

The 2010 elections, the working class and the Democratic Party

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With only a few days remaining in the 2010 election campaign, one thing is certain: the Obama administration and the Democratic Party are preparing a further lurch to the right.

Four years after a massive turnout at the polls to repudiate the Republican-controlled Congress and give the Democrats the majority, and two years after the election of Barack Obama to the White House by a margin of 7 million votes, the administration's right-wing policies have shattered the popular illusions raised by Obama's vague appeals to "hope" and "change."

Millions are coming to see the Democrats as a second party of big business, committed to the defense of corporate interests both at home and abroad. But within the framework of the American two-party system they are given no way of expressing their frustration and anger except by staying home on election day or casting a vote for the even more right-wing party of big business, the Republicans.

Given the orchestrated and manipulated character of the election, with more than \$4 billion expended, largely by the wealthy and corporate interests, and a corporate-controlled media that suppresses any consideration of political alternatives to the two official parties, the outcome of the November 2 vote must necessarily have a contradictory character.

Under the impact of the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, the American population is moving broadly to the left, as suggested in poll after poll. But the official interpretation of the vote, reiterated in a thousand commentaries by media pundits and echoed by politicians of both parties, is just the opposite: the American voter will deliver a rebuke to the supposed liberal excesses of the Democratic Party, demanding fiscal austerity, more tax breaks for the rich and further deregulation of banks and corporations.

Washington Thursday, reported a poll that found some 53 percent of the American people are seriously worried about being able to make their next mortgage or rent payment, up from 37 percent at the time of the September 2008 Wall Street crash. That figure rises to 75 percent among African-Americans.

Of those polled, 65 percent blamed mortgage lenders for the crisis, and a majority supported an immediate moratorium on home foreclosures. Yet the Obama administration has flatly rejected calls for such a moratorium, despite the widespread reports of banks using fraudulent documents to evict working people from their homes.

This continues its right-wing stance from the moment Obama entered the White House: everything possible must be done to bail out the banks and financial institutions, while there is complete indifference to the fate of millions of working people who are losing their jobs and their homes.

A *New York Times* poll released the same day declared that key sections of the population were turning away from Obama and the Democrats, citing a loss of support among women, lower-income groups and independent voters. But the poll results did not show any enthusiasm for the Republican Party, which was rated even lower than the Democrats. More blamed the economic slump on George W. Bush than on Obama. Nor was there support for the extreme-right policies of the Republican candidates linked to the Tea Party movement. Large majorities opposed any cuts in Social Security, such as raising the retirement age or reducing benefits.

The first two years of the Obama administration have dealt a major blow to the pretense of the Democratic Party as a party of the "people" or the "middle class." It is increasingly clear that it speaks for major sections

of the financial elite and the most privileged and comfortable sections of the middle class—including the trade union bureaucracy, the civil rights establishment and wealthiest layers of African-Americans and other minorities, and the petty-bourgeois left-liberal and ex-radical milieu that long ago rejected the class struggle in favor of identity politics.

The two big business parties have already begun preparing for the post-election period. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, in an interview with the *National Journal* magazine, said the Republicans would not repeat their mistake after 1994, attempting to override administration policies even if that meant shutting down the government. Instead, he said, they would seek to “finish the job,” adding, “the single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president.”

White House officials gave a groveling response that foreshadows the predictable response of the Democrats to an electoral defeat—a further shift to the right. Press Secretary Robert Gibbs pleaded for cooperation from the Republicans, saying, “[I]n the weeks, in the months after this campaign, the message that voters are going to send and the message that we as elected officials should take is that of working together.”

“I can assure you that when the political and election season has passed and we get... back into the governing of this country, that this is a president that will reach out to, as he did, and try as best as he can to work with the Republican Party,” Gibbs said. McConnell responded arrogantly, saying that if Obama were to do “a Clintonian back flip, if he’s willing to meet us halfway on some of the biggest issues, it’s not inappropriate for us to do business with him.”

Obama will not have to perform any such anatomical contortions to join forces with the congressional Republicans, since he is largely operating with the same playbook, despite the posturing of the election season. The White House has continued the foreign policy of the Bush administration with little variation, even of personnel—Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and General David Petraeus play central roles.

On domestic policy, back-channel discussions have already begun over a post-election consensus on extending the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy. Obama has campaigned during the election on ending the tax cuts for those making over \$200,000 a year, but Vice

President Biden suggested last week that the figure could be substantially raised, a position endorsed by numerous Democratic candidates in closely contested House and Senate races.

According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal* Thursday, liberal Democratic Senator Russell Feingold is working with ultra-right Republican Tom Coburn “on new legislation to trim billions in federal subsidies and other spending programs,” and there were potential agreements on trade policy and renewing the No Child Left Behind Law, which has devastated public education. The *Financial Times* reported that Obama told business lobbyists he is open to a cut in the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 24 percent provided it is offset by closing “loopholes,” noting that the “reform” is similar to one brokered by Republican President Ronald Reagan in 1986.

The 2010 election starkly poses before working people the need for a new political perspective. The corporate-controlled two-party system is a blind alley. The only way to fight the mounting attacks on jobs, living standards and social programs, and to oppose a foreign policy based on militarism and war, is to break with the Democrats and Republicans and build an independent political movement of the working class, based on a socialist and internationalist program.

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