

The midterm elections and the political crisis in the US

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Early voting began last Thursday in Iowa, and mail-in voting has begun in several states for the US general election set for November 4. The contests on the ballot include a third of the US Senate, all 435 seats in the House of Representatives, and the governorships of 36 out of 50 states, as well as thousands of seats in state legislatures.

Yet from the standpoint of everyday life in America, one would hardly know an election was taking place. There is little discussion of electoral politics in factories, offices and other workplaces, and little interest in the candidates of either of the two corporate-controlled parties.

The elections are taking place in the aftermath of the decision by the Obama administration, with the bipartisan backing of congressional Republicans and Democrats, to plunge into a new imperialist war in the Middle East, with the bombing of Syria and the dispatch of thousands of American troops to Iraq. Yet there is not a way for the working class to make its opinion heard on this or any significant element of policy.

On the specific question of the bombing of Iraq and Syria, Congress adjourned without attempting to vote on the Obama administration's new war, while approving, with large bipartisan majorities in both House and Senate, the financing of "moderate" rebels seeking to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Voter turnout in the primaries in which the Democrats and Republicans chose their candidates fell to record lows this year. In many cases, fewer than five percent of eligible voters went to the polls. All indications are that voter turnout in the November 4 balloting will be even lower than the dismal 37 percent recorded in the last non-presidential election in 2010.

The indifference to the electoral process and its outcome testifies to the deepening alienation of the population from both the political system and the corporate-dominated socioeconomic order that the two parties defend. Tens of millions of working people see the Democrats and Republicans as providing government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich, and they are not wrong.

According to a CBS-New York Times poll conducted September 12-15, only five percent of voters thought their own congressional representative deserved reelection, while 87 percent favored replacing the incumbent with someone new. Poll after poll shows majority opposition to both the Democrats and Republicans. But despite these sentiments, the two-party political monopoly ensures that the election to be held in five weeks will change nothing.

Projections and forecasts by campaign consultants and election analysts agree that the Republicans will retain their majority in the House of Representatives, gaining or losing at most a handful of seats; the Republicans will add at least three seats in the US Senate to their present total of 45, and may well achieve the 51-vote majority that would give them control of the upper house. The Democrats are expected to take back some of the state governorships that Republicans won in their 2010 electoral sweep.

The likelihood of Republican gains, despite the deep unpopularity of both the Republican Party and its ultra-right policies, is an indictment of the Obama administration and the Democratic Party, which represent merely another brand of right-wing, pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist policies.

Obama's approval rating has plunged, not merely in the states won by Republican Mitt Romney in 2012, but in so-called "blue states" like New York, where the

most recent Marist poll found only 39 percent approval in a state where Obama captured 63.3 percent of the vote two years ago.

A Pew poll over the summer found that the revelations of massive NSA surveillance of Americans, as well as the threat of greater US involvement in Mideast wars, have alienated millions, particularly young people, who had voted for Obama in 2008 and 2012. Add to that the constant provocation of the president proclaiming the “success” of his economic policies, which have boosted the stock market and the wealth of the super-rich to record levels, while unemployment remains high and real wages decline.

Whatever the outcome of elections in the United States, the political apparatus as a whole moves steadily to the right. Since coming to power nearly six years ago, Obama has embraced and extended the major policies of the Bush administration, particularly in the area of foreign policy and attacks on democratic rights. The doctrines of the Bush administration to justify torture have been resurrected under Obama to argue for presidential power to carry out the assassination of US citizens without any due process.

In domestic social policy as well, Obama carried forward the most important initiatives of his predecessor, above all the bailout of the big banks and financial institutions in the wake of the 2008 Wall Street crash. Obama intensified the attacks on public education, reached several deals with congressional Republicans for austerity measures to cut public spending on other social programs, launched an assault on health care programs under the guise of reform, and arrested and deported more immigrants in six years than Bush did in eight years.

Money predominates over the entire process. In campaign fundraising for 2014, for example, the Democrats have actually raked in more money in large donations from the super-rich than the Republicans, with the 15 top Democrat-aligned political action committees outraising the 15 top Republican PACs by \$453 million to \$289 million. In key Senate races like North Carolina, Louisiana, Arkansas and Alaska, endangered Democratic incumbents have raised far more and spent far more than their Republican challengers.

All of this is a measure of the crisis of bourgeois rule in the United States. The state is run by a combination

of a corporate and financial aristocracy and a military-intelligence apparatus that makes all decisions behind closed doors. Policy is marketed to the public on the basis of lies and propaganda parroted by the mass media.

The institutions of the ruling class, among which one must include the trade unions and the network of organizations around the Democratic Party, seek desperately to prop up a hollowed out apparatus in which democratic forms are an increasingly threadbare cover for the dictatorship of the banks. This is the political form that corresponds to the extraordinary level of social inequality that is the dominant feature of American life and has soared to new records in the six years since the 2008 financial collapse.

American working people should draw the necessary political conclusions. To carry forward a struggle against war and militarism, and to defend jobs, living standards, social conditions and democratic rights, the working class must break with the two parties of big business and build an independent political movement based on a socialist program.



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