

Republican presidential debate—the ugly face of American fascism

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Wednesday night's Republican debate, the first in the campaign for the party's presidential nomination, showed the face of a party that is fascist in all but name. The Republican Party is not simply moving to the right, it has reached a new stage defined largely by ex-president Donald Trump and the fascist thugs who stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, in the first major coup attempt in US history.

Trump, of course, did not attend the debate, citing his 40-point advantage over his rivals in current opinion polls. The eight candidates who took the stage in Milwaukee followed his example, however, in a deeply degrading spectacle characterized by constant shouted interruptions, mutual mudslinging, and the advocacy of one position after another that would, only a few decades ago, have been considered the province of ultra-right fringe groups like the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan.

It is pointless to analyze the debate as though it was an exchange of political views or an exploration of policy differences. To one degree or another, all the candidates conformed to the Trump playbook, based on one of the few books he has read, the speeches of Adolf Hitler: fascist demagoguery, reframed for American circumstances, with a mixture of religious fundamentalism, anti-immigrant nativism and anti-intellectual backwardness.

It is impossible to exaggerate the level of stupidity and ignorance on display, expressed in hackneyed phrases, reactionary sound bites, and a visceral hatred of the working class, voiced by one candidate after another.

Senator Tim Scott said the solution to the crisis in education was to “break the backs” of the teachers unions, by which he meant crushing the teachers themselves, who have engaged in massive strikes, not

the stooge unions run by millionaire bureaucrats and CIA agents.

Former Governor Chris Christie said that the teachers unions were the biggest enemy of America, and boasted that he had slashed public employee pensions during his eight years in office in New Jersey.

Former Vice President Mike Pence declared that he was the only candidate willing to state openly that there had to be major cuts in Social Security and Medicare. None of the others on the stage indicated opposition to this proposal, which would devastate tens of millions of retired and disabled workers.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis called for shooting migrants “stone cold dead” to stop them crossing the US-Mexico border, and said that he would dispatch US Special Forces into Mexico on his first day as president—in effect, the invasion of Mexico by the US military.

IT multimillionaire Vivek Ramaswamy condemned all measures taken to protect working people during the COVID-19 pandemic—effectively arguing that the current policy of letting the virus run rampant should have been adopted from Day One. And he called climate change a “hoax,” in response to a question that cited record heat waves, wildfires and unprecedented rainfall events.

On abortion, the candidates differed only on how far the attack on the democratic rights of women could be taken, given the overwhelming popular support for these rights, expressed in referendums in Kansas, Ohio, Michigan and other states. Most supported a national ban on abortions. Senator Scott declared, “We cannot let states like California, New York and Illinois” have laws protecting abortion rights.

The moderators from Fox News waited until the second hour of the debate to raise the issue of Trump

and his attack on democracy, and their questions were phrased in the easiest terms for the candidates on the stage. Would they support Trump if he won the nomination but were convicted of a felony charge? Did they think Pence had done the right thing on January 6, when he refused to try to block certification of Trump's election defeat?

These questions notably avoided a far more direct posing of the issue: Did the Republican primary hopefuls believe that the 2020 election had been stolen, as Trump claims incessantly? Did they plan to challenge the legitimacy of the 2024 election should the Republican candidate lose?

None of the candidates raised this issue either. They sought to cover up the significance of the attack on American democracy and have it both ways, endorsing Pence's conduct on January 6, when he declined Trump's request to violate the US Constitution, and backing Trump's legitimacy as an eventual nominee, even if he were convicted of felony crimes linked to his political coup.

Despite the various prosecutions, in Atlanta and Washington D.C., on Trump's actions to overturn the 2020 elections, the conspiracies against democracy are ongoing. Trump indicated as much in his interview with fascist former Fox commentator Tucker Carlson, conducted on Carlson's webcast. He hailed the January 6 rioters while agreeing to Carlson's suggestion that America was "moving towards civil war." He described Democratic Party leaders as "savage animals. They are people that are sick. Really sick."

Trump has a wide lead in the contest for the Republican presidential nomination, according to opinion polls, and is competitive with Biden in the general election. His entire campaign is based on bogus claims that the 2020 election was stolen, that he was the rightful victor, and that his election in 2024 will be followed by a campaign of "retribution" against his political opponents.

How is it possible that this would-be fascist ruler, not even three years after a failed attempt to overthrow the Constitution and establish himself as a dictator-president, now has a viable perspective of returning to power?

This is entirely the responsibility of the Biden White House and congressional Democrats, who have devoted themselves since 2021 to saving the Republican Party

and maintaining the capitalist two-party system, the political instrument of the corporate ruling elite. They have limited the investigations into January 6 to the personal role of Trump and his immediate circle, protecting both the congressional Republicans and powerful sections of the military-intelligence apparatus that acted in sympathy with the coup.

While Trump and the Republicans are preparing fascistic attacks on the working class, Biden and the Democrats offer nothing but war with Russia in Ukraine and the buildup towards war with China, both of them posing the danger of World War III. This is combined with an internal war against the working class, in which Biden utilizes the union bureaucracy to suppress the class struggle and impose cuts in wages, benefits and jobs—the sacrifices required to pay the costs of war and militarism.

The Democrats and Republicans are both parties of the financial aristocracy. The struggle against Trump and the threat of fascism cannot be waged through pressure on the Democratic Party or support for any Democratic Party politician, including Biden in 2024. It requires the independent mobilization of the working class, both in the United States and internationally, on the basis of a socialist and antiwar program.



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