

The Obama-Romney debate: Questions unasked and unanswered

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Tuesday's debate between President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, was billed as a town hall meeting, in which the two candidates would answer questions from "real Americans" about the most important issues in the election. The event was ostensibly a "going to the people" moment.

In both form and content, however, it exemplified the scripted and stage-managed character of the entire election, in which no serious questions can be asked, let alone answered. The ritualized character of American politics has become so pervasive that nothing spontaneous can be allowed, lest it breach the facade and bring the entire edifice of deceit tumbling down.

To ensure proper vetting, the Gallup polling agency first hand-picked the 82 individuals assigned to represent the "uncommitted voter," a category of the population that, like the "great American middle class," is largely a political and media fiction. Excluded are the millions of people who hate both candidates or are so disgusted and alienated they don't bother to vote.

These 82 individuals submitted questions beforehand to the moderator, Candy Crowley, the chief political correspondent of CNN and a trusted media talking head. Crowley determined which questions would be asked by deciding which of the 82 would be allowed to speak.

The questioners essentially served as props in the media production. They read their pre-approved questions from cards, and one had the feeling that if one of them dared stray from the script, he or she would be cut off and whisked away to a back room for "enhanced interrogation." Just to make sure there was no unauthorized ad-libbing, the microphone was turned off once the questioner finished reading out a question.

More significant than the questions asked were those

that were not asked—and could not be. Such as:

* Mr. President, precisely what is your legal justification for assassinating US citizens without any judicial process? When asked whether the administration's claimed right to target people for murder applied to citizens within the US, FBI Director Robert Mueller earlier this year said he was "not certain." Do you consider yourself justified in killing any US citizen just on your own say-so?

* President Obama, is it true, as reported in the *New York Times*, that you have a meeting every Tuesday to decide personally who will be killed by US drones around the world? How many death warrants have you signed? Why has your administration opposed the prosecution of Bush administration officials for torture and domestic spying?

* This is for both candidates. What new wars are being planned behind the backs of the American people? What assurances have been given to Israel that the US will attack Iran next year? Is the United States prepared to go to war with Russia and China if they oppose such action? Will the United States use nuclear weapons in any such conflict?

* President Obama and Governor Romney, why is it that no banker or hedge fund manager has been held accountable for the Wall Street crash that set off the global economic crisis? Can you explain why the stock market and corporate profits are soaring in the midst of record poverty and mass unemployment?

* Democrats and Republicans are currently in negotiations to cut trillions of dollars in social programs. What cuts are you prepared to implement? Is not a basic aim of your shared policy of cutting health care costs a lowering of the life expectancy of millions of ordinary Americans?

The list goes on...

In their responses to the questions that were asked, the candidates and the moderator were careful to avoid any reference to the most important issues. Amidst a back-and-forth on energy policy, in which the two candidates vied over who would open up more federal land to oil and natural gas exploitation, no one brought up the 2010 BP oil rig explosion, which killed 11 workers and injured another 18 and led to the greatest environmental disaster in American history.

The discussion on Libya and the killing of the US ambassador avoided the fact that the United States, in the middle of a supposed “war on terror,” has been allied with Islamic jihadists linked to Al Qaeda in its drive to overthrow the governments of Libya and now Syria. Just before the debate, the *New York Times* reported that arms sent with the aid of the CIA to Syrian “rebels” are going mainly to Al Qaeda forces. But this cannot be discussed because it blows apart the central pretense of US foreign policy over the past 11 years, used to justify unending war and the destruction of democratic rights.

The first debate was summed up in Romney’s comment that, regardless of who was elected, the rich would do well. The defining moment in the second debate was Obama’s concluding comment: “I believe that the free enterprise system is the greatest engine of prosperity the world’s ever known. I believe in self-reliance and individual initiative and risk-takers being rewarded.”

This is the most important issue. Both candidates unreservedly defend the capitalist system and the interests of the corporate and financial elite. They both speak for a ruling class that has led the world into the greatest crisis since the 1930s.

Amid the various and vacuous talking points propounded by the media, the cynicism of the whole process was expressed most pithily by ABC News in its tagline: “Your Voice, Your Vote.” A more appropriate slogan, directed to the corporate and financial elite, would be: “Your Money, Your Candidate. You Decide.”

Workers and young people do confront an important decision. It is not which of these two big business candidates they should vote for, but what must be done about the entire political and economic system.

The Socialist Equality Party and its candidates Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer have intervened in the US

elections to fight for the building of a new political leadership of the working class. The SEP is holding conferences later this month and in November to review the experiences of the elections and discuss the socialist program upon which this new leadership must be built. We urge workers and youth to make plans to attend today.

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