

US debate night number two

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This evening's nationally televised debate between President Barack Obama and his Republican opponent Mitt Romney will be no less stage-managed than the first one earlier this month. Nothing will be seriously or honestly discussed.

The real policies that are being prepared for the aftermath of the November 6 election, regardless which of the two candidates wins, will not be broached. Instead, there will be the usual diversions and trivialities of American politics. The post-debate talking heads, all millionaires and all linked to various corporate and state interests, can be counted on to claim there is a sharply defined choice for voters between two competing "visions" for America.

Whether or not Obama "comes out swinging" after his dismal performance in the first debate is a matter of little real importance. Who is deemed the "winner" and who the "loser" will have more to do with the preference, apparently as yet unsettled, of the corporate-financial elite than the merit of arguments or the verdict of the viewing public.

Observing the first presidential debate and last week's vice presidential event, and the election campaign as a whole, one would never guess that the United States is in the fifth year of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. There is virtually no mention of mass unemployment, record home foreclosures, the epidemic of utility shutoffs, or the growth of poverty, hunger and social inequality.

Both candidates will proclaim their devotion to the American "middle class," while remaining silent on their joint plans for intensified attacks after the election on basic social programs and the living standards of working people.

How many voters are aware that senators from both parties are meeting behind closed doors, with the Obama administration's support, to draft a budget deal for the post-election lame duck Congress that includes

massive cuts in Medicare and other entitlement programs as well as tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy? Or that Obama has worked with the Republicans to cut unemployment benefits for the long-term jobless, and is preparing to end them altogether after the New Year?

It is extraordinary that four years after the greatest economic crash in nearly a century, not a single genuine social reform has been enacted. One fact alone reveals the social interests represented by the Obama administration: the stock market is higher today than it was prior to the Wall Street crash of September 2008. The rich are richer than ever, while the country as a whole is much poorer. How is this possible?

Every measure taken by Obama since coming to power in January of 2009 has been for the purpose of shoring up the position of the privately owned banks. The administration overseeing this operation is packed with their representatives—from Obama's treasury secretary (the former president of the New York Federal Reserve), to all three of his White House chiefs of staff, to the heads of the Auto Task Force that imposed sweeping layoffs and cuts in wages and benefits.

Trillions in public funds have been poured into the banks, benefiting no one but the financiers and speculators. Not a single leading banker has been held accountable for reckless and illegal actions that led to the financial meltdown, costing countless millions of people in the US and around the world their livelihoods.

The trajectory after the elections is clear regardless which party controls the White House and Congress:

* The next administration will be involved in another major war, or several wars. The leading candidates for a US-led attack are Syria, Iran, China and Russia, but others are looming in the background, including Mexico. A spate of recent reports shows that US

planning for a military attack on Iran is far advanced, a fact that was underscored by the hysterical speech of Defense Secretary Leon Panetta charging Iran with planning a “Pearl Harbor” cyber attack.

* What remains of basic social programs will be drastically restructured and cut. That includes Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and food stamps. An unstated aim of these attacks will be to reduce the life expectancy of working class Americans, so as to save on outlays for health care, pensions, etc.

* There will be an escalation of the assault on democratic rights and the expansion of police powers that have been ongoing since 9/11 and were intensified under Obama. The Bill of Rights will be rendered a dead letter.

What is the real issue before working people? It is not which of these two representatives of American capitalism is elected. While there is understandable concern over the implications of a Republican victory, the slogan of “the lesser of two evils,” trotted out every election to boost the Democrats, is a trap. It enables the ruling class to impose its agenda, supported by both big business parties, of social reaction, war and attacks on democratic rights.

The *Nation* magazine exemplifies the sophistries employed by the liberal-left backers of the Democratic Party to justify their support for Obama’s reelection. In a video appeal posted on the *Nation* web site, publisher and editor Katrina vanden Heuvel calls the reelection of Obama a “vital first step” for “progressive” causes, even as she admits that the “staggering rates of poverty” and “militarization of foreign policy” have “gone missing” from the election campaign of both candidates.

She further acknowledges that Obama’s “conflicted” tenure has been tarnished by “the scale and terms of the economic recovery” [read: trillions for Wall Street and nothing for the people] and “the escalation of the national security state with its erosion of civil liberties” [i.e., the trashing of habeas corpus, extra-judicial assassinations, the expansion of domestic spying, etc.].

The real issue is the need for the working class to break free of the anti-democratic electoral farce and the two-party system, and build an independent political movement in opposition to the entire political and corporate establishment. That means building a mass socialist movement to fight for a workers’ government

and a radical restructuring of economic life based on social need, not profit, and the achievement of social equality.

That is the fight being taken up by the Socialist Equality Party and its presidential and vice presidential candidates, Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer. The SEP is holding conferences later this month and in early November to draw the lessons of the critical experiences of American workers and youth and the working class internationally.

These include drawing a balance sheet of the Obama administration and the two-party system, examining the social and political dynamic of the official US election campaign, reviewing the experiences of the SEP campaign, and placing these developments within the context of the world economic crisis of capitalism and the resurgence of the class struggle in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the US.

We urge workers, youth and students to make arrangements to attend the conferences, and make the decision to join the SEP.

For more information and to register for the SEP conferences, click here. To join the SEP and get involved in the election campaign, click here.

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