The Democratic convention: A scripted and empty spectacle

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As the Democratic National Convention went into its second day Wednesday, the predictable and banal character of this event became increasingly evident. Representing one of the two parties of American big business, the delegates assembled in Charlotte are a million miles away from the real conditions of life facing working people in the United States.

Speaker after speaker has sought to present the Democrats as the party more sympathetic to the plight of workers, young people, the unemployed, the poor, the sick and the elderly. But the speeches, devoid of any actual political content, have only demonstrated the vast social gulf separating the delegates, drawn largely from the more privileged layers of the upper-middle class, and the masses of working people.

Some speakers attempted to bridge the gulf with demagogy, usually of a right-wing populist and nationalist character, like the remarks of former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland and Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley on Tuesday.

Others told personal stories aimed at demonstrating their own rise from humble beginnings, like the keynote speaker, San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro. These accounts, usually of cloying sentimentality, aimed only to distract attention from the right-wing, pro-corporate policies of the Democratic Party.

Many of the speakers did not even pretend to try to connect with the wider audience of working people. Like Democratic House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, the former speaker, they seemed to be indifferent and going through the motions in a sort of political stupor. The wife of a multi-millionaire property speculator and daughter of a longtime Democratic Party kingpin, Pelosi is a charter member of the US financial aristocracy.

The banal and formulaic character of the convention is underscored by a report in the Washington-based publication *Roll Call*, which reveals that the Democratic assembly was literally scripted. According to the newsletter, every word and movement on the podium has been prescribed in advance by a team of professional scriptwriters employed for that purpose.

Roll Call identified the four, all former Democratic Party staffers or attorneys, who make up part of the Podium Operations Team, working under the aegis of top party officials. These four people "have written every word spoken on the convention stage, outside of individual politicians' speeches."

Roll Call elaborated: "Everything from the introductions for each speaker to all the procedural processes, the DNC resolutions and anything else that will knit the convention together. The program starts this afternoon, and from there every name pronunciation and every word choice is noted in the script. Almost every word that will be uttered on the stage from 3 p.m. until 6 p.m. and then again from 8 p.m. until 10 p.m. is already drafted."

The corporate-controlled media plays a major role in the process of image-making and manipulation that is the essence of the political conventions. As *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank put it, in a particularly shameless column, "Do not be deceived by all that talk of delegates and floor speeches: This is a convention of the media, by the media and for the media."

Milbank elaborated: "There are some 15,000 representatives of the media here for the convention, and only about 5,000 delegates. This mathematical imbalance means most journalists spend their time with other journalists at events sponsored by corporations and hosted by media organizations for the purpose of entertaining advertisers and promoting themselves to each other."

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Media organizations are pouring millions of dollars into wining and dining politicians and corporate lobbyists, with CNN alone spending $2 million to set up its CNN Grill at the Republican convention in Tampa to entertain selected guests.

In only one instance over the first two days has there been a breach in the careful packaging of the convention for popular consumption. That came after attacks by the campaign of Republican nominee Mitt Romney and the American Israel Political Action Committee, the principal pro-Israel lobbying group, on the deletion from the Democratic platform of a longstanding reference to recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The official position of the US government, under both Democratic and Republican presidents, has been that the status of Jerusalem is a subject for negotiation between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, since both claim all or parts of the city as their capitals. Consequently, the US embassy remains in Tel Aviv.

In their party platforms, however, both the Democrats and Republicans have backed recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital in an effort to curry favor with the Zionist lobby. The shift in the Democratic platform may have been a concession to Arab-American groups or an acknowledgment of the longstanding US government policy.

Whatever the case, as soon as the platform came under attack as insufficiently pro-Israel, there was a phone call from the Obama White House and an amendment was quickly rammed through backing the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. There was sufficient opposition from rank-and-file delegates that the convention chairman had to call three voice votes, and then—without justification, according to most observers—declared the amendment adopted by a two-thirds margin. Also added to the platform was the word “God,” the absence of which came under attack by religious groups.

This incident underscores both the stage-managed and undemocratic character of the convention, and the complete alignment of the Democratic Party with the political requirements of American imperialism, including Washington’s use of the state of Israel as its major proxy in the Middle East.

The platform which was amended to reinstate the language on Jerusalem praises President Obama effusively for the killing of Osama bin Laden, hails the US-NATO intervention to overthrow and murder Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and backs US aid to anti-government groups in Syria and Iran, the two countries that are now the major targets for imperialist aggression in the region.

At the same time, the platform is discreetly silent on Obama’s claim of presidential authority to assassinate American citizens, asserted after the drone missile strike that killed US-born Islamic preacher Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen. Indeed, the word “drone” makes no appearance in the 80-page document.

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