

The decay of American democracy

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The 2010 US election campaign, now mercifully concluding, marks a further descent by the American two-party system into political imbecility. None of the major issues confronting the American people—the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, two wars, spreading poverty, hunger and homelessness, the plague of foreclosures, mounting attacks on democratic rights, the worst environmental catastrophe in US history—were seriously discussed. Most were not discussed at all.

Instead, the candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties engaged in a war of mutual mudslinging, inanities, diversions and outright lying on a scale without precedent even in the dismal history of American elections. More than \$4 billion was spent by the two parties and various corporate-backed groups created for the purpose of smearing one set of candidates on behalf of the other.

The lion's share of this vast sum went for the purchase of television attack ads that reached a crescendo over the past weekend. It was impossible to watch a news program, drama, comedy or sporting event without being subjected to a torrent of filth, mind-numbing in its viciousness, repetitiveness and obvious insincerity.

In Nevada, viewers were told that the incumbent Democratic senator, Harry Reid, supported free Viagra for imprisoned child molesters. In Kentucky, they were told that the Republican candidate for the US Senate had trussed up a college co-ed and forced her to worship an idol called Aqua Buddha. In Illinois, the Democratic candidate for Senate was vilified as a “banker for mobsters.” A Republican congressional candidate in Michigan was branded a con-man who cheated business partners out of \$6 million.

Much of the advertising is purchased by “independent” groups created overnight for the purpose of influencing the 2010 vote, usually by an influx of

cash from a wealthy donor, a corporate lobby, or one of the major unions. Under an innocuous cover name—“Americans for Prosperity,” “Americans for Jobs,” “American Families First”—the group then buys television time to slime one candidate and promote another.

A major function of the advertising barrage is to confuse the viewing audience and make coherent reflection about political issues virtually impossible. Neither party wishes to actually communicate with the voters on a rational level. Instead, their spin doctors and admen seek to stun the audience with emotionally loaded attacks on opposing candidates, while the actual agenda of the ad sponsors is concealed.

The abysmal intellectual level of the 2010 campaign is not merely a bizarre or grotesque aspect of an otherwise healthy electoral process. It is an expression of the fundamentally bankrupt character of American capitalist democracy.

It is impossible for the two big business parties to speak to the American people honestly and directly, because both the Democrats and the Republicans represent the financial aristocracy, a tiny handful of the population whose interests are diametrically opposed to those of the broad masses.

The populist posturing of both parties has become stale and unbelievable. Obama pretends that his administration has been the scourge of Wall Street, when it has overseen the handover of trillions from the Treasury to rescue the banks. The Republicans in their turn thunder against the bank bailout, although it was devised by the outgoing Bush administration and ratified by the congressional Republican leadership.

The absence of any substantive discussion of issues like war and the ongoing attacks on democratic rights is a demonstration of the degraded and false character of the officially sanctioned political process. Neither party will submit to the popular will when it comes to

decisions on any critical questions.

Bush went to war in Iraq despite mass opposition at home. Obama escalated the war in Afghanistan after winning the 2008 election as the purported “peace” candidate. Likewise on questions of democratic rights: both parties are committed to the continued buildup of the powers of the military-intelligence apparatus, the scaffolding for an American police state.

It has been a full decade since the notorious intervention by the US Supreme Court into the 2000 presidential election and the capitulation by the Democrats to the installation of George W. Bush in the White House. At the time, the *World Socialist Web Site* drew the conclusion that there was no longer any significant constituency in the American ruling class for the defense of democratic rights.

There have followed a series of elections, each more of a travesty than the one before. The 2002 election was held amid the stampede to war in Iraq, with the Bush administration warning of “mushroom clouds” in American cities if Saddam Hussein was not overthrown.

In the 2004 election, the Democrats turned their backs on the antiwar sentiments of the American people and ran a candidate pledged to military victory in Iraq.

In 2006, the Democrats won control of Congress, largely due to popular opposition to the war in Iraq, but the Bush administration escalated the war instead and the Democratic Congress refused to cut off funds or take any action to halt the bloodbath.

In the 2008 presidential election, Obama’s victory was a triumph of media manipulation and illusion-making. The candidate, a virtual unknown with only four years in the US Senate, was selected and groomed by power brokers and moneymen in the Democratic Party, then packaged as a fresh-faced insurgent who would bring “hope” and “change.” He took office amid celebratory declarations that the first African-American president represented a milestone in democratic progress. Two years later, the disillusionment is all the more profound.

These years have not been lived in vain, however. Tens of millions of people instinctively grasp, based on harsh experience, that both parties do the bidding of corporate America, whatever their rhetoric at election time. There is a growing realization that working people need a fundamentally new road.

There is no way out of the degraded and corrupt character of the American political system through such mechanisms as campaign finance “reform” and other efforts to tinker with the rules by which capitalist politicians are bought and sold by their corporate masters.

American politics will be redefined only through the entrance of the masses into great social and political struggles. The emergence of a genuine popular movement from below will explode everything that is false, untrue, artificial, concocted and phony in American political life, including pseudo-populist diversions like the Tea Party.

The way forward for the working class is to build an independent political party of its own—of, by and for the working people and all the oppressed—based on a socialist and anti-imperialist program. This is the policy fought for by the Socialist Equality Party.

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