The SEP's 2004 campaign: a preparation for coming battles

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The 2004 elections are over. The Bush administration has won a second term during which it aims to escalate its global military aggression and intensify its attacks on the social conditions and democratic rights of working people in America.

The Democratic Party has suffered a humiliating debacle, not only going down to defeat in the presidential race, but losing ground as well in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

This party stands discredited before tens of millions of people who harbored illusions that it could serve as the political instrument for overturning the administration's reactionary policies. The elections proved that the ostensible opposition party was incapable of mounting serious opposition to any of these policies.

For its part, the Socialist Equality Party has registered an important victory. The perspective that we advanced in launching our election campaign has been thoroughly vindicated. We stated from the outset that the struggle against war and reaction could be advanced only through a break from the two-party system and the building of an independent party of the working class opposed to the profit system.

While the number of votes received by our candidates was relatively small, the political content our campaign stands in stark contrast to the lies and demagogy of the two parties of big business. It has served to raise the level of political debate and educate a significant layer of working people, students and youth on both the nature of the social and political crisis and the socialist and internationalist program required to confront it.

Bush, Vice President Cheney and others in the administration have claimed the election results as a popular mandate to continue their policies of militarism and war and embark on a domestic program that amounts to the dismantling of every social reform and restriction on corporate power enacted in the course of the twentieth century.

First, they propose the "reform" of the tax code, meaning drastic reductions, if not the outright elimination, of taxes on accumulated wealth, combined with a greater tax burden on workers' incomes. Under the slogan of an "ownership society," they are pressing for the privatization of the Social Security program, subordinating retirees' limited benefits to the profits of Wall Street. Social Security "reform" is to set the precedent for gutting whatever else remains of entitlement programs, such as Medicare.

In his victory speech Wednesday, Cheney claimed that the Bush had campaigned "forthrightly on a clear agenda for this nation's future, and the nation responded by giving him a mandate."

This is a lie. The Republican campaign sought to terrorize the American people by invoking a supposedly omnipresent terrorist threat. It relied on cynical appeals to religion and social backwardness, over issues such as gay marriage, abortion and stem cell research.

The confused vote given to Bush on this basis is no political mandate. The relatively narrow victory registered by the Republicans at the polls does not suffice to dispel the political stench left by their theft of the 2000 election. This administration was and remains a government based on criminality and lies.

In conceding the election to Bush Wednesday, Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry urged a "common effort," invoked the need for "unity," and pledged to "bridge the partisan divide." He disingenuously suggested that Bush might show "compassion" in his second term.

Kerry does not speak for the broad layers of the population that are deeply opposed to the war in Iraq, the assault on civil liberties, and the vast transfer of wealth from working people to the financial elite—the centerpieces of Bush's first term. On the contrary, he is calling for the political establishment to close ranks so that it can better prosecute these very policies.

The Democrats' refusal to demand a full count of the Ohio vote, or pursue reports of uncounted votes and electoral fraud in other states, is the final act in what was a bankrupt and cowardly campaign. One can only imagine the Republicans' response had the results been the reverse, with Bush trailing Kerry by 2 percent of the vote in Ohio. As in Florida in 2000, they would have mobilized battalions of lawyers, Supreme Court justices and right-wing mobs to capture the state's electoral votes—by fair means or foul.

More fundamentally, the Democrats' surrender is a manifestation of the party's real social base—which is rooted not in the working population, but rather in sections of the ruling elite and the most privileged social layers. No matter how bitter their tactical differences with the Republicans, the Democrats defend the most basic interests of the same financial oligarchy.

Kerry underscored his call for unity by declaring: "Now, more than ever, with our soldiers in harm's way, we must stand together and succeed in Iraq and win the war on terror." He thereby signaled the Democrats' support for an impending bloodbath.

The administration is falsely claiming the election as a referendum in support of its criminal war in Iraq. With the ballots

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barely counted, the Pentagon is already launching a military offensive that will claim many more Iraqi lives and add to the death toll among US soldiers. On Thursday, AC-130 gunships poured cannon and machinegun fire into Fallujah, while tanks joined in the bombardment, in preparation for a ground assault against the city. The operation was held in abeyance until after the election for fear of hurting Bush at the polls.

The Socialist Equality Party campaigned in the 2004 election for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq. This is a demand supported by many millions of Americans, but it could find no expression within the two-party system. We are confident that the opposition to this war will intensify in direct proportion to the escalating military aggression against the Iraqi people.

While the media portrays the Bush administration as greatly strengthened by the election, the coming year will confront both the government and the American people with immense crises.

The popular resistance to the US occupation of Iraq will not be crushed by tanks storming Fallujah. On the contrary, the wholesale killing of civilians will only provoke greater opposition, while inflaming the masses throughout the Middle East. The clumsy attempts by Washington to impose a colonial regime in Iraq will inevitably end in ignominy.

This military campaign is a massive atrocity. It is now estimated that up to 100,000 Iraqis—the vast majority of them civilians—have been killed as a result of the US invasion and occupation. It is an obscenity that under these conditions the Republican Party can run an election campaign on "moral values," while the Democrats seek ways to emulate it. What is the morality of slaughtering women and children so as to seize a country and its oil?

The military operation in Iraq unfolds simultaneously with growing indications that US capitalism is headed for a financial shipwreck. Just one day after the election the Bush administration announced that the US government was on the brink of bankruptcy, demanding that Congress raise the debt ceiling to $8.074 trillion so that Washington could continue borrowing to cover its ballooning deficits. These budget deficits, together with the record current account deficit and rising oil prices, threaten to bring about a crash of the dollar, unleashing a global economic crisis.

We are confident that the political work of our election campaign has prepared the SEP for the outbreak of mass social and political struggles that lie ahead. The campaign served to root our party even more firmly in the perspective of socialist internationalism. In fighting for our program, we championed the interests not only of working people in the US, but of the masses of workers and oppressed all over the world who suffer the consequences of US imperialism's military and economic policies. Our party made the fight for the international unity of the working class the axis of its campaign.

In the final weeks before the election, I had the great privilege of addressing audiences of workers, students and professionals both in Britain and in Sri Lanka on the SEP's attitude both to the Iraq war and the 2004 election. The perspective of building a mass independent socialist party in the United States as part of a worldwide movement against imperialism was a powerful pole of attraction in both countries. The understanding that in the center of imperialism there exists an immense social force—the American working class—whose interests are objectively opposed to those defended by Bush, Kerry and the US ruling elite has revolutionary significance for people all over the world.

The high level of interest in and support for our party's fight for an internationalist perspective within the United States is an indication that any development of the class struggle in the US will be answered by an eruption of mass struggles internationally.

Through the campaign, our party has won a significant new layer of supporters. Many participated in or politically supported the SEP's difficult battle to place our candidates on the ballot—confronting undemocratic ballot laws and the dirty tricks of both Democratic and Republican officials. This struggle served to educate many as to the nature of the existing political system and the profound erosion of democratic rights that is rooted in the growth of social polarization in the US.

The Socialist Equality Party is not awed by the Bush administration's electoral gains. We are confident that the deep economic, social and political contradictions underlying this government will give rise to a new wave of mass struggles. We have utilized the 2004 elections to lay the political foundations for the emergence of a new mass political movement of working people in the struggle for socialism. We will continue and strengthen these efforts in the aftermath of November 2 vote, utilizing the *World Socialist Web Site* to make our program widely known and to unite the struggles of American workers with those of working people all over the world.

Our party is not simply a party for elections. While elections can play an important role, our intervention has been aimed at organizing, mobilizing and, above all, educating. This work will go on. We will continue to draw the lessons of this election and go forward to build the Socialist Equality Party in the months ahead. We intend to advance the work begun in the 2004 campaign, and we appeal to all of our readers to participate in this effort. We urge you to come forward, join the SEP and take up the fight for socialism.

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