

Republican National Convention: A celebration of reaction

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The Republican National Convention opened Tuesday in Tampa, Florida and quickly concluded its main business, endorsing an ultra-right political platform and rubber-stamping the nomination of Mitt Romney as the Republican presidential candidate.

The rest of the three-day event, shortened by one day because of Hurricane Isaac, is devoted to interminable speeches by Republican Party officials and office-holders extolling Romney and his running mate Paul Ryan and vilifying the Democratic incumbent Barack Obama, despite the fact that the two big business parties are in basic agreement on all of the most important political issues.

To a considerable extent, the Republicans have been forced to move further and further to the right, adopting positions that lead to bizarre episodes like the Todd Akin affair, because the Democratic Party has itself adopted openly right-wing positions on social policy (the abolition of welfare, cuts in Medicare and Medicaid), democratic rights (extra-judicial assassinations, domestic spying, the gutting of due process and habeas corpus) and imperialist war (the “surge” in Afghanistan, war against Libya, war for regime-change in Syria, preparations for war against Iran).

The general tenor of the Republican convention was set by the keynote speech delivered Tuesday night. The hard-line right-wing message found an appropriate human repository in the thuggish persona of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie. His theme was that politicians had to choose between being respected and being loved.

Politicians of both parties, he declared, “have decided it is more important to be popular, to do what is easy and say ‘yes,’ rather than to say ‘no’ when ‘no’ is what’s required.” Now, he argued, at this Republican convention, “we choose respect over love.”

According to Christie, it is necessary to say “no” to the expectations and needs of the American people—to slash

the jobs, wages and benefits of public employees; eliminate teacher tenure and gut public education; and cut spending on entitlement programs for the poor, the sick and the elderly.

The New Jersey governor claimed that the people of his state “stepped up and shared in the sacrifice,” although not a penny was extracted from the super-rich or big business. The entire burden of budget cuts and deficit reduction—\$132 billion in a single state, by Christie’s boasting account—was imposed on the backs of working people.

He claimed that his policies were popular in the state, although opinion polls consistently show majority opposition to his drastic deficit reduction measures and growing hostility to Christie personally. Only the collaboration of the Democratic Party, which still controls the state legislature, and the treachery and cowardice of the public employee unions have enabled the Republican governor to sustain his chosen posture as the bully of New Jersey politics.

An incoming Republican administration in Washington would carry out similar measures, Christie declared. “We believe in telling our seniors the truth about our overburdened entitlements,” he said. The truth, in fact, is that the so-called crisis in Social Security and Medicare is the product not of inexorable demographic trends, but the insatiable profit drive of Wall Street. Finance capital looks upon these social programs, the last remnant of the era of social reform in America, as a source for more bailouts and more raids on the public treasury to prop up the banks and the financial oligarchy.

Christie made no reference to the Wall Street crash of 2008 or the economic crisis that followed it. The words “recession,” “slump,” “unemployment,” “foreclosure” and “eviction” never crossed his lips, let alone “poverty,” “homelessness” or “hunger.”

The experience of the past four years has discredited the

capitalist system in the eyes of tens of millions of working people. Wall Street bankers and speculators are widely—and justly—blamed for the biggest social catastrophe since the 1930s. But there is not the slightest acknowledgment of such sentiments in Tampa, where “free-market” mythology is even more dominant than Christian fundamentalism.

There are two concerns revealed in Christie’s emphasis on “respect” over being “loved.” The short-term issue is that the Republican Party and its nominee, Mitt Romney, are deeply unpopular. One recent survey showed that despite hundreds of millions of dollars in advertising by the Romney campaign and pro-Republican super-PACs, only 35 percent of those polled had a positive impression of Romney.

More fundamentally, Christie, Romney & Co. are well aware that the measures demanded by the American financial aristocracy—which calls the tune in both the Democratic and Republican parties—will provoke massive resistance among working people.

There is no way to make popular the destruction of working class living standards and social conditions to finance ever-greater tax cuts for the wealthy and big business. To carry through these measures will require dictatorial methods and the collaboration of both political parties of corporate America.

Christie referred to this political reality towards the close of his remarks, when he declared, in his only reference to Obama, “Mr. President—real leaders don’t follow polls. Real leaders change polls. That’s what we need to do now.”

Translated into plain language, this means that the next government, whether headed by Romney or Obama, the Republicans or Democrats, will ride roughshod over public opinion, pushing through measures like the destruction of Medicare and Medicaid and the gutting of Social Security that the ruling class demands and the vast majority of the people opposes.

The political physiognomy of the Republican Party was also laid bare in the platform adopted by the convention. The document is replete with provisions crafted to win favor among the most politically deranged elements of the middle class, including:

- * A complete ban on abortion, even for victims of rape and incest;
- * A constitutional amendment to bar same-sex marriage;
- * Withdrawal of federal funding from universities that give immigrant children in-state tuition rates;

- * Endorsement of efforts by Republican governors to ban or cripple public employee unions, as in Wisconsin and Ohio;

- * Declaration of English as the “official language,” effectively barring any government recognition of Spanish or other languages spoken by millions;

- * Authorizing the government to conduct religious exercises such as “public display of the Ten Commandments,” effectively abolishing the separation of church and state;

- * The establishment of a national commission to study returning to the gold standard.

The platform also endorses the House Republican budget, drafted by Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, chosen by Romney as his running mate, to privatize Medicare, raise the eligibility age to 67, and transform Medicaid into a block grant to the states with strict financial caps to ensure the program’s rapid demise.

It is possible for a party running on such a platform to go before the public as a serious contender for popular support only because neither the corporate-controlled media nor the Democratic Party dare to say what is: the Republican Party is an ultra-right organization that openly advocates the enrichment of the top one percent of American society at the expense of the rest of the population.

To the extent that its representatives gain any significant popular following within hard-pressed sections of the middle class and among workers, it is largely a byproduct of the right-wing, anti-working class policies of the Democratic Party, supposedly the official “left” party in America. The Democratic Party represents the interests of the corporate-financial elite no less than the Republicans, although in a somewhat more concealed manner, since its assigned task historically is to divert popular discontent into harmless channels and maintain the monopoly of big business over the American political system.



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