

The American working class and the 2012 presidential election

Patrick Martin
16 April 2012

With the effective end of the contest for the Republican Party nomination, the 2012 presidential election shapes up as a contest between the Democratic incumbent, Barack Obama, and the Republican former governor of Massachusetts, Mitt Romney.

Working people are being presented with the choice of two right-wing multimillionaire politicians, one of them, Romney, a former investment banker with a personal fortune of a quarter of a billion dollars, and the other, Obama, a proven defender of the financial aristocracy.

Whatever political differences exist between Romney and Obama are limited to matters of a secondary character. The Republicans and Democrats agree on the big issues: continuing and escalating the wars of US imperialism; defending the profits of the giant banks and corporations at the expense of working people; building up the infrastructure of a police state in the name of an open-ended “war on terror.”

The outcome at the ballot box November 6 will be determined, not by the wishes of the American people, but by whether the ruling elite decides to continue to entrust the Obama administration with the defense of its interests or chooses to install a new administration that will introduce certain tactical shifts in policy. The sentiments and views of the people will hardly be involved, under conditions where polls show that the majority of the population looks upon both Obama and Romney with hostility.

US presidential elections have long been dominated by political duplicity and media manipulation. The two parties are both controlled by the financial elite and employ the filthiest methods of corporate marketing to promote their candidates. The entire corrupt framework is aimed at creating the pretense of political choice

while exclusively offering alternatives that are acceptable to and vetted by the corporate oligarchy.

The elections are completely dominated by big money, which is openly and shamelessly used to buy candidates and political influence. There is nothing genuinely democratic about the entire process.

Obama was elected four years ago after being carefully groomed by the US ruling elite to divert popular hostility to the Bush administration and the Republican Party into harmless channels. The candidate offered “hope” and “change” to the masses, while reassuring his multimillionaire backers, particularly through his support to the Wall Street bailout, that he would serve their interests faithfully.

The popular illusions created in 2008 in the course of the campaign that installed Obama in the White House have long since been dashed. The major actions of the current administration make clear that the past four years have represented, not a break with the Bush administration, but its continuation.

They include the expansion and extension of the Wall Street bailout, combined with opposition to any program of direct government job-creation or serious relief for the victims of the economic crisis; intervention in the auto industry to restore the companies to profitability by slashing workers’ jobs, wages, pensions and other benefits; intensified attacks on democratic rights, with expanded surveillance and spying, assertion of the “right” of the president to order assassinations, including of American citizens, protection of government torturers, and keeping the Guantanamo gulag open and running; escalation of the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan and new US-backed wars and interventions in Libya, Yemen and Somalia, as well as threats against Syria and Iran.

The fundamental class character of the Obama

administration can be illustrated by how its policies have impacted the distribution of income in America. A study by Emmanuel Saez of the University of California at Berkeley found that in the course of 2010, the first full year of “economic recovery” according to the Obama White House, the top one percent of Americans raked in 93 percent of the total increase in national income. The incomes of this top one percent rose 11.6 percent in that year alone, while the incomes of the bottom 90 percent actually declined.

In an effort to disguise this reactionary record, Obama has chosen to focus his reelection campaign on the so-called “Buffett rule,” which states that multimillionaires should not pay a lower income rate than working people. While the president spins this proposal as though it were a populist demand directed against the rich, it actually underscores the Democrats’ repudiation of the principle of progressive taxation—that the rich should pay *a much higher rate* than poor and working people.

The same political forces that hailed the election of Obama are seeking once again to dragoon the working class and young people behind the Democratic Party. The mouthpieces of American liberalism, from the *New York Times* to the *Nation* magazine, present this government, guilty of mass murder internationally and the gutting of democratic rights at home, as the “progressive” alternative to the reactionary policies of the Republican right.

These backers of Obama are joined by pseudo-left groups, such as the International Socialist Organization, which support the Democrats by lauding trade union officials who are raising hundreds of millions of dollars to reelect Obama and by promoting black Democratic Party politicians like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton. Representing privileged layers of the upper-middle-class, these organizations support Obama and the Democrats because they support their anti-working class and militarist policies.

The liberal and pseudo-left groups that advocate a vote for Obama in order to prevent the “disaster” of a Romney administration deserve only contempt. The truth is that whether Obama or Romney wins the presidential election, the next administration will preside over the most right-wing policies in the history of the United States.

Once the election is past, the two parties will drop the

charade of intransigent differences and join forces to attack the working class. The Democrats and Republicans are agreed on drastic cuts in social spending, including the gutting of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid as well as other vital programs ranging from food stamps to environmental protection. They are agreed on stepped-up aggression overseas, threatening new wars in Syria, Iran and elsewhere in the oil-rich Middle East. And they are agreed on intensified repression of the growing opposition to these policies among working people and youth.

The great danger facing working people is that the capitalists have a monopoly of political power through their control of both of the officially recognized parties. The decisive issue in the 2012 election is the building of a mass popular movement in the working class, based on a socialist program and dedicated to the preparation of a struggle for power against the profit system.

The Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the presidential election with our own candidates, Jerry White for president and Phyllis Scherrer for vice president, to bring our revolutionary socialist program to the widest possible audience. We urge all workers and young people to consider the program of the SEP, support the campaign of Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer, and make the decision now to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.

Patrick Martin



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact