

The fascist spectacle of the Republican National Convention

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One need not idealize the American party conventions of decades past to acknowledge that this year's Republican National Convention was an unprecedented spectacle of reaction and backwardness.

The tradition of the national party convention has its roots in early 19th century America, in a period of widening enfranchisement when the mass character of bourgeois politics was a relatively new historical phenomenon. In its democratic beginnings, the national convention served as a means to fight out political programs and to bring forward individuals associated with such programs. At the hotly-contested 1860 Republican convention held at Chicago's "Wig Wam" pavilion, for example, the party adopted a Free Soil platform and nominated Abraham Lincoln as its presidential candidate.

Following the Civil War, the capitalist class consolidated its rule, and the reactionary side of party conventions came to predominate, affirming that the United States was, in Marx's words, "the model country of the democratic swindle." Corrupt horse-trading by party bosses in smoke-filled convention halls became the norm. However, conventions still remained arenas for the hashing out of party platforms, as was the case in 1896 when the Democratic Party nominated William Jennings Bryan on a "free silver" platform at its convention in Chicago.

The convention continued to serve this role through the middle of the 20th century, and at times bourgeois politicians of considerable ability were elevated through the convention system, including figures like Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson and John F. Kennedy. The bourgeoisie grappled with such issues as civil rights through platform fights held at conventions in 1948, 1964 and 1968.

The development of more naked forms of oligarchic rule in the latter half of the 20th century meant that by the 1980s and 1990s, all politically significant decisions were reached in private. Over the last half-century, the massive growth of inequality and ever-expanding imperialist war have dovetailed with the more naked domination of both parties by private capital.

Political life has become more openly criminal and violent, as expressed in the multiple assassination attempts from the 1960s through to today. This process of degeneration was accelerated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the conventions of both parties have been transformed into nothing more than vapid, stage-managed infomercials full of meaningless patriotic bathos.

This week's gathering of Republicans in Milwaukee, however, witnessed a level of political putrefaction that is without historical parallel. Pitched to the lowest, most degraded intellectual, political and moral level, the convention was an obscene celebration of brutality, violence and cultural backwardness. To the extent that any political ideas were elaborated, they consisted of fascist appeals for the mass deportation of 15 million immigrants and mad ravings about the dangers of communism and socialism.

The speakers list was a line-up of right-wing conspirators, CEOs, evangelicals, entertainers, fascist personalities and other political

nobodies. Prominent slots were given to the politicians and media figures most publicly identified with the fascist coup attempt of January 6, including Josh Hawley, Ted Cruz, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Matt Gaetz, Kari Lake, Charlie Kirk, Tucker Carlson and Kimberly Guilfoyle.

To lend a personalist character to the event, four members of Trump's family and several of his close personal advisors gave speeches, including economic advisor Peter Navarro, who arrived at the convention straight from jail. Vice presidential candidate J.D. Vance promoted the lie that the Republican Party is the party of the working man, an ahistorical absurdity to which Teamsters President Sean O'Brien lent credence during his own prime time address.

The convention was a festival of the culturally retrograde. O'Brien was immediately preceded by an "entrepreneur" named Amber Rose, a reality TV star who authored a book titled *How to Be a Bad Bitch* and is the ex-girlfriend of Hitler admirer and rapper Kanye West.

On the last night of the convention, Trump's keynote speech was preceded by a political freak show. Fascist musician Kid Rock performed his song "American Bad Ass," while 70-year-old wrestler Hulk Hogan screamed and shouted and tore off his shirt.

The final speaker introducing Trump was Ultimate Fighting Championship promoter Dana White, whose claim to fame is having invented the "power slap" competition in which individuals sit opposite one another and attempt to slap one another's faces as hard as possible. Such garbage has been systematically promoted for decades by the corporate media and political establishment in a deliberate effort to lower the cultural level and dull political consciousness.

With this backdrop, Trump emerged to the tune of Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." and delivered a 90-minute semi-literate fascist rant, a meandering series of self-congratulatory half-baked ideas rehashed from previous rally speeches. He presented the failure of last week's assassination attempt as an act of divine intervention and attempted to claim the endorsement of the Almighty himself by claiming he was speaking to the convention "only by the grace of God."

Coming on the heels of Biden and the Democrats' appeals to "tone down the rhetoric" for the sake of "national unity," the political content of Trump's speech consisted of a Hitlerian attack on immigrants intended to cultivate a violent, pogrom-like climate.

Trump claimed that immigrants are coming to America to rape, murder and even commit cannibalistic acts against American citizens. "They're coming from prisons. They're coming from jails. They're coming from mental institutions and insane asylums," he said. "Has anyone seen *The Silence of the Lambs*? The late, great Hannibal Lecter. He'd love to have you for dinner. That's insane asylums. They're emptying out their insane asylums. And terrorists at numbers that we've never seen before. Bad things are going to happen."

Trump presented immigrants as the perpetrators of brutal crimes and appealed to the delegation of border guards and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials seated in the audience, saying "it was a

pleasure” to conduct brutal deportations during his first term:

ICE would go right into a pack of these killers. And you see fists flying, you see everything flying and they take them. They put them in a paddy wagon. They take them back and they get them out of our country.

The response of the corporate media has been to treat the proceedings as though they were normal, or even to applaud the Republicans for their showmanship. Not one of the media talking heads had the intellect or courage to denounce the convention for the fascist spectacle it was.

On the contrary, Democrats in the media appear awed by Trump’s gawdy display. CNN’s Van Jones said of Trump’s speech, “Dreams become nightmares and nightmares become dreams. You’re watching a nightmare become a dream for Donald Trump.”

The *New York Times* promoted illusions that a “nice” version of Trump might still see the light and tone down his fascistic rhetoric, writing that his keynote speech

capped off a convention that showed off a party ecstatic over its odds of winning. But it left open which Trump would finish out the campaign, let alone govern if he won. The new Trump or the old? The nice guy or the antihero? In wrestling terms, the face or the heel?

To present Trump as some political genius who brought the Republican Party under his wing is equally absurd. Trump is the rotten product of the degraded political, economic and social culture of American capitalism in its period of protracted decline. He was made possible by a toxic combination of reality television, casinos, prostitution, wrestling and real estate speculation. The fact that he stands to win so many votes is itself an expression of the extent to which public opinion has been degraded in the United States.

There can be no greater condemnation of the Democratic Party than its own complicity in the process of elevating and clearing the way for Trump’s rise and possible return to office. The Democrats have had four years to put forward a program, but have instead focused entirely on the promotion of their reckless imperialist foreign policy aims.

Upon taking power in 2021, Biden proclaimed that “we need a strong Republican Party” in order to win bipartisan support for war against Russia in Ukraine and for Israel’s genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. The administration has adopted Trump’s policies on immigration, shutting the southern border and banning asylum on the Trumpian grounds that doing so is necessary to prevent “crime.”

The response of the Democratic Party to the RNC has remained relatively muted, as Democrats attempt to sort out the crisis of leadership on their own ticket. Criticism so far has largely focused on concerns for the fate of the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine should Trump win the election.

Leadership figures like Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer appear to be moving for the removal of Biden from the ticket, given his clear mental inability to challenge Trump. But it is notable that those political figures associated with the pseudo-left and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) are the most adamant defenders of Biden.

In a social media video posted Thursday, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez warned supporters against calling for Biden’s removal, saying, “I’m not here to use fear to dissuade people out of their position, but I need us to understand the stakes, okay?”

Bernie Sanders gave an interview in which he said

You’re right—sometimes he doesn’t put three sentences together. It is true. But the reality of the moment is, in my view, he is the best candidate the Democrats have for a variety of reasons, and trying, in an unprecedented way, to take him off the ticket would do a lot more harm than good.

What Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders mean is that removing Biden from the ticket poses the risk that the nomination process may, despite the Democrats’ best efforts, serve as a lightning rod for the discussion of the issues the Democratic Party wants to avoid at all cost: the worsening economic crisis confronting the working class and, above all, opposition to the administration’s war in Ukraine and genocide in Gaza.

The primary concern of Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders is preventing social opposition from finding any reflection within the two-party system and assuring the selection of a candidate capable of carrying out the wars abroad. To this end, the DSA and its accomplices hang on for dear life to the quivering corpse of Joe Biden, pretending that they can counteract his and the Democrats’ rigor mortis with reformist massages.

Political conclusions must be drawn from the fascist spectacle in Milwaukee and the danger of fascist dictatorship. Democracy is on its death bed. If the election ends up in the courts, there is no doubt the Supreme Court will place its stamp of approval on Trump’s efforts to rig or steal the election. The Democrats, fearful of mobilizing the population, will do nothing to stop him.

Joseph Kishore, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for president, stated on X yesterday:

The orgy of fascistic reaction at the RNC is the political expression of extreme social inequality, endless war, the US-backed genocide in Gaza, and the ruling class response to the pandemic that has killed millions. As Trotsky put it, “capitalist society is puking up the undigested barbarism.”

If Trump represents in its purest form the political filth of a new American fascism, Biden represents the senility of American liberalism and the collapse of any pretense of commitment to social reform and the defense of democratic rights.

The fate of democracy is bound up entirely with the development of the class struggle. This requires a fight to revitalize the great traditions of socialism in the American and international working class.

This is the essential issue posed to the working class in the 2024 presidential elections.



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