After the conventions: The political issues in the 2012 elections

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The Democratic and Republican Party national conventions have concluded and the principal parties of American capitalism have officially selected their candidates for the elections to be held November 6. In the course of two weeks of stage-managed spectacles and media hype, the conventions managed to evade any serious discussion of the fundamental issues facing the American people.

It is now four years since the financial collapse of 2008 set off the greatest world economic crisis since the 1930s, yet there is no end in sight. The countries of Europe stagger from one bankruptcy and bank bailout to the next. Production is slowing sharply in China, India and Brazil. The United States is beset by an unrelenting jobs crisis, highlighted by the miserable employment report issued by the Labor Department on Friday, which exposed the fraud of the Obama administration's pretensions to an economic "recovery."

Mass unemployment, poverty, unending war, the erosion of the most basic democratic rights—this is the "new normal." The conditions that prevail stand as an unanswerable indictment of the capitalist system and therefore pose the necessity for its alternative: socialism.

The conventions, in their own way, expose the bankruptcy of the economic system that the two parties jointly defend. In the course of two weeks, the Democrats and Republicans vied with one another in their displays of demagogy and lying aimed at cloaking the fact that they have nothing to offer the American people.

For the most part, the population looks on with disinterest. The game has been played so many times, with the same tired rhetoric and hollow phrases. The media engages in nonstop coverage in an effort to puff up the political windbags who comprise the leading personnel of the two parties.

Each party has its own particular brand of lies. The Republicans, sensing the widespread disillusionment after four years of the Obama administration, are seeking to palm off their reactionary free-market nostrums and program of tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy as the solution to the jobs crisis. They combine cynical criticisms of Obama's sweeping cuts in Medicare with their own proposals to dismantle the program entirely. Their candidate, Mitt Romney, personifies the financial aristocracy, having accumulated his $200 million fortune as a private equity speculator and asset stripper.

While defending the same basic class interests, the Democrats employ somewhat different rhetoric in an attempt to present themselves as "pro-people." Seeking to deflect criticism of their own record, they hypocritically posture as opponents of Wall Street and the banks. The principal speakers at the convention, including Obama and former president Bill Clinton, elaborated a fictional narrative, presenting the past four years as an epic struggle by the administration on behalf of ordinary people, in opposition to the wealthy and their Republican backers. Obama, the argument went, just needs "more time" to get the job done.

The posturing of the Democrats stands in direct contrast with the actual record of the last four years. Obama declared, for example, that the Democrats "believe that when a CEO pays his auto workers enough to buy the cars that they build, the whole company does better." Yet it was the administration itself that conditioned its restructuring of the auto industry on the acceptance of a 50 percent pay cut for new-hires. This war on wages and benefits has been extended throughout the country and is the basis of the administration's goal of "insourcing" manufacturing by driving down labor costs.

Since coming to office, the Obama administration has done everything it could to defend the interests of the corporate and financial elite. Trillions were handed to the banks with no strings attached. The crisis was set off by criminality and corruption on a massive scale, yet no one

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has been held accountable and not a single banker has been prosecuted. Nothing has been done to assist the millions of people who have lost their jobs or been thrown out of their homes.

Imparting to its campaign an especially ghoulish and disgustingly chauvinistic character, the administration is waving the bloody shirt of Osama bin Laden. The extrajudicial killing of bin Laden is being trumpeted shamelessly as proof of the administration's ruthlessness in defending the interests of American imperialism.

The United States is engaged in a campaign of unending war, targeting one country after another. The elections are being held under the threat of an imminent war against Iran. A future war between the United States and China or Russia has the air of inevitability as the American ruling class seeks to assert its hegemony over every inch of land, sea and air.

American democracy is itself in an advanced state of decay. The media's mantra of "Your choice, your vote" is a fraud. The people, in reality, decide nothing. The electoral process is controlled by massive corporations, Wall Street and the super-rich. These are the forces that control the two-party system and will determine the policies of the government, regardless which candidate wins.

The results of Obama's 2008 victory prove the point. The changes that followed the election were purely cosmetic. In substance, the worst of the policies of the hated Bush administration were either continued or intensified.

The rich have gotten richer. The position of the working class has deteriorated. The military exerts ever-greater power over the state. The CIA pursues its criminal operations with impunity. Over the course of the past four years, Obama has gone further than his predecessor in asserting the right to kill anyone anywhere, including US citizens, without even the pretense of judicial review.

Obama's record of reaction reflects not simply one administration, but the entire social system that it defends. Capitalism has failed. A genuine alternative is necessary.

The Socialist Equality Party and its presidential and vice presidential candidates—Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer—are intervening in the elections to arm the working class with a revolutionary socialist program. Our program states that the only solution to the crisis facing workers in the United States and internationally is premised on the radical reorganization of economic life, an end to the dictatorship of the banks and corporations, and the establishment of genuine equality.

The SEP is advancing a revolutionary program based on the international unity of the working class. We call for the transformation of the giant corporations into publicly owned and democratically controlled enterprises run on the basis of social need, not private profit. The rights of the working class—for decent-paying jobs, quality health care, affordable education—cannot be secured without a political fight against the power and privileges of the financial aristocracy.

The realization of this program is possible only through mass struggle. In every country, the working class is beginning to fight against the dictates of the corporations and the banks. In the United States, the ability of the trade unions, in alliance with the Democratic Party and its "left" supporters, to contain and suppress open class conflict is increasingly tenuous. At the same time, the confidence of American workers in the capitalist system has been vastly eroded.

Nothing can be achieved within the existing political system. The fight for equality, peace and democratic rights is the fight for socialism. But this can be achieved only through a break with the two-party system and the independent political mobilization of the working class.

The SEP urges workers and youth throughout the country to vote for our candidates. In some states, White and Scherrer will be on the ballot. Due to extremely undemocratic ballot access laws, in many states supporters will have to cast a write-in vote. Every vote for White and Scherrer is a class-conscious vote for socialism.

We need more than votes, however. The central purpose of the SEP campaign is the building of a revolutionary leadership in the working class. This requires the active support of all those who have drawn the necessary political conclusions from the experiences of the past four years. Socialism will not come about automatically; it must be fought for. We urge all those who are following the SEP campaign to make the decision to take up this fight by joining the Socialist Equality Party.

For more information on joining the SEP, click here.

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