

The political issues posed by the US midterm elections

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Tuesday marks the end of an election campaign in which billions of dollars have been expended in the effort to convince working people that there are significant differences between the Democrats and the Republicans. Nothing could be further from the truth.

On all essential issues, the two parties are united in defense of the interests of the super-rich—the billionaires who fund their campaigns and give their marching orders to senators, representatives, governors, state legislators and presidents.

US elections have long been manipulated by the corporate-controlled media and dominated by corporate money. Their democratic content has been increasingly vitiated by a political system monopolized by two right-wing parties of big business. They have become a means for the ruling class to adjust the personnel and party affiliation of those in power in order to better prosecute its offensive against the working class and advance its imperialist agenda internationally.

But this election has set a new benchmark for fraud and deceit. It has underscored the growing chasm between the broad mass of the people and the entire political establishment, revealing pervasive popular disaffection and outright hostility toward both parties and the electoral circus.

After six years of the Obama administration, which promised “change” only to continue and deepen the reactionary policies of its Republican predecessor, fewer and fewer working people believe that their votes will change anything. More and more recognize that the system is controlled by the wealthy. It is expected that Election Day will see record low turnout.

At a rally in Detroit Sunday, President Barack Obama summarized the issues in the election as follows: Democrats favor a minor increase in the minimum wage, which would still leave tens of millions in

poverty; Democrats support equal pay for women, a claim that was not backed up by any concrete proposals; Democrats support slightly easier credit terms for students taking out loans to pay for college. These are differences in the second and third decimal point, the small change of capitalist politics.

Meanwhile, the parties are in agreement on the big issues: expanding imperialist war in the Middle East and elsewhere; intensifying government spying on the American people; imposing further cuts in social services and deeper attacks on the jobs, wages and benefits of working people; dispensing more tax giveaways to corporate America and the rich.

Any worker, young person or student seeking to oppose war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights will find no alternative on the election ballot today. There is only one conclusion to be drawn: the working class must break free of the two-party straitjacket and build an independent mass political movement to defend its own class interests.

In the last few days, there have been hints in the corporate-controlled media of what is coming after the election, i.e., a further shift to the right in the policy of the Obama administration. This is to be justified in the name of “bipartisanship” and finding “common ground” with the congressional Republicans, who are expected to increase their majority in the House of Representatives and their presence in the Senate, likely taking control of the upper chamber for the first time since 2006.

There are indications that the Obama White House sees potential advantages in a Republican majority in the Senate, considering that it would provide a measure of political cover for its plans to escalate the war in the Middle East, step up US provocations against Russia, and make further inroads against what remains of basic

social entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security.

The *New York Times* published a front-page article Sunday under the headline “Braced for a Shift in Congress, Obama Is Setting a New Agenda.” The article reported that top White House aides have been meeting for weeks “mapping possible compromises with Republicans” in anticipation of a Republican takeover of the Senate.

The newspaper suggested that, “if Republicans are fully in charge of Congress rather than mainly an opposition party, both sides may have an incentive to strike deals,” identifying as the main areas of potential agreement “trade, corporate taxes and infrastructure.”

Agreements in these areas could include an across-the-board cut in corporate income taxes, expanded authority for the White House to negotiate pro-corporate trade deals, direct subsidies to construction and engineering companies (infrastructure), and a one-time windfall tax break for corporations that bring offshore profits back to the US (worth an estimated \$400 billion to corporate America).

Other areas of possible agreement, according to the *Times*, are cyber security and surveillance—measures to expand the powers of the national security apparatus to spy on the American people and to wage electronic warfare against foreign rivals.

On Monday the *Washington Post* raised the same issue with a lead editorial declaring that talk of “gridlock” in official Washington “has gotten a bit overdone.” The *Post* continued: “Beneath the conflictual surface, there are a surprising number of policy areas in which bipartisan agreement is not only imaginable but incipient, and where the two parties could produce results in the next Congress.”

While there have been hints about the direction of domestic policy after the election, the media and politicians have remained silent on the major actions in foreign policy that are in the pipeline. Foremost among these is a planned congressional vote authorizing expanded US military action in Iraq and Syria.

Congress recessed for the election in September after hastily approving a Pentagon plan for \$500 million in arms and training for selected Syrian rebel groups. But the authorization of a full-scale resumption of the war in Iraq, now being openly discussed in military circles, was put off until the lame duck session of Congress that

will convene in the weeks immediately following the election. This was deliberate, to deprive the antiwar majority of the American people any voice in the decision to escalate the war in the Middle East.

Also postponed until after the election is the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s report on torture of prisoners at CIA “black site” prisons overseas and at Guantanamo Bay. If the Republicans win control of the Senate, they are likely to suppress the report altogether.

What exists in Washington, and in every state capital, is government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich. It is not enough for working people and young people to be alienated and hostile to this reality. Now is the time to take up the struggle to build a political alternative for the working class through a break with the two-party system and the development of a mass movement of working people based on socialist principles. This means joining and building the Socialist Equality Party, the only political organization that fights for this perspective.



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