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Debate debacle triggers panic in Democratic Party

Thursday night's debate between Democratic President Joe Biden and Republican ex-President Donald Trump was a totally degraded spectacle. One candidate could barely finish a sentence, while reiterating his commitment to US military supremacy and war against Russia. The other openly defended the attempted fascist coup of January 6, 2021 in which he attempted to establish a presidential dictatorship.



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump, left, and President Joe Biden during a presidential debate hosted by CNN, Thursday, June 27, 2024, in Atlanta. [AP Photo/Gerald Herbert]

Biden's disastrous performance has already touched off a full-blown crisis in the Democratic Party. Even before the 90-minute session ended, there were panicked phone calls among party leaders and their media apologists declaring that Biden must withdraw from the race and allow the Democratic National Convention in August to nominate a more credible candidate. The process for carrying out such a shift is highly contentious and problematic, however, with no obvious replacement at hand.

The primary concern of dominant sections of the US political establishment is that Biden's catastrophic debate performance, which has solidified Trump as the frontrunner in the election, has put in jeopardy far-reaching plans to massively escalate the war in Ukraine, to which Trump has expressed reservations. All of their efforts to orchestrate a replacement for Biden are aimed at putting in place a president capable of overseeing the massive escalation of US imperialist violence on a global scale.

If Biden had not so visibly disintegrated on stage, Trump's own performance would have been widely viewed as deeply damaging, even disqualifying. The 78-year-old fascistic ex-president frequently refused to respond to questions, seemed fixated on migrants as the cause of every social evil in American life, and was unable to acknowledge elementary facts or discuss political issues without brazen and obvious lies.

That said, the political crisis goes far beyond the debilitation and disorientation of the two candidates. The CNN moderators are not senile or delusional, but their questions and follow-ups were no better, from an intellectual standpoint, than the meandering answers and non sequiturs of the Democratic and Republican candidates. The entire event was a manifestation of the thorough, deep-going rot that characterizes official politics in the wealthiest and most powerful capitalist nation.

Even if the two candidates had been lucid and coherent, the system which they represent is increasingly irrational, wracked by social contradictions and conflicts within and among nation-states that are exploding into war. If one abstracts from the question of the two decrepit and loathsome personalities on the stage, what is the "choice" which the capitalist ruling elite is offering to the American people?

One candidate represents the substantial fascist and Christian-supremacist constituency in the Republican Party, which seeks to establish a religion-based state that would roll back a century of social gains for working people, women and racial minorities. If Trump were not the candidate, his replacement would inevitably be a younger and perhaps less notorious advocate of militarism, dictatorship and social reaction.

The other candidate represents the military-intelligence apparatus which controls the Democratic Party and is primarily interested in pursuing the foreign policy and national security policies required to maintain the global dominance of American imperialism. Any replacement for Biden would continue the war in Ukraine, support Israeli genocide in Gaza and escalate the US military and economic confrontation with China.

Both parties are fundamentally opposed to the social and democratic interests of the American people. Both are unalterably committed to the defense of Wall Street and the

worldwide hegemony of the United States, against both Russia and China, and rival imperialist powers like Japan, Germany and France.

The consternation in the Democratic and media establishment arises from these considerations. Biden's performance has put in jeopardy the war policies to which they are fully committed. And it comes on the eve of other major political shifts in global politics: French and British elections over the next two weeks, followed by the NATO summit in Washington, at which Biden is supposed to preside.

At the same time, events like the mass uprising in Kenya, the failed military coup in Bolivia, a resurgence of COVID-19 and the outbreak of H5N1 "bird flu," and fires, floods and hurricanes exacerbated by climate change testify to the mounting instability of capitalism as a global system.

Joseph Kishore, the presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party, offered this assessment of the debate:

The explosive political crisis in the United States, the center of world imperialism, is the most concentrated expression of the world capitalist crisis. While the exact course of events cannot be predicted, one thing is absolutely certain. There will be no progressive resolution to this crisis until the working class, on a world scale, comes together as an international force on the basis of a socialist program.

The problem is not Biden or Trump—or Putin, Xi Jinping, Macron, Scholz or any other individual capitalist politician. The problem is the capitalist mode of production and the nation-state system with which it is indissolubly bound up.

The resources exist to abolish poverty and provide a decent and fulfilling life to every human being. But these resources, produced by the labor of the world's population, have been appropriated by a relative handful of corporate exploiters and billionaires, who subordinate all of society to their increasingly deranged pursuit of expanded wealth.

There will, in the face of Biden's debacle and the threat of Trump's return to the White House, be a growing interest in third parties. Both the Democrat and the Republican are regarded with hostility by a majority of the American public. Polls already show that the number of people indicating a desire to vote for a third-party candidate has doubled since the 2020 election.