

Obama campaign underscores dead end of American political system

Statement by Jerry White, SEP candidate for US president

Jerry White, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president
10 May 2012

With his appearances at college campuses over the last few days, President Obama officially launched his reelection campaign. The carefully crafted media events, complete with vetted audiences of cheering college students, were an exercise in empty demagoguery.

The president's remarks highlighted the enormous gulf that exists between millions of working people in the US and the self-satisfied politicians whose wealth and lifestyles insulate them from the social misery they perpetuate.

Perhaps the most significant comment by Obama was his paean to the capitalist system.

"We believe the free market is one of the greatest forces for progress in human history," he claimed, adding, "that businesses are the engine of growth, and that risk-takers and innovators should be rewarded."

Such comments are made in the midst of the greatest capitalist crisis since the Great Depression. The failure of the capitalist system is demonstrated on a daily basis in the staggering growth of social inequality, the breakdown of entire economies, brutal austerity measures and persistence of social want and misery.

More than three and a half years after the financial meltdown of 2008, Europe is descending into a new recession and debt crisis, economic activity is slowing all over the world, and the social conditions facing millions of people in the United States are dire and getting worse.

In his remarks Obama painted a mythical picture of American history where anyone who worked hard and played by the rules has been rewarded with success and wealth. Of his initial run for the presidency, he said, "We came together to reclaim the basic bargain that built the largest middle class and the most prosperous nation on Earth."

What nonsense! Rather than a "basic bargain," the

working class has had to wage a bitter struggle for every gain it has ever achieved. In so far as it wrenched concessions from the corporate owners and the government, for example, during the New Deal of the 1930s or the Great Society reforms of the 1960s, this was chiefly because the ruling class feared social revolution.

Over the last three decades, workers have faced an unrelenting war against their jobs, living standards and social rights, supported by both big business parties. This war has been accelerated under the Obama administration as it has sought to make workers pay for the breakdown of American capitalism, particularly after the Crash of 2008.

In an effort to deflect attention from his own responsibility, the president blamed the present economic crisis entirely on the Republicans, saying they had strayed from "American values" and allowed "Wall Street speculators to reap huge profits by making bets with other people's money."

The choice for voters, Obama said, was between Democrats fighting for "hardworking Americans" and Republicans who "have insisted that we go right back to the policies that created this mess in the first place." Contrasting himself to Romney, Obama said, "We measure prosperity not just by how many billionaires we produce, but by how well the typical family is doing."

The president and his speechwriters no doubt believe, contrary to Lincoln's dictum, that they can fool all the people all the time.

If the conditions of the typical family were really the president's criteria he would have to acknowledge that his first term was a miserable failure. Tens of millions of workers are still without work or have been forced to accept devastating wage and benefit cuts. Millions of households are underwater on their mortgages or are already in foreclosure. An entire generation of young

people is leaving school burdened with unsustainable debt with little or no chances of finding a job, let alone one that pays a living wage.

The expression of concern about typical families, however, was only for popular consumption. From the moment he entered the White House, Obama has done everything to serve the interests of the super-rich.

After transferring trillions to the Wall Street banks, the president used the threatened liquidation of GM and Chrysler to slash the wages of new workers in half, precipitating a wave of pay and benefit cuts throughout the private and public sector. The president has joined with the Republicans to slash trillions in social programs and has already agreed to gut basic entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid.

The stock markets and the profits of large corporations have rebounded to pre-slump levels and the wealthy are doing better than ever. Meanwhile, labor's share of the national GDP is at the lowest level since the 1920s.

The president said nothing about the record levels of long-term unemployment or the growth of poverty and hunger. Instead he repeated the absurd claim that the economy was recovering and producing a record number of new jobs.

In words that could have been mouthed by Republican icon Ronald Reagan, Obama denounced "wasteful" government spending. "Look, we don't expect government to solve all our problems, and it shouldn't try...As a young man, I worked with a group of Catholic churches who taught me that no poverty program can make as much difference as the kindness and commitment of a caring soul. Not every regulation is smart. Not every tax dollar is spent wisely. Not every person can be helped who refuses to help themselves."

Boasting that he "signed \$2 trillion of spending cuts into law" the president assured the banks, "And now I want to finish the job by streamlining government, and cutting more waste..."

Obama and his handlers hope to fool people by packaging his savage budget cuts with talk of "equal sacrifice" and raising taxes on the wealthy. But whatever minor increase in taxes on the rich is proposed—which has little chance of being passed anyway—would be offset by even more budget cuts.

Well aware of the deep opposition to militarism and war, the president said little about foreign policy outside of the claim that there were no longer any Americans fighting in Iraq, and that the war in Afghanistan would be over by 2014. Not only are both claims false, but the

president is preparing for new wars on behalf of American imperialism against Syria, Iran and ultimately against China.

In 2008, under conditions of massive opposition in the US and internationally to President Bush, the media and very powerful sections of the financial elite and the military-intelligence apparatus promoted Barack Obama to provide a facelift for the American state. His campaign was supported by the fraternity of upper middle class liberals and ex-left proponents of identity politics who claimed the first African American president would champion the interests of ordinary people.

The last three-and-a-half years have demonstrated that no substantial change can be achieved within the corporate-controlled parties. The needs and aspirations of the vast majority of people can find no expression within a political system that is controlled by the same banks and corporations that exercise an economic dictatorship over society.

The struggle to defend the most basic social rights—for decent jobs, living standards, education, health care and a future free from war—requires the independent political mobilization of the working class against both the Democrats and Republicans and the capitalist system they defend.

My running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I are running in the elections to provide a socialist alternative to the millions of working people who are ignored by this political system. Our aim is to build a new leadership that will prepare the mass struggles that will emerge whether Obama or Romney wins the election, and to fight for the working class to take political power in its own hands and carry out the socialist transformation of the economy.

For more information and to become involved, visit socialequality.com



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact