

The lessons of the Massachusetts election

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The Republican victory in Tuesday's Massachusetts election to fill the Senate seat vacated by the death of Edward Kennedy was not only a major blow to the Obama administration and the Democratic Party, it was an expression of the widespread social discontent and anger that is building up in the US.

Inevitably, within the framework of a political system dominated by two parties of big business, the beneficiaries of popular opposition to Obama's right-wing policies were the Republican Party and a candidate connected to extreme right forces. Therein lies a warning to the working class.

The policies of the Obama administration allowed the victor, Republican state Senator Scott Brown, to make a demagogic appeal to popular anger over rising unemployment and Obama's reactionary health care "reform," a scheme to cut health care costs for the corporations and the government by slashing benefits and services for millions of workers and middle class people.

The expression of discontent is not in and of itself an answer to the attacks on living standards and democratic rights. It is necessary to draw the political lessons of the Massachusetts election.

Predictably, the response of the Democrats has been to shift further to the right. In an interview with ABC News on Wednesday, President Obama made it clear he was prepared to drop medical coverage for the uninsured and work out a deal with the Republicans to limit his health care overhaul to cost-cutting. Insurance companies responded that such a deal, abandoning the legal requirement in the original plan for people to purchase insurance on the private market, would result in a further increase in premiums.

Leading Democrats have signaled that they are preparing to drop even token regulations on the banks and any measures to rein in corporate polluters. Talk

from Obama advisers about "pivoting" to focus on jobs and the economy is code language for preparing unprecedented cuts in basic entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security and awarding more tax cuts to big business and the rich.

Obama and congressional Democrats on Tuesday, the day of the Massachusetts election, agreed to set up a bipartisan commission to propose major cuts in these and other social programs. Obama is expected to argue in next week's State of the Union Address that fiscal austerity and corporate tax cuts are the keys to job-creation.

Evidently, Obama's handlers believe that they can once again con the American people by combining this reactionary program with a dose of populist demagoguery. They are mistaken. The Massachusetts vote, which saw a collapse in turnout from Democratic voters, showed that millions who voted for the candidate of "change" are coming to see that his campaign was a fraud.

The analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site* has been entirely confirmed. One week after Obama's election, the WSWWS wrote: "Whatever the initial exhilaration over Obama's victory, the deepening economic crisis will sooner rather than later make itself felt in the lives of tens of millions of Americans and begin to clarify the class interests that underlie the new administration. This will set the stage for a new period of class struggle in the United States."

The Massachusetts debacle is a devastating commentary not only on the Democratic Party, but on Obama himself. He is the apotheosis of American liberalism's decades-long embrace of identity politics, which has accompanied its repudiation of any program of social reform and its growing alienation from and hostility to the working class. By means of identity and life-style politics, which appeal to privileged layers of the upper-middle class, the Democratic Party has more closely aligned itself with the American financial

aristocracy.

The fact that Obama has so quickly moved after the election to conciliate with the Republicans only demonstrates that, notwithstanding the bitter internecine political warfare between the two parties, on all substantive issues that go to the basic interests of the ruling class, their differences are negligible.

What are the political lessons that must be drawn?

The interests and aspirations of working people can find no expression within the framework of two parties dominated by the financial elite. The working class must repudiate the Democratic Party and the two-party system and build a mass independent movement that articulates its needs in opposition to the ruling class.

The only alternative to unemployment, repression and war is the fight for a revolutionary socialist program to smash the grip of the financial aristocracy and reorganize society on democratic and egalitarian foundations.

This is the program of the Socialist Equality Party.

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