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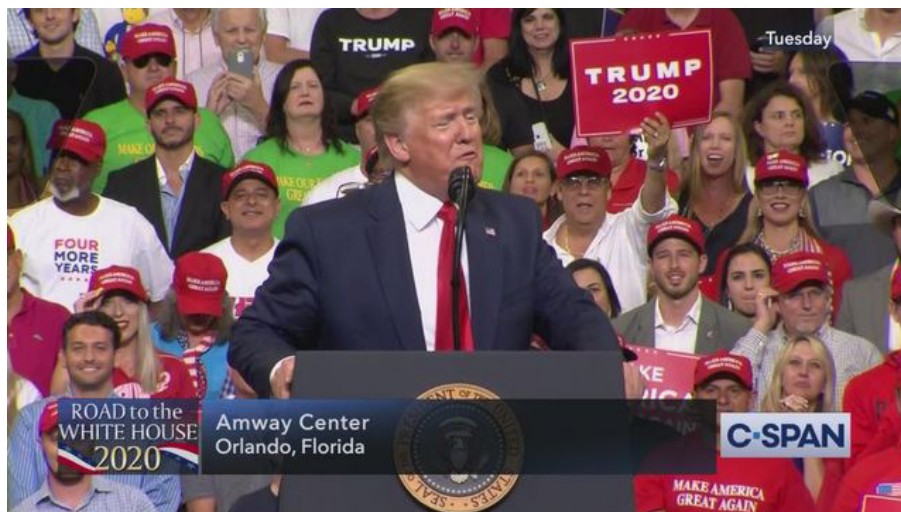
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Trump kicks off 2020 presidential campaign with fascist rally

While Biden pledges to protect billionaires

The campaign rally held by President Trump Tuesday night in Orlando, Florida, marked the semi-official beginning of the 2020 election campaign, an eighteen-month contest between the two right-wing parties that exercise a political monopoly in the United States.

The Trump rally featured the fascist appeals to nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism that have been the hallmark of his political activity since he launched his first campaign for the Republican presidential nomination four years ago.



Trump addresses the rally [Credit: C-Span]

But today, unlike 2015, Trump appeared at the Orlando rally as the unchallenged leader of the Republican Party. Surrounded by the trappings of the presidency, demonizing both the media and his Democratic Party opponents, Trump appeared to be bidding for the role of *Führer* rather than seeking to win a majority of votes in a democratic election.

In a typically meandering and incoherent presentation, riddled with lies, exaggerations and vicious slanders, Trump vilified immigrants, attacked the media (whose reporters at the rally he denounced repeatedly, prompting catcalls and threats from his supporters), and denounced the Democratic Party, which he described as “radical,” “un-American,” “socialist,” “extreme,” “depraved,” and guilty of “the greatest betrayal of the American middle class, and, frankly, American life.”

When he said, at one point, “Our Radical Democrat opponents are driven by hatred, prejudice and rage,” he was clearly engaged in projection. He spent much of the speech re-fighting the 2016 elections, rehashing three-year-old attacks on Hillary Clinton and encouraging chants of “lock her up” from the crowd.

Anyone who takes politics seriously would conclude from this speech that Trump will treat victory in 2020 as a mandate to eliminate opposition, even from the right-wing, conservative and pro-capitalist perspective of the Democratic Party. This is the ominous implication of his closing declaration, “We are one movement, one people, one family and one glorious nation under God.”

The tendency to authoritarianism is expressed most nakedly in Trump’s constant appeals to the police and military, which began as early as his inauguration, when uniformed troops suddenly lined up behind him to form a military backdrop as he was giving his address.

In Orlando, Trump called on his supporters to attend the Fourth of July celebration in Washington, which for the first time in modern history has been commandeered by the White House to serve as a political platform for the president. Trump is set to deliver a televised address before the fireworks, using the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and the National Mall as props in staging his latest effort at self-glorification.

Significantly, Trump said nothing at all about the 2018 elections, which saw record turnout for a midterm election and resulted in a resounding defeat for the Republican Party, which lost control of the House of Representatives for the first time in eight years. Trump has effectively refused to acknowledge the outcome of the 2018 vote, defying congressional authority now that it is in the hands of the Democrats, and ordering his aides

to ignore subpoenas, refuse to testify and withhold documents from the House of Representatives.

Trump has flatly denied that he is trailing in opinion polls projecting the vote in 2020, and last week fired three of his own Republican polling firms when they produced results that confirmed the deep unpopularity of this administration. His Orlando speech was one more demonstration that he could well refuse to acknowledge the outcome of the 2020 vote if it goes against him. Only two days before the rally, he said in a tweet that his supporters might well demand that he stay in the White House after 2024—in defiance of the two-term limit set by the 22nd Amendment to the US Constitution.

Unlike 2016, when he made at least a limited appeal to the social anger arising from deindustrialization, economic decline and widespread social misery—particularly in industrial states like Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia—Trump goes into the 2020 election campaign proclaiming that conditions of life for masses of working people have never been so good.

In Orlando, his rapture over the economy had a delusional character. “Our country is now thriving, prospering and booming,” he said. “And frankly, it’s soaring to incredible new heights. Our economy is the envy of the world, perhaps the greatest economy we’ve had in the history of our country... Our future has never ever looked brighter or sharper.”

This is under conditions where the actual conditions of life for tens of millions of working people remain little changed from four years ago, and in many cases have deteriorated further, particularly for youth and young workers, the first generation in American history to live under far worse conditions than their parents.

Most dangerously for Trump, the past year has seen the beginning of a movement from below, initially among teachers and other public service workers, but now threatening to spread to masses of industrial workers with the expiration of contracts for 155,000 autoworkers in September. Any significant offensive by workers against corporate America will rapidly destroy Trump’s populist pretenses and expose him as a billionaire thug and enemy of the working class.

Trump has one political advantage: that his nominal opposition is the Democratic Party, just as committed to the defense of big business as the Republicans. Congressional Democrats have sought to divert all popular opposition to Trump in a right-wing direction through their campaign over alleged “Russian meddling” in the 2016 elections.

The one genuine note that sounded in Trump's speech is when he accused the Democrats of spending the last two-and-a-half years seeking to overturn the results of the 2016 vote.

The Democrats have done so in alliance with a section of the military-intelligence apparatus which opposes Trump on foreign policy questions, particularly his shift away from the hard-line policy towards Russia adopted in the second term of the Obama administration.

The name-calling and mudslinging between the Republicans and Democrats, frequently conducted at mind-numbing volume, serve to disguise their agreement on fundamentals: support for big business and the capitalist system; defending the worldwide interests of American imperialism; subservience to the military-police apparatus that is the ultimate guarantor of the wealth and property of the US ruling class.

The campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination has been underway for many months, but the first official event, a televised debate over two nights, takes place June 26–27 in Miami, Florida.

The Democratic frontrunner, former Vice President Joe Biden, set the stage for the debate with a series of flagrantly right-wing comments: declaring that the only alternative to collaborating with Republicans was “physical revolution”; reminiscing fondly about his days in the Senate rubbing shoulders with segregationists like James Eastland and Herman Talmadge, who treated him with respect (while they supported lynching and other brutalities); and telling an audience of financial backers in Manhattan that a Biden administration would protect the wealthy from popular anger fueled by widening economic inequality.

Biden's remarks in Manhattan, where he held three fundraisers in a single evening, deserve attention because they demonstrate the class basis of the Democratic Party and show how Trump is able to use the prostration of the Democrats before Wall Street as part of his phony populist appeals.

“You know what I've found is rich people are just as patriotic as poor people,” Biden said. “Not a joke. I mean, we may not want to demonize anybody who has made money.” He went on to warn, however, “when we have income inequality as large as we have in the United States today, it brews and ferments political discord and basic revolution.”

Twice in as many days, the Democratic frontrunner has publicly raised the possibility of revolution in America. And every day, the Republican president declares that he is the bulwark against the spread of socialism in America.

Clearly what both parties fear most is that the emerging mass movement among working people will take on a clear socialist political direction and challenge the profit system, and the wealth and power of the ruling elite that both the Democrats and Republicans serve.

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