

The Tea Party primary election victories

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The upset victory of far-right Tea Party candidates in Tuesday's Republican primary elections must be seen within the context of an immense social crisis and growing economic distress in the United States.

The victory, in particular, of two candidates opposed by the Republican Party establishment—Christine O'Donnell in the Delaware senatorial primary and Carl Paladino in the New York gubernatorial primary—is a distorted reflection of the general growth of popular anger and disillusionment with the political system.

This is not to say that the results of these contests and previous Republican primaries in which Tea Party candidates ousted more established incumbents—such as last month's victory of Joe Miller over incumbent Senator Lisa Murkowski in Alaska—represent the emergence of a mass popular right-wing movement. Voter turnout in these primary contests has remained dismally low, at about 20 percent, reflecting broad disgust with both big business parties.

In the Delaware contest, for example, less than 58,000 votes were cast across the entire state. The Tea Party movement itself is not a grass roots movement from below, but rather the creation of elements within the Republican Party leadership. It has been relentlessly promoted by the media and lavishly funded by billionaire reactionaries such as Fox News owner Rupert Murdoch and the oil baron Koch brothers of Kansas.

The Tea Party phenomenon reflects the concerted effort by the ruling elite to create a broad base for right-wing politics, precisely to counter the general shift of the population to the left.

Nevertheless, Tea Party-backed candidates such as O'Donnell and Paladino make an appeal to very real social grievances among middle-class and even working class voters, exploiting the political vacuum left by the uniformly right-wing policies of the Obama administration and the Democratic-controlled Congress.

They combine denunciations of the government bailout of Wall Street, Obama's cost-cutting, pro-business health care "reform," and other handouts to the corporate elite

with a glorification of American militarism and reactionary attacks on immigrants, abortion rights, gays, etc...

Their populist pretensions are entirely demagogic, and the solutions they propose—sweeping cuts and even the dismantling of basic social programs, sharper attacks on public sector workers—are even more brutal than the policies being carried out by Obama.

In Delaware, O'Donnell cast herself as the anti-establishment candidate and pledged to help repeal Obama's health care law. She defeated the heavily favored former governor and current congressman Michael Castle. She turned to her advantage the Castle campaign's attempts to discredit her by publicizing her failure to pay off her college loans and taxes on time, saying this only showed she was struggling like so many other people in Delaware.

Paladino, a multi-millionaire real estate tycoon, presented himself as a warrior against the rich and powerful. He attacked his opponent, former congressman and JPMorgan executive Rick Lazio, for receiving a \$1.3 million bonus in 2008—at the same time the bank was getting \$25 billion in a taxpayer financed bailout—in return for lobbying his former colleagues in Congress to defeat a credit card bill opposed by the banks.

Following his victory Tuesday night, Paladino declared: "Tonight the ruling class knows. They have seen it now. There is a people's revolution."

This supposed revolutionary calls for cutting the New York state budget and spending for Medicaid, the government health program for the poor and disabled, by upwards of 20 percent. He also demands sharper attacks on public employee unions.

This absurd combination of pseudo-populist demagoguery and viciously anti-working class policies is possible only in a country where the real sentiments of the masses are systematically suppressed and no expression of opposition of a socialist character is allowed in official media or political channels.

While the Republican establishment, largely for short-

term electoral reasons, has opposed many insurgent Tea Party-backed candidates, their promotion serves a very useful function for the ruling class. It facilitates a general shift of the entire political system further to the right.

To this point, the growth of popular discontent fueled by mass unemployment has found political expression only on the right. The reason for this is the complete inability of the Obama administration and the Democratic-led Congress to provide any answer to the social crisis.

Having come to power as a result of a sweeping popular repudiation of Bush and the Republicans, in the midst of the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression, and with the benefit of massive majorities in both houses of Congress, Obama has from day one relentlessly continued and deepened the pro-corporate, anti-working class policies of his predecessor.

One measure of popular disillusionment and disgust with his government is the fact, reported this week by the Center for the Study of the American Electorate at American University, that for the first time since the 1930s, participation in Republican primaries exceeds participation in Democratic primaries.

The perspective of left-liberals, such as the *Nation*, and pseudo-socialist middle-class groups, such as the International Socialist Organization, that the growth of right-wing forces can be stopped by appealing to the Democratic Party is utterly bankrupt. It is precisely the continued political subordination of the working class to the Democratic Party that facilitates the growth of extreme right elements.

The issue posed to working people by the crisis is the necessity to break with the Democratic Party and build an independent socialist movement in opposition to both parties of big business and the capitalist system which they defend.

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