

The Republican primary campaign

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The Republican Party primary race has, predictably, descended into a degrading spectacle, with the assortment of right-wing candidates seeking, in increasingly vitriolic tones, to outdo one another in adopting the most extreme positions.

The inmates, as the saying goes, appear to have taken over the asylum. But the asylum in question is not simply the Republican Party. The primary campaign provides a window into the decayed character of the entire US political system.

In the lead-up to today's New Hampshire primary, the contending candidates have called for the abolition of child labor laws (Newt Gingrich), the destruction of Medicaid and other social programs (Rick Santorum), a new invasion of Iraq (Rick Perry), an immediate \$1 trillion cut in federal spending and the shutdown of various federal agencies (Ron Paul and Rick Perry), among other proposals.

These are all hugely unpopular measures, and their promotion is symptomatic of a political system that has lost all connection with the sentiments of the broad masses of people. When, for example, Perry in a debate over the weekend called for the redeployment of US combat troops to Iraq, an electronic meter registering the response of TV viewers plunged violently.

The atmosphere of the political debate has its own significance. The various candidates hurl insults at one another and at Obama, the language and tone suggesting an ominous undercurrent of potential violence. The ferocity of tone is inversely proportional to the seriousness of substantive differences on all important questions.

The semi-deranged character of the Republican primary campaign is in part due to the fact that Obama himself has shifted so far to the right that his Republican opponents feel obliged to adopt ever more extreme positions.

Obama has, at least for the time being, secured the

support of dominant sections of the financial elite and corporate-controlled media. The Republicans respond with bizarre attacks on the president, denouncing this front man for Wall Street as a "socialist" in an effort to whip up their ultra-right and religious fundamentalist base.

Neither of the two big business parties has a significant political constituency among the broad masses of people. Aside from the giant banks and investors, the Democrats, largely on the basis of identity politics, seek to base themselves on better-off sections of the middle class. Whatever their "left" pretensions—chiefly concerning lifestyle issues—these social layers are thoroughly hostile to the working class, having materially benefited from the growth of financial swindling and the unrelenting attacks on workers' jobs and living standards.

There are, of course, differences between the candidates and parties. But these reflect differences within the ruling elite itself. What are being worked out in the course of the 2012 elections are issues such as: Which wars will have priority? Where can troops be most effectively and profitably deployed? Should the US move against Iran now, or shift forces to confront China in the Asia-Pacific? What of Russia? How can the "human rights" industry be most effectively utilized to conceal the colonial character of the next war?

On the domestic front, the debate is over how best to prosecute the war against the working class. What are the best means to force workers and young people to pay for the breakdown of American capitalism and the continued enrichment of the financial elite? Is it advisable to make use of the services of the trade unions and the corrupt civil rights establishment to suppress popular opposition, or is it more efficient to simply circumvent these outfits?

Whatever the individual vanities and ambitions of the various candidates, all of them are vying to serve the

most reactionary and violent state machine in the world, and the financial aristocracy whose interests the state defends.

The imperviousness of the political system to the needs and desires of working people has been amply demonstrated by the Obama administration. Elected in 2008 by appealing to popular hatred for Bush and a desire for progressive change, Obama engineered a seamless transition and proceeded to drive the political system even further to the right.

Many of the top personnel, including Robert Gates at secretary of defense, simply switched their allegiance from the old administration to the new. Timothy Geithner, who as president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York worked closely with Bush's treasury secretary in engineering the first round of bank bailouts, came in as Obama's treasury secretary.

One purpose of the Republican campaign is to ease the way for the official "left" (in reality, a crucial part of the right-wing political system) to line up behind Obama and once again declare that the only alternative to fascism in America is the election of the "lesser evil" Democrats.

But as three years of Obama have once again demonstrated, the outcome of the election, notwithstanding the vast amounts of money expended and the huge yearlong media campaign, is largely irrelevant from the standpoint of basic government policy.

Four years into the worst economic and social crisis since the Great Depression, both parties are indifferent to the unprecedented levels of social distress their policies have caused. Far from providing relief to the tens of millions of workers who have lost their jobs or taken wage cuts, the Democrats and Republicans are committed to even deeper austerity measures.

The mounting popular indignation over the ever-greater concentration of wealth and the political domination of the country by a rapacious oligarchy found initial expression in the Occupy Wall Street movement, which garnered broad sympathy among working people. This, however, is only the beginning.

The United States is ripe for a social explosion, an eruption of class conflict on a scale not seen in generations. The coming wave of protest and social struggle must of necessity sweep away the entire apparatus through which the ruling class exercises its

political control. This requires the building of a genuine mass political movement of the working class that will take direct aim at the capitalist system.

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