# The US elections and the unemployed

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The controversy that has broken out over the US Labor Department's report Friday on jobs and unemployment only testifies to the unbridgeable gulf between the corporate ruling elite, including both the Democratic and Republican parties, and the working people who comprise the vast majority of the population.

The official figures showed a net gain of 114,000 jobs during the month of September, a number that closely tracked previous estimates, combined with a greater than expected drop in the unemployment rate, from 8.1 percent to 7.8 percent. More than 40 percent of the unemployed, nearly five million workers, have been jobless for more than six months.

The Obama administration and the Democratic Party immediately hailed the decline in the unemployment rate, which fell below 8 percent for the first time since Obama entered the White House. They viewed the report as a welcome change of subject from the president's dismal performance in Wednesday night's presidential debate.

Republican Party and right-wing media pundits denounced the report, particularly the unemployment rate, as the product of a conspiracy by pro-Obama government officials to provide a favorable jobless figure one month before the November 6 presidential election.

There is a seeming contradiction between the extremely modest job gains reported by the survey of employers—only 114,000 net new jobs—and the survey of households that found an increase of more than 800,000. However, the two figures are generated by separate surveys, with the household survey itself notoriously volatile, and they frequently show conflicting results.

Moreover, the household survey found the bulk of the increase, nearly 600,000 jobs, came in part-time employment, and much of this seems related to a change in the seasonal pattern of college students reducing work hours when they go back to school. August showed an unexpectedly large decline in employment among those aged 20 to 24, 530,000 compared to an historical average of 98,000. September's large increase may simply reflect a reversal to that abnormal decline.

What is most remarkable about the controversy is how low the bar has been set to mark economic "progress." Democrats rejoice and Republicans cry foul over an unemployment report that would in any other presidential year have been regarded as catastrophic. No president since Franklin Roosevelt in the Great Depression has been reelected with an unemployment rate as high as 7.3 percent.

The two big business parties view the unemployment figures purely from the standpoint of gaining an edge in the mutual mudslinging of the final month of a presidential election campaign. Neither party has the slightest concern for the actual conditions of life of the 12.1 million officially out of work, the 23 million who are either unemployed or working only part-time when they need full-time jobs, or the tens of millions more living in poverty and increasing desperation.

Obama and the Democrats have proposed nothing to put the unemployed back to work, let alone create jobs that pay anything above poverty-level wages. The "stimulus" package adopted in 2009, when the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress, was deliberately crafted to attract Republican support,

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focusing on tax cuts for business and excluding any direct job creation by the federal government.

From the time Obama entered the White House, his major concern was to bail out the Wall Street banks and the auto companies at the expense of the working class.

The Republicans, who traditionally set the agenda and boundary lines of big business politics, have been even more vehement in opposition to any measures to alleviate poverty, unemployment and social misery, proposing budgets that would virtually wipe out domestic social spending, ending food stamps and Medicaid as entitlements and transferring them to the states with strictly limited funding.

Romney, in a moment of genuine candor, revealed the real attitude of both presidential candidates towards working people when he dismissed the “47 percent” who believe they are entitled to decent housing, food and social services. “I can’t worry about them,” he said. This 47 percent includes all the unemployed whom the Republican candidate pretends to sympathize with in his campaign speeches.

In the 2012 election campaign, only one party speaks for the unemployed and underemployed and upholds the right to a job as the most fundamental of social rights: that is the Socialist Equality Party and our candidates, Jerry White for president and Phyllis Scherrer for vice president.

The SEP campaign demands an emergency public works program to provide employment for all, rebuilding schools, hospitals, public housing, roads, mass transportation and other social infrastructure. We demand paid job training and employment for all laid-off workers and for the new generation of young people now entering the workforce. We call for the mobilization of the working class in direct struggle against mass layoffs and workplace shutdowns, particularly under conditions where a new downturn in the economy is looming.

The fight for jobs is bound up with a broader struggle to develop a mass political movement of the working class based on a socialist program. This will be the subject of the regional conferences being held by the SEP and our youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, in the final weeks of the election campaign. To find out more and to attend these conferences, click here.

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