The class issues in the 2012 US elections

Jerry White
11 October 2012

With less than four weeks to the US elections, vice presidential candidates Joseph Biden and Paul Ryan will debate tonight, with the Democratic Party hoping to recover from the impact of President Obama's dismal performance last week in the first debate.

The event still resonates, not so much because Obama had a bad night, but because the political essence of his entire administration was concentrated in his performance before tens of millions of viewers. Since taking office President Obama has led a right-wing administration that has served the interests of Wall Street. How could Obama attack Romney, who personifies the financial aristocracy whose class interests the Democratic president so loyally serves?

Under conditions of the worst economic and social crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s—with record levels of long-term unemployment, hunger and poverty—Obama has refused to offer any relief. Instead, he has signed on to a bipartisan agreement to be enacted after the elections to cut trillions more from the budget by slashing programs upon which millions of people depend.

Any effort by Obama and his political handlers to recoup their losses by more directly attacking Romney will rightly be seen as insincere posturing. The real Obama was on display on October 3 in Denver.

The president's falling poll numbers and the real possibility that Romney could prevail in the elections have created a sense of nervousness in the one section of American society that has backed Obama so enthusiastically—the left-liberal establishment. As usual, the most consistent representative of this social layer is the *Nation* magazine.

In its editorial, "Re-elect the President," the *Nation* puts together a tortured and totally unconvincing argument to back Obama. It begins with a series of devastating admissions:

The president has attacked workers and excluded any discussion on "staggering rates of poverty."

He has reneged on his promise to close Guantánamo, end military tribunals and restore the rule of law for terror suspects.

He has "launched a drone war that is killing civilians and fueling a backlash against the United States throughout the Muslim world."

Under Obama, "more power has been concentrated in the White House by a president who now reserves the right to extra-judicially assassinate US citizens."

But none of this should dissuade people from voting for Obama!

The *Nation* writes: "Whatever disappointments we have with Obama's first term—and there are many—progressives have a profound interest in the popular rejection of the Romney/Ryan ticket." A Republican victory, it insists, would "strike a devastating blow to progressive values and movements, locking us in rear-guard actions on a range of issues—from the rights of women, minorities, immigrants and LGBT people to the preservation of social insurance programs and a progressive tax structure."

Why anyone should believe an anti-working class and war-mongering president can be entrusted with defending people's democratic or social rights, the *Nation* does not say.

In conclusion, the editorial declares, "Progressives made real advances during Obama's four years in office and we can build on the lessons and struggles of his first term if he's given a second."

Who are these "progressives" who benefited under the Obama administration? It cannot be the working class, which has suffered a historic decline in its living standards.

No, the vague category of "progressives" describes a social milieu made up of trade union executives, academics, lawyers and other professionals who benefit

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from identity politics and career opportunities linked to the Democratic Party. This upper-middle class layer has seen its stock portfolios and incomes rise over the last four years and fears it will lose out if the Republicans are elected.

The *Nation* unwittingly reveals the dead end of the "lesser-of-two-evils" argument that has been used in election after election to block the development of a real political alternative for the working class. Far from protecting democratic and social rights, this bankrupt perspective has only opened the door to ever-deeper political reaction, with the capitalist candidates in each successive election staking out positions even further to the right than in the previous one.

Such politics leave the working class politically unprepared for what will happen regardless of who wins the election on November 6—namely, an escalation of imperialist war and the war on the working class.

Herein lies the great significance of the Socialist Equality Party's campaign in the 2012 elections. We are defining the political issues and fighting to provide the political leadership and perspective for the social struggles that are coming. Throughout the world—from South Africa, the Middle East, Europe and China to the strikes of Chicago teachers and Detroit city workers in the US—the working class is being driven into struggle by the global economic crisis and the capitalists' determination to make the working class pay for it.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are holding a series of regional conferences entitled "Socialism and the 2012 Elections" on the East and West coasts and in the Midwest. These conferences will draw a balance sheet of the political experiences of our election campaign and provide the direction for the building of a mass socialist party of the working class. We invite workers, students, young people and all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to attend and sign up to join the SEP and IYSSE today.

Jerry White

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