

The invisible election

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In less than three weeks, the United States will hold national elections to choose a third of US senators, all 435 members of the US House of Representatives, the governors of 36 out of 50 states, and thousands of state legislators.

The elections come at a time of immense crisis, nationally and internationally. The American people are being dragged into yet another war in the Middle East, as Washington pursues a global militarist policy that leads inexorably toward World War III.

At home, chronically high unemployment is fueling a growth of poverty, while basic social services—education, health care, housing—are being slashed, along with wages and pensions.

Democratic rights are being shredded, with police-state mobilizations in cities such as Ferguson, Missouri against social protest and the government sweeping up the communications of every American.

Social inequality has reached levels not seen since before the Great Depression of the 1930s. And now an Ebola epidemic in Africa is exposing the criminal neglect of healthcare infrastructure in the US and threatening to spiral into an international catastrophe.

All of these issues are being ignored in the election campaigns of the two big business parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. Instead, what predominate are banal and right-wing platitudes combined with mutual mudslinging. The entire process is dominated by corporate money, with all of the rival candidates on the take.

The Democratic Party is seeking to hold onto its majority in the upper house of Congress, the Senate. This is presented by the media as a momentous issue. In reality, which party ends up in control of Congress makes no difference for working people. The outcome of every election, regardless of which party wins, is a shift of the political system further to the right.

The Democrats secured comfortable majorities in

both the House and the Senate in 2008. They proceeded to continue the war in Iraq, escalate the war in Afghanistan, expand the taxpayer bailout of Wall Street, implement a health care “reform” that slashes workers’ benefits and increases their costs, impose a 50 percent cut in the pay of newly hired auto workers, and oversee a vast expansion of government spying on the population.

Neither party offers any policies to address the raging social crisis. The Obama administration touts a “recovery” that has brought the share of total household wealth held by the richest 0.5 percent to just under 35 percent and that of the top 0.1 percent to 20 percent. The Republicans, who work hand-in-glove with the Democrats to slash working class living standards, demand even bigger tax cuts for the rich and deeper cuts in social programs.

The basic bipartisan unity extends to a foreign policy of endless war and militarism. The Democrats who postured as opponents of the Iraq war under Bush—and insured that war funds were continued when they gained control of Congress—are avidly backing Obama’s new war in Iraq and Syria.

On the domestic front, there is no mention of the bankruptcy of Detroit, imposed by a Republican governor working with a Democratic mayor and backed by the Obama White House. The gutting of Detroit city workers’ pensions and health benefits, in violation of the state constitution and under the dictates of an unelected “emergency manager,” is being used as a precedent for cities across the US. In a debate Sunday night, Mark Schauer, the Democratic challenger to Republican Governor Rick Snyder, made clear that he supported the Detroit bankruptcy as well as the wage-cutting bankruptcy of General Motors and Chrysler.

War, austerity and the attack on democratic rights are all massively unpopular, but the views and interests of working people, the vast majority of the population,

find no expression in the election campaigns of the two parties. The experience of the Obama administration, which came to power by exploiting popular disgust with Bush and his policies of war and social reaction, only to continue and deepen the same policies, has further alienated the masses of Americans from the political system.

They no longer believe that their votes will have any impact on the policies pursued by the government. They try to block out the meaningless debates between the candidates and the mind-numbing attack ads financed by the corporate donors who control both parties and the system as a whole.

The crisis of the American capitalist political system results in an election that is barely being followed by the electorate, the majority of whom feel little commitment but a great deal of anger toward both parties. One would hardly know, from the level of interest shown by the population, that an election is taking place.

None of the traditional outward signs of an election—license plate stickers, lawn signs promoting candidates, campaign buttons—are to be seen.

All signs point to a record low turnout on November 4, even lower than the dismal 37 percent of eligible voters who cast ballots in the last nonpresidential election, in 2010. Voter turnout in the primary elections earlier this year, in which the Democrats and Republicans chose their candidates, hit new lows, with, in many cases, fewer than 5 percent of eligible voters going to the polls.

The likely participation of younger voters, who turned out in relatively large numbers to elect Obama in 2008, is particularly revealing. In recent polls, only 23 percent of voters between the ages of 18 and 29 said they were definitely going to cast a ballot this year.

The contrast could hardly be starker between the acuteness of the issues the American people confront—war, poverty, dictatorship—and the empty and right-wing character of the campaign and general popular disinterest in the election. This contradiction bespeaks a system that is coming to the end of its rope. The immense growth of social inequality has turned American democratic institutions into hollow shells behind which the corporations, the military brass and the intelligence agencies conspire against the people of the US and the world.

The political system is incapable of responding to the crisis facing the working class because it is an instrument of a plutocracy.

The 2014 election is an expression of the crisis of American capitalism, which is at the center of the breakdown of world capitalism. The abstention is not an expression of either acceptance of the status quo or popular complacency. Social opposition is mounting, but the working masses as of yet see no alternative.

As they enter into struggle, they will inevitably seek alternatives outside the two official parties. The burning question is the building of the Socialist Equality Party to prepare the coming mass movement, ensure that it breaks all ties with the Democratic Party, and imbue it with socialist consciousness and an independent revolutionary program.



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