

One week until the US elections

28 October 2008

With only one week remaining before Election Day, the opinion polls indicate that Barack Obama and the Democratic Party will likely register a substantial victory. In addition to gaining control of the White House, the Democrats stand to increase their majorities in both houses of Congress, possibly obtaining the 60-40 margin in the Senate required to end filibusters and force a floor vote on legislative proposals.

Predictably, Democratic leaders are already issuing excuses as to why a lopsided Democratic victory should not be interpreted as a mandate for a significant change of policy in an Obama administration, and why no such change will be forthcoming.

As the *New York Times* observed in a front-page article Sunday on the implications of a sizeable Democratic victory, popular expectations of immediate action on health care, home foreclosures, jobs and other social issues “could be difficult to meet even with enhanced numbers in the Senate as well as the House.”

The *Times* noted: “The nature of the Democratic majority, expanded partly through the election of centrists and even conservatives, would also temper Democratic zeal to pursue an overly ideological agenda, Democrats said.”

The newspaper quoted a series of Democratic Party leaders warning against “overreaching” and urging a cautious legislative agenda. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland told the *Times*, “We are going to get new members with a clear understanding that the reason they won is appealing to independents and disaffected Republicans, and they are going to want to continue to do that.”

The most significant feature of the elections is that the entire campaign has been overtaken by an economic

crisis which neither party anticipated. The response of both candidates, apart from some campaign theatrics, has been identical. For all the mud-slinging, once issues critical to the class interests of the American ruling elite emerged, Obama and his Republican opponent John McCain joined in endorsing, over popular opposition, a multi-trillion-dollar bailout of the banks.

What will an Obama victory mean? It will not be long before the campaign platitudes about “hope” and “change” and the “fierce urgency of now” will be exposed for what they are. The American people will confront an administration committed to relentlessly pursuing the interests of American imperialism at home and abroad. It will become apparent that the chief difference between Obama and Bush is not the right-wing character of their policies, but the skill with which these policies are carried out.

Even as the final stretch of the campaign unfolds, and in the midst of an economic crisis widely acknowledged to be the deepest since the Great Depression, American imperialism continues its bloody rampage, with missile strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan and incursions into Syria. The entire election is an expression of the bankruptcy of the existing political set-up and the failure of American democracy.

Once again, as in 2002, 2004 and 2006, the massive popular opposition to the militaristic and anti-democratic policies of the Bush administration can find no genuine expression within the framework of the two-party system, and the basic policies of war and social reaction will continue regardless of the outcome of an election.

For all of Obama’s demagoguery about “bringing the country together” and uniting rich and poor, it will rapidly be shown that he, no less than Bush, is a

political representative of the financial aristocracy.

The fundamental lesson that must be drawn is this: The American working class confronts the necessity of breaking free of the Democratic Party and the entire framework of capitalist politics. The only alternative to growing social misery and ever more violent eruptions of militarism is the development of an independent political movement of the working class in opposition to the existing economic and political order and based on a program for genuine democracy and social equality—that is, a socialist program.

The Socialist Equality Party has intervened in the elections, running Jerry White for president and Bill Van Auken for vice president, for one essential purpose: to clarify the fundamental class issues and lay the basis for the political struggles of the working class that will develop in the aftermath of the vote.

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