

The Harris-Trump debate: A degraded exhibition of political reaction

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The degraded spectacle of Tuesday's debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris held up a mirror to a political system in extraordinary crisis. Between the mad ravings of Trump and the reactionary platitudes of the warmonger Harris, the debate presented the vicious face of American capitalism.

Both candidates, with the help of the ABC moderators, were careful to avoid discussing any of the burning social issues confronting masses of working people. Throughout the entire 90-minute debate there was not a single discussion or question on inequality, poverty, job cuts or stagnating wages. Neither candidate mentioned that 1,000 people per week are dying of COVID-19 and that the pandemic continues to spread through workplaces and schools.

Trump pointed to the rise in the stock market during his administration as proof of his "great economy," while Harris cited the authority of Goldman Sachs, the biggest US investment bank, to validate her economic agenda. A vast social chasm separates both these Wall Street candidates from the realities confronting the bottom 90 percent of the population.

Coming across at times as completely deranged, Trump appealed to the inchoate rage and frustration that exists in the country. He seeks to direct this away from its true source, the capitalist system and the ruling class, and toward immigrant workers. Immigrants are "pouring into our country from prisons and jails, from mental institutions and insane asylums," he frothed. "They're coming in and they're taking jobs that are occupied right now by African-Americans and Hispanics and also unions."

Trump repeatedly referenced the fascist provocation his campaign initiated last week against Haitian factory workers in the de-industrialized city of Springfield, Ohio, where local neo-Nazis sparked a false rumor that Haitian workers are stealing family pets: "Look at what's happening to the towns all over the United States," Trump said. "Don't go to Springfield. In Springfield, they're eating the dogs. The people that came in. They're eating the cats. They're eating the pets of the people that live here."

Trump represents a definite form of American fascism. And whatever the outcome of the election, Trump and the Republicans will have received some 70 million votes, sweep large sections of the country, and control many state governments and likely one or both houses of Congress.

That Trump can even conduct a campaign, let alone garner significant support, testifies to the complete political bankruptcy of the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party is hostile to making any broad appeal to the social aspirations of masses of people and subordinates everything to the war aims of American imperialism. This is not merely an erroneous tactic, it is an expression of the class character of the Democratic Party, which represents the banks and corporations no less than Trump and the Republicans.

Harris' debate performance, like her campaign as a whole, was pitched to the Republican Party, the military and the national security apparatus. Not only did she deliberately avoid making any appeal to broad social opposition to Trump, she actively associated herself with some of the most widely hated politicians of the 21st century: "I actually have the endorsement of 200 Republicans who have formerly worked with President Bush, Mitt Romney, and John McCain including the endorsement of former Vice President Dick Cheney and Congress member Liz Cheney."

Harris justified Israel's genocide in Gaza and threatened war against Iran: "the one thing I will assure you always, I will always give Israel the ability to defend itself, in particular as it relates to Iran and any threat that Iran and its proxies pose to Israel."

She attacked Trump from the right on China, claiming his administration "ended up selling American chips to China to help them improve and modernize their military," and denounced Trump for calling for a negotiated end to the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine.

Harris declared in her concluding remarks, "I believe in what we can do together that is about sustaining America's standing in the world and ensuring we have the respect that we so rightly deserve including respecting our military and ensuring we have the most lethal fighting force in the

world.”

Harris’s imperialist saber-rattling provided Trump with the opportunity to make a demagogic appeal to growing opposition to the US war against Russia. “We don’t have any idea what’s going on,” he said, noting that casualties on both sides are far higher than what is reported in the media. “We have wars going on in the Middle East. We have wars going on with Russia and Ukraine. We’re going to end up in a third World War. And it will be a war like no other because of nuclear weapons, the power of weaponry.”

The fact that Trump, a vicious imperialist politician himself, could posture as a “peace” candidate speaks to a dangerous dynamic in the two-party system as the election approaches.

The same dynamic was on display when the debate moderators asked the candidates about the coup attempt of January 6, 2021. Trump characterized his role as “patriotic” and pivoted to attacking Harris on immigration: “I ask you this. You talk about the Capitol. Why are we allowing these millions of people to come through on the southern border?”

Harris responded with a string of hackneyed phrases, presenting January 6 as a thing of the past and not a warning of the imminent future in 2024: “For everyone watching who remembers what January 6th was, I say we don’t have to go back. Let’s not go back. We’re not going back. It’s time to turn the page. And if that was a bridge too far for you, well, there is a place in our campaign for you. To stand for country. To stand for our democracy. To stand for rule of law. And to end the chaos.”

In reality, January 6 was a stage in an ongoing and ever-escalating effort to overthrow the constitution and establish a dictatorship. Trump has pledged to ignore the results of any election he loses, and House Republicans are advancing a bill to require all voters prove their citizenship—an effort that would disenfranchise millions of lower-income voters who do not have passports or easy access to birth certificates. Though the bill (called the SAVE Act) will not likely become law, its purpose is to allow Trump to claim that a Democratic victory is illegitimate because millions of undocumented immigrants supposedly voted. Hours before the debate he posted on Truth Social: “THE DEMOCRATS ARE TRYING TO ‘STUFF’ VOTER REGISTRATIONS WITH ILLEGAL ALIENS. DON’T LET IT HAPPEN-CLOSE IT DOWN!!!”

Less than eight weeks now remain before November 5, and polls show the race is neck-and-neck between these two candidates of imperialist war and social counterrevolution. A close race is all Trump needs to move forward with his back-up plan of denouncing the election as a fraud and mobilizing his supporters in the courts and on the streets to overturn it.

Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Joseph Kishore issued a statement following the debate condemning both parties.

“Tuesday’s debate between Harris and Trump revealed the reactionary character of the entire political system and both the candidates of the ruling class,” he stated. “Trump and the Republican Party are seeking to build up the framework for an authoritarian regime, whatever happens in the election. This threat cannot be opposed, however, through support for the Democrats, a party of Wall Street and imperialism.”

Kishore added, “Everything is done to exclude any discussion of the real issues. The terms ‘inequality,’ ‘capitalism’ and ‘socialism’ were not mentioned in the debate. Even though every poll shows broad dissatisfaction with both the Democrats and Republicans, all other candidates are excluded, including the Socialist Equality Party.”

Kishore pointed to the extreme social crisis confronting the working class, including “crushing levels of debt,” “soaring prices,” “cost of housing [which] makes it impossible to afford a home or rent,” “stagnant wages,” and “mass layoffs.”

He concluded, “The urgent task, in the next eight weeks and beyond, is to build within the working class a socialist leadership that articulates its interests in opposition to both capitalist parties. Only on this basis is it possible to undermine the forces of reaction, dictatorship and war.”



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