

The Democratic convention opens

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4 September 2012

Today is the opening session of the Democratic National Convention, the second of the nominating conventions in the US two-party system, setting the stage for the fall presidential campaign between President Obama and the Republican candidate Mitt Romney.

Like the Republican convention last week in Tampa, Florida, the Democratic convention in Charlotte, North Carolina is not a genuine deliberative or decision-making body, but an elaborately staged and carefully scripted public ritual. It is being financed with \$18 million in taxpayer funds, as well as tens of millions more provided by corporations and banks. Despite the fact that every speech has been preapproved and that the outcome of the convention is a foregone conclusion, the convention will receive saturation coverage by cable television as well as an hour each night on the broadcast networks.

The sole purpose of the convention is the renomination—perhaps “coronation” is a more appropriate word—of the Obama-Biden ticket. Dozens of Democratic Party speakers will sing the praises of the current administration and warn of the pernicious consequences of the election of Romney and his running mate Paul Ryan. The Republicans, they will say, aim to destroy social programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, enact new tax cuts for the wealthy, and carry out attacks on the democratic rights of women, gays, Hispanics, African Americans and working people as a whole.

There is no doubt that such appeals will get a certain hearing, particularly after the repulsive spectacle of the Republican convention last week, which displayed a grotesque combination of social reaction, unbridled greed and brazen lying.

But for all its “pro-people” posturing, the Democratic Party, no less than the Republicans, defends the interests of the corporate elite at home and abroad.

There is, however, a division of labor between the two capitalist parties that is most evident during a period of open electoral contention like the fall presidential campaign.

The Republicans represent the unvarnished, ugly face of capitalist reaction; the Democrats seek to mask that reality behind a cloud of pseudo-populist rhetoric, reinforced by the more diverse character of their political personnel, above all Obama himself, the first African-American president. The Democratic convention will include hundreds of delegates drawn from the black and Hispanic middle class, including the trade union apparatus, as well as from women’s rights and gay rights groups.

These are differences, however, of a purely secondary character—a good cop, bad cop routine. Under conditions where the policies of the Obama administration have benefited only the super-rich, the Republican Party makes a cynical appeal to working people, pointing to the 23 million still unemployed or underemployed four years after the financial crash. The Democratic Party makes an equally phony appeal, pointing to the ultra-right program of the Republicans, which would actually make the crisis even worse for working people.

The Democratic Party that assembles in Charlotte Tuesday offers no alternative to the Republicans and their reactionary program. On the contrary, the record of the Democrats is that after routing the Republicans in the 2008 election and winning the White House and control of both houses of Congress, they proceeded to carry out the program of the ultra-right and big business and not the promises Obama made to working people.

On issue after issue, Obama continued the policies of George W. Bush. He embraced the Wall Street bailout, insuring that trillions of Treasury dollars were made available to save the banks, while millions of homeowners were plunged into foreclosure and

eviction without any government rescue. His stimulus package consisted largely of tax cuts, designed to win Republican support, and the White House refused to launch a public works program or take any other direct action to create jobs for the millions of unemployed workers. Obama pushed through the bailout and reorganization of the auto industry at the expense of the workers, slashing pay for new-hires by 50 percent and cutting pensions and health care benefits for retirees.

After winning the Democratic nomination as the supposedly most antiwar candidate, Obama embraced the Bush administration warmongers, retaining Bush's defense secretary, Robert Gates, barring any prosecution of Bush officials for the lies that accompanied the war in Iraq or the use of torture, and keeping open Guantanamo Bay and other US torture centers. Obama tripled the number of troops in Afghanistan, waged war in Libya, and ordered drone missile strikes that have incinerated men, women and children in half a dozen countries. He is the first US president to assert the right to assassinate any American citizen, anywhere on the globe, based solely on his executive authority, without either legal or judicial sanction.

Obama's signature social policy initiative, the health care "reform" legislation, was a compendium of reactionary measures—some borrowed from the Republicans, like the "individual mandate," a regressive tax on lower-income working people—implemented for a reactionary purpose: to cut the health care costs of US corporations and the government by forcing working people either to use fewer health care services or pay for them out of pocket. This was not a genuine social reform, like Social Security or Medicare, but a major step towards denying millions the health care they need, an effort that will accelerate after the election, regardless which candidate wins the presidency.

For many decades, working people have been told by the trade union officials, the civil rights leaders and the media representatives of liberalism that they should vote for the Democrats as the "lesser evil," to keep out the Republicans. But the reformist liberalism of the Democratic Party of the New Deal period was dead and buried in the 1960s. The limited reforms of the Johnson administration were its last gasp.

Since then, both the Democrats and the Republicans,

reacting to the deterioration of the global position of American capitalism, have shifted steadily to the right, with the Republican Party generally setting the political tune whether in or out of office, and the Democrats struggling to keep pace. From 1980 on, under both parties, American society has seen the uninterrupted growth of social and economic inequality and the embrace of militarism and social reaction by all sections of the political establishment.

These processes continue whether a Democrat or a Republican is in the White House and regardless which party controls Congress. As the transition from Bush to Obama demonstrated, the continuity between administrations is far more significant than any break or shift in policy. This will be true as well if Romney and Ryan replace Obama and Biden.

The task facing working people in the United States is to understand the political dead-end represented by the two-party system and draw the necessary political conclusions. The working class must break out of this corporate straitjacket and build its own independent party, based on the socialist reorganization of economic life to serve the needs of working people, the vast majority of the population, not private profit and the accumulation of obscene levels of private wealth.

This is the perspective fought for in the 2012 elections by the Socialist Equality Party and our candidates for president and vice president, Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer. For more information on the SEP campaign, visit www.socialequality.com

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