The political issues facing American workers on election day 2000

The Editorial Board
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The most salient fact that confronts American workers on election day 2000 is the absence of any genuine political alternative. The choice presented to the electorate underscores the reality that the vast majority of the population is effectively disenfranchised by the present political system. Neither of the two official parties represents their interests.

The Republican Party is a party of unabashed reaction. Its choice of Texas Governor George W. Bush, a man who by any standards is unfit to undertake the immense responsibilities of the presidency, is a measure of the contempt in which the Republicans hold the American people.

In the name of “compassionate” conservatism the Republicans are running a politician who has presided over the execution of 145 people. A man without any intellectual interests, Bush is to serve largely as a figurehead—a smiling face behind which will operate the most sinister and reactionary forces in American life. The basic aim of the Bush campaign is to remove all restrictions on the accumulation of personal wealth and lift all restraints on the exploitation of the working class and the plundering of the environment.

The Democratic Party, while presenting itself as the defender of the working class and the middle class, is beholden to corporate interests. Democratic candidate Al Gore has proposed nothing in the way of serious social reforms. He has repeatedly assured the financial establishment that he will oppose any return to “big government”—a euphemism for liberal reform policies.

Gore's occasional populist rhetoric is belied by the record of the Clinton-Gore administration, which eliminated the welfare safety net and pursued a policy of fiscal austerity, enabling the most privileged social layers to enrich themselves at a colossal rate. Under Clinton and Gore the anti-working class offensive launched by Reagan was continued, resulting in a further growth of social inequality.

The Democrats pursue a somewhat different class strategy than the Republicans, while relying more directly on the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy and the civil rights establishment. But for all the ferocity of the battles between the two parties, on the issues most basic to the interests of the American financial oligarchy, they are united.

Nor does Green Party candidate Ralph Nader represent a genuine alternative for working people. His eclectic and confused reformist perspective reflects the Green Party's middle-class social base.

Nader criticizes some of the most glaring failings of the two-party system, but he defends the capitalist profit system on which the two-party monopoly is based. He promotes the illusion that somehow, through public pressure, the ruling elite can be moved to release its grip on the political system and carry out reforms of a democratic and egalitarian character. He combines his call for liberal reforms with a reactionary appeal to economic nationalist sentiments, a political orientation that lends credibility to extreme right-wing forces.

Finally, Nader does not fight for a principled break with the Democratic Party. On the contrary, he presents a vote for the Green Party as a means of lobbying the Democrats, strengthening what he calls its “progressive” wing, and moving the Democratic Party as a whole to the left.

The Socialist Equality Party does not advocate a vote for any of these candidates. This is not because we advocate political abstention, but because to urge a vote for a candidate means to assume political responsibility for his or her policies.

Many who call for a vote for Gore do so not because they are enthusiastic about his candidacy, but because,

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they assert, it is the only way to prevent a Republican victory. This line—the politics of "the lesser evil"—has been advanced time and again to rally support for the Democrats. And time and again, having gained office by pledging to oppose the policies of the Republicans, the Democrats have enacted large parts of the Republican program. The Clinton-Gore administration is a case in point.

The assault on the working class of the past two decades has been carried out entirely on a bipartisan basis, under Democratic as well as Republican administrations, and with Democratic as well as Republican majorities in Congress. In the field of foreign policy, moreover, the two parties have joined hands to carry out military aggression, whether against Panama, Iraq or Yugoslavia.

Even by American standards, the 2000 election campaign has distinguished itself for its sheer cynicism. Neither of the parties has said what it will do if and when the speculative boom comes to an end. Unmentioned in the campaign is the looming financial crisis, the signs of which have mounted in recent weeks, in the gyrations on the stock exchange, turmoil on the currency markets, record trade deficits, slowing corporate profits and production cutbacks and layoffs. The candidates have engaged in a phantom debate, with both parties ignoring the deepening economic crisis that will ultimately determine the policies of the next administration, whichever party takes office.

The sharpest expression of the malaise of the political system is the silence from both camps on the greatest constitutional and political crisis of the past century—the year-long drive by the Republican Congress and right-wing forces in the media, judiciary and business to bring down the Clinton administration. The Republicans dare not mention the impeachment conspiracy because it aroused the indignation of the general public, resulting in a Republican debacle in the 1998 congressional election. The Democrats are no less intent on avoiding the issue, because they fear exposing before the population the decay of democratic institutions and the enormous influence of ultra-right forces within the political establishment.

The main lesson to be drawn from the 2000 elections, regardless which candidate wins, is the necessity to build a working class alternative to the parties of big business. A new party must be constructed to counterpose to the demands of the profit system a socialist and internationalist program that articulates the needs of the working class. This is the political task to which the Socialist Equality Party and its political organ, the *World Socialist Web Site*, are dedicated.

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