

Charlie Kirk: The Horst Wessel of the MAGA movement

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In the 36 hours following the assassination of Charlie Kirk—the fascist political operative whose activities were lavishly funded by billionaire oligarchs and for which he was paid millions of dollars—he has been posthumously elevated to the status of a national hero. Once again emulating the propaganda tactics of Hitler and Goebbels, the Trump administration is portraying Kirk as a political martyr, an American version of the German Nazi Horst Wessel. After the latter's violent death in February 1930, the Nazis eulogized Wessel as an exemplar of Germany's patriotic youth. A hymn to honor Wessel's memory, the notorious "Horst Wessel Song," became the anthem of the Nazi Party.

In a similar process of political canonization, Charlie Kirk is being transformed into the Horst Wessel of the fascistic MAGA movement.

That the Trump administration and its fascist followers would exploit Kirk's death for its political purposes can come as no surprise. But the impact of the propaganda campaign has been amplified by the collaboration of the Democratic Party and the establishment media.

Accepting the lies of Trump and his minions—that Kirk died in the service of democracy and free speech—the Democrats and media are not challenging the right-wing narrative of events. They do not even mention that Kirk's presence at Utah Valley University had encountered mass popular opposition. A petition signed by several thousand people that was circulated prior to Kirk's arrival stated:

As students at Utah Valley University, we have come to cherish an environment that strives for inclusivity and diversity. Yet, the planned speaking engagement of Charlie Kirk threatens this ideal. Kirk's presence and the messages he delivers stand in contrast to the values of understanding, acceptance, and progress that many of us hold dear.

It's imperative that UVU re-evaluates the decision to allow Charlie Kirk to speak. We advocate for speakers who inspire inclusivity and unity, rather than division. Universities are meant to be places of learning, growth, and unity. Giving a platform to someone whose views are in direct opposition to these principles undermines UVU's commitment to being "a place for you."

While concealing this important fact about his fatal trip to Utah Valley, the Democrats and media are participating in the fumigation of the smelliest aspects of the right-wing operative's career. Excluded from any mention in the media are statements Kirk had made, including that "Jews control... the colleges, the nonprofits, the movies,

Hollywood, all of it"; that "the philosophical foundation of anti-whiteness has been largely financed by Jewish donors," and that "we made a huge mistake when we passed the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s."

As part of this political whitewashing, the use of the word "fascist" has been effectively banned in describing Kirk's political views, although that is the only accurate description, along with racist, antisemitic, misogynist, bigoted and white supremacist.

That this is an explicit political directive by the bosses of the corporate media was made clear when MSNBC—supposedly the most liberal of the cable television networks—fired on-air commentator Matthew Dowd because he described Kirk as a purveyor of "hate speech... aimed at certain groups," suggesting that the fascist agitator was reaping what he had sowed.

Dowd is hardly a leftist, having served as chief of polling for the Republican National Committee and managed the reelection campaign of President George W. Bush in 2004 before becoming a media pundit. But even his somewhat muted characterization of Kirk and Turning Point USA was declared off-limits following the assassination.

Trump and the fascist right have seized on Kirk's death to threaten mass repression and violence against those who oppose them. On Wednesday, Trump denounced those who had "compared wonderful Americans like Charlie to Nazis" and vowed that his administration would "find each and every one of those who contributed to this atrocity." The next morning he announced that he would award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Kirk posthumously, the first outright fascist to receive the award.

Trump makes these threats under conditions in which no information is yet available about the identity of the shooter or his motive. This merely exposes the transparently political purpose for which the killing is being utilized.

As for his followers in Make America Great Again, Turning Point USA, Fox News, Newsmax, Breitbart and the whole array of billionaire-funded far-right media, the Kirk murder is the occasion to threaten vengeance and bloodshed. The *World Socialist Web Site* has also received violent threats in response to its initial analysis.

Trump's son Eric tweeted that he was tired of the bullets only being fired one way, trying to conjure up a deeply false image of peaceful Trump supporters under fire from "left-wing lunatics." Representative Derrick Van Orden, Republican of Wisconsin, did not wait to learn about the motivations or the profile of the shooter before condemning his political opponents and the media. "The left and their policies are leading America into a civil war," he wrote on social media. "The gloves are off. This I will defend."

Right-wing social media was full of such tropes, and there were actions taken already. Telephoned bomb threats forced lockdowns or partial closures of seven Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), including Alabama State University, Virginia State University, Hampton University, Spelman College, Southern University and A&M College, Clark Atlanta University and Bethune-Cookman. A similar bomb threat was phoned into the Democratic National Committee office in Washington.

The denunciations of “political violence” by Trump and the Republicans reek of hypocrisy. These are the same forces that orchestrated the coup attempt of January 6, 2021, celebrated vigilante killers like Kyle Rittenhouse and encouraged armed intimidation of public health officials during the pandemic. Their conspiracy theories have inspired mass shootings from Christchurch to El Paso to Buffalo, the plot to kidnap and murder the governor of Michigan, Democrat Gretchen Whitmer, and the violent attack that nearly killed the husband of then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Only three months ago, the Democratic leader in the Minnesota state legislature and her husband were murdered by a gunman espousing Christian nationalist and anti-abortion views. The response of Trump & Co. was to lie about the killer’s motives, claiming that he was left-wing, and to step up the stream of fascist invective that would inspire copycats.

The response of leading Democrats to the Kirk assassination has been a combination of cowardice and prostration. They have embraced Kirk posthumously, legitimizing his long record of fascist agitation and vilification of racial minorities, gays, women, immigrants and virtually anyone opposed to a Republican Party that has been transformed under Trump’s dominion into the personal instrument of a would-be dictator.

This was true not only for congressional leaders like Senator Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries but also the so-called “lefts” like Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America. Ocasio-Cortez said Thursday that she was rescheduling a planned rally in North Carolina, in part because of security concerns but in part out of respect for Kirk.

The universal line from the Democratic Party, repeated as if following a script, is that “violence has no place in American politics,” or as the *New York Times* wrote in its editorial published Thursday, “such violence is antithetical to America.” Who are they kidding? As H. Rap Brown once remarked, “violence is as American as cherry pie.”

None of the Democrats responding to Kirk’s assassination could even bring themselves to make the basic point that the president of the United States has systematically promoted violence against his political opponents, including leading Democrats. Just one week ago, moreover, Trump murdered 11 people in a shipping boat off the coast of Venezuela and threatened Chicago, one of the country’s largest cities, with “war.” This is not to mention the ongoing genocide in Gaza, backed by both parties, which has killed tens of thousands. The entire ruling class is steeped in blood.

The cowardice and complicity of the Democratic Party are epitomized in the response of Ezra Klein, the *New York Times* columnist and adviser to the Democratic Party. Klein echoed the central theme of Trump’s speech, declaring that the killing showed the danger of “dehumanizing” political opponents. “There is a terrible cost to rhetoric that casts people as irredeemable, as monsters rather than adversaries,” he wrote. “If you spend years calling people

fascists, you should not be surprised when some begin to believe they must be fought with violence.”

Effectively repudiating the charge that Kirk *was* actually a fascist, Klein continued, “You can dislike much of what Kirk believed and the following statement is still true: Kirk was practicing politics in exactly the right way. He was showing up to campuses and talking with anyone who would talk to him. He was one of the era’s most effective practitioners of persuasion.” Klein, had he been writing in the 1930s, would have said the same of Hitler.

Klein’s praise recalls the remark of Leon Trotsky that force not only conquers, it convinces. Rather than mobilize against the far right, the media and the Democratic Party establishment adapt themselves to it. There are those who will say that the Democrats are responding to political reality. In fact, partly out of cowardice and partly out of self-justification, they vastly overestimate the actual power of Trump and the relationship of social forces within the United States and internationally. The billionaires and mega-millionaires constitute a tiny fraction of society. The working class, the massive social force which operates the productive forces, forms the overwhelming majority of the American and world population.

More fundamentally, underlying the response of all factions within the political establishment are class interests. The hysterical denunciations by the far right of the “lunatic left” are an expression of the fears of the corporate oligarchy, which sees any form of criticism of American society as a threat to its wealth.

The Democratic Party’s adaptation to Kirk and the right reflects its own class character. It represents Wall Street and the corporate-financial oligarchy. Its concern is not to alert the population to the danger of fascism but to chloroform it, suppressing mass opposition that would threaten capitalist rule.

Some young people, disgusted by Kirk’s reactionary politics, have expressed satisfaction over his death, much as others hailed the killing last year of a healthcare CEO. This sentiment is profoundly mistaken. Individual acts of violence resolve nothing. They only play into the hands of the far right, strengthen the state and reinforce the argument that repression is necessary.

As Trotsky wrote in 1939, in an essay written after 17-year-old Herschel Grynszpan shot and killed Nazi German diplomat Ernst vom Rath, “Not the lone avenger but only a great revolutionary mass movement can free the oppressed, a movement that will leave no remnant of the entire structure of class exploitation, national oppression, and racial persecution.” To defeat fascism, “it is necessary to set in motion millions, tens and hundreds of millions of the oppressed throughout the whole world and lead them in the assault upon the strongholds of the old society.”

This is the basic issue confronting workers and youth today, in the US and internationally. The struggle against fascism cannot be waged with the methods of individual revenge, nor can it be entrusted to the Democratic Party or any faction of the ruling class political establishment. It requires the conscious and organized mobilization of the working class, the vast majority of society, based on a socialist program.



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