadcasting and the format included questions posed to the candidates by three journalists. It also allowed the candidates to ask each other questions.

Both sets of questions focused on topics that fall within what is considered acceptable to the political establishment. There was no effort to deal with the real problems facing masses of people in Georgia, across the US and around the world—such as poverty, unemployment, low wages, inflation, attacks on democratic rights, and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and US preparations for war against China, which are bringing the world perilously close to a nuclear third world war.

Little was said about Trump's attempted coup and the increasingly fascistic character of the Republican Party. None of the candidates, all defenders of the profit system, wished to bring attention to these manifold expressions of the mortal crisis of American and world capitalism. Nor was there any mention of the rising struggles of workers in the US and internationally, which are increasingly taking the form of a rebellion against the corporatist trade union bureaucracies.

When asked why she was behind in the polls, Abrams made a perfunctory reference to the crisis facing young people and "families facing rising prices" before moving on to echo right-wing law-and-order agitation. She claimed that everyone she met was "afraid of the gun violence and rising violence in the state (Georgia)." She offered no program for the economic and social crisis, merely saying, "I look forward to leading our state forward."

Responding to a provocative question that falsely equated her remarks about voter suppression in the 2018 gubernatorial election with Donald Trump's denial that Biden won the 2020 presidential election, Abrams evaded a direct response. She neither defended her charge that working class and minority voters were excluded from the polls in Georgia in 2018 nor

denounced the refusal of Trump and his backers to abide by the results of the 2020 election. And she failed to warn that this election denialism was the preparation for the installation of a fascistic dictatorship under Trump in 2024.

When Kemp asked Abrams, "How many sheriffs statewide have publicly endorsed your campaign," she responded by saying, "I support law enforcement and did so for 11 years, worked closely with the sheriff's association. I am probably the only person standing up here who has ever actually written an SOP [standard operating procedure] for a police department when I was working for the city of Atlanta."

Abrams said she had the support of sheriffs and that she was for "justice and safety." She did not refer to the fact that Georgia police officers have been involved in 95 shootings in which 45 people have been killed so far in 2022.

When she was given the opportunity to pose a question to Hazel, Abrams resorted to the method of the right-wing, anti-communist smear. Abrams quoted Mike Pompeo and asked Hazel if he agreed with Trump's secretary of state that allowing Chinese Communist Party-backed companies to purchase land in the state of Georgia "was a sign of madness" with grave "national security implications."

As a libertarian defender of private property rights, Hazel said he would not tell anyone how or to whom they should sell their property, to which Abrams responded by saying that Georgia has 13 military installations and the state is using a Chinese technology that "both Donald Trump and Joe Biden have warned is very much a national security threat."

When she asked a question of incumbent Governor Kemp, Abrams, speaking on behalf of upper-middle class and bourgeois blacks, focused in on race-based funding of small businesses. She asked, "What are your concrete, specific, targeted plans to decrease and address the racial equity gap currently facing contracting and purchasing for minority businesses?"

For his part, Kemp emphasized that his number one priority was reopening businesses and pushing to reopen the schools during the pandemic. He said, "A lot of Georgians, including African Americans, cannot go to work if their kids are not in the classroom." He then claimed that "our economy is incredible," when Georgia has some of the highest poverty rates of any state in the country.

In her rebuttal, Abrams did not refer to the desperate condition of poor and working class families of all racial and ethnic groups in Georgia, but instead dwelled on the claim that "black- and brown-owned businesses" did not have "access to contracts and access to purchases" from the $10.9 billion that has been delivered to Georgia by the US Congress in recent funding.

When the candidates were asked by a journalist about the "biggest challenge facing Georgia" and what they would do to address it, Abrams noted that "gang crime is up and gun violence is up," and then said Kemp has "weakened our gun laws and flooded our streets."

Like Biden and many other Democratic Party candidates in the midterm elections, Abrams presented herself as an advocate of bipartisanship, even though members of the Republican Party in Georgia, such as Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene from the 14th Congressional District in the northwest corner of the state, are outright fascist supporters of Donald Trump and far-right QAnon conspiracy theories.

At a pro-Trump rally in September, Greene told reporters that Abrams needed to get "the hell out" of Georgia if she did not like the living conditions there.

Due to the fact that Abrams has so openly adopted right-wing, anti-working class positions, which were on display at the debate on Monday, the Democratic Party-aligned corporate media has gone to great lengths to emphasize the differences between her and Brian Kemp.

The *New York Times*, for example, said on Monday, "For whatever else is happening during this debate, it is serving as a clear view of the competing visions of the state presented by Kemp and Abrams." Other than her appeals to "people of color," the *Times* could not point to any specific difference between the two candidates.

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