

US presidential campaign begins: A travesty of democracy

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Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination, will formally announce her candidacy on Sunday. With a dozen candidates having announced or begun fundraising in the contest for the Republican nomination, Clinton's official entry into the race marks the de facto beginning of the 2016 US presidential election campaign.

What will unfold over the next 19 months is a travesty of democracy. The American financial aristocracy will select the candidates of the two big-business parties, using its vast wealth and control of the media. This will culminate on November 8, 2016, when the voters will be given the "choice" between two individuals with nearly identical right-wing views, committed to the defense of Wall Street's interests at home and abroad.

A staggering amount of money is required to be considered a "viable" presidential candidate. Ultra-right Texas Senator Ted Cruz vaulted onto that list by raising \$31 million in the first week after announcing his candidacy. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, brother and son of former presidents, reportedly plans to raise \$100 million in the April-June quarter alone, even before announcing his campaign for the Republican nomination.

By one published estimate, Hillary Clinton will raise and spend between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion in the primary and general election campaigns, twice the amount Barack Obama and Mitt Romney each spent in 2012.

To raise these vast sums, all potential presidents must thus pass through a screening process that involves a few thousand billionaires and near-billionaires. According to a revealing report in the *Washington Post* last week, so-called bundlers who played a vital role in

earlier campaigns by combining donor checks into bundles totaling \$100,000 or more are now generally ignored by the top candidates. Their cash input is considered insignificant compared to what the "super-PACs" can obtain in one check from billionaires such as the Koch brothers, Sheldon Adelson and George Soros.

The financial oligarchy selects the possible candidates, a process now referred to as the "invisible primary," and puts them through their paces, using various media-generated attacks and pseudo-scandals to determine which ones are best able to shake off external pressures, ignore public opinion and do the bidding of their corporate masters.

Those selected are invariably right-wing, reliable defenders of corporate America, usually themselves millionaires or multimillionaires. On the Republican side, the announced or likely candidates include four US senators—Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, Marco Rubio and Lindsey Graham—and numerous governors and former governors, including Bush, Scott Walker of Wisconsin, Chris Christie of New Jersey, Rick Perry of Texas, Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Mike Huckabee of Arkansas.

The Republican Party has moved so far to the right that Jeb Bush, who viciously attacked public education and supported the ultra-right campaign over the comatose Terri Schiavo, is now regarded as the leading "moderate." His main competition for that role is Christie, promoted by the media as a "moderate" despite his savage attacks on social services and bullying of teachers and other public employees.

Those based primarily on ultra-right Tea Party and Christian fundamentalist elements include Cruz, who provoked a partial shutdown of the federal government in 2013, and Rand Paul, who recently called for a \$190

billion increase in military spending.

Those appealing to both the ultra-right and the Republican establishment include Rubio, set to announce Monday, and Scott Walker. The Wisconsin governor, now running even or ahead of Bush in most polls, is best known for his attack on public employees in Wisconsin, which provoked a stormy mass movement in 2011.

On the Democratic side, Clinton is the prohibitive favorite, with the full backing of both the party establishment and Wall Street—and of the trade unions, which plan to spend several hundred million dollars squeezed out of their members to elect a Democratic president.

The former secretary of state and senator will seek to make much of her status as the first female presidential candidate of one of two corporate-controlled “major” parties. This merely copies the playbook of Obama, who became the first African-American commander-in-chief for American imperialism.

While the American media—itsself owned by giant corporations or billionaires like Rupert Murdoch—will portray the 2016 presidential as an exercise in democracy, the US political system can be more accurately described, paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, as government “of the billionaires, by the billionaires and for the billionaires.”

There is little or no correlation between the political sentiments of the working people who constitute the vast majority of the American population and the policies advocated by the Democratic and Republican candidates for president.

By large margins, even in opinion polls conducted by the corporate-controlled media, the American people support sharp increases in taxes on the wealthy to fund social programs and provide jobs for the unemployed; they oppose cuts in Social Security and Medicare and view education, health care and other public services as basic rights; they oppose government spying on the telephone and Internet usage of ordinary Americans, as well as other police-state measures; and they oppose overseas military interventions in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The Democratic and Republican presidential candidates stand on the other side of the barricades on all these issues.

The electoral process effectively excludes any candidates who challenge the capitalist system. Tens of

millions of working people support measures that can be achieved only through a struggle for socialism. But the political monopoly of the two-party system prevents any consideration of such policies.

This political straitjacket has become increasingly intolerable. There are many signs of growing popular disaffection, from declining voter turnout to widespread support for courageous opponents of the emerging police state such as Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning, the outbreak of strikes despite the efforts of the trade unions, and the wave of protests over police murders.

It requires ever-greater injections of media propaganda, fueled by billions in corporate cash, to maintain the domination of the Democrats and Republicans. But if nothing can be done through the existing political apparatus, this only means that mass discontent will find expression through an explosion that erupts outside of—and against—the state apparatus as a whole and the capitalist system it defends.



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