

The 2016 elections and the dead-end of “lesser evil” politics

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The final two weeks of the US presidential election campaign will be dominated by appeals to working people and young people from unions and liberal publications and organizations to vote for Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Given that Clinton is widely despised as a creature of Wall Street and the political establishment and an advocate of a more aggressive and militaristic foreign policy, this sales effort encounters significant obstacles.

At the very least, it is claimed, Clinton represents the “lesser evil” to billionaire demagogue Donald Trump, whose campaign of racism, anti-immigrant bigotry and American nationalism is aimed at laying the basis for the development of a genuinely fascistic movement in the United States. The truth, however, is that the choice of Clinton or Trump is a choice between two forms of terminal cancer. And given Clinton’s support for expanded military intervention in the Middle East and a full-scale confrontation with Russia, the world’s second-largest nuclear power, it cannot be said with any certainty which of the two diseases would prove more quickly fatal.

One group of prominent economists and sociologists has issued an open letter proclaiming Hillary Clinton not merely the lesser evil, but a positive good. The letter was signed by 50 leading academics, including some who have done important work in illuminating the growth of social and class inequality in America, such as Emmanuel Saez of the University of California, Berkeley, and William Julius Wilson of Harvard.

The letter cites the rampant growth of economic inequality in America, including the growth of the share of national income going to the top 1 percent from 10 percent of the total in 1981 to 22 percent in 2015. The vast majority of all income increases since the mid-1970s have gone to the super-rich. This 40-year period is divided evenly between Republican and Democratic administrations, both of which have favored the wealthy

at the expense of working people.

Nonetheless, the 50 academics argue that the policies of Clinton, “backed by the most progressive Democratic Party platform in four decades, will both promote growth and reduce income inequality.”

The letter then lists a series of proposals, ranging from a \$15-an-hour minimum wage to universal pre-school, relief from college-student debt and expanded spending on infrastructure, financed by higher taxes on the wealthy including a surtax on millionaires. It declares that Clinton has worked her “entire adult life” for such measures.

There are some long-time Democratic Party hacks among the signers, including two former members of Bill Clinton’s cabinet, Robert Reich and Laura D’Andrea Tyson. But there are others who should know better, but have allowed themselves to be politically stamped by fear of Trump.

In the Democratic primaries, many of the signatories supported Bernie Sanders and his criticisms of Clinton’s ties to Wall Street. Now that these ties have been confirmed a thousand times over with the release by WikiLeaks of campaign communications and Clinton speeches to corporate audiences, the letter’s signers choose to look the other way.

But what is most significant about the letter is the fact that it contains not a word about foreign policy, the growing war danger, or the commitment of an incoming Clinton administration to policies of military confrontation with Russia and China, both nuclear-armed powers. Even if one believed, against all the evidence, that Clinton actually intended to enact a modest program of social reform, the financial demands of an expanded military intervention in the Middle East, let alone a major war with Russia or China, would mean an immediate end to such projects.

Fifty years ago, when American capitalism enjoyed a far more dominant position in a booming world economy,

the Johnson administration collapsed because it proved impossible to combine “guns and butter.” A Hillary Clinton presidency, under conditions of global economic crisis, financial shocks and US decline, would not even make the attempt.

On the contrary, the WikiLeaks documents demonstrate that Clinton and her closest aides actually oppose the modest social reforms listed in the letter from the 50 economists and sociologists. They only acceded to including them in the platform as the price of defeating Sanders and giving something to sell to his supporters. Now Sanders pathetically touts Clinton’s candidacy, even as documents pour out from WikiLeaks demonstrating her subservience to the “millionaires and billionaires” Sanders rhetorically condemned.

In its response to the WikiLeaks revelations, the Democratic Party has revealed the real political axis of an incoming Clinton administration. It has denounced WikiLeaks as an agent of Russia and claimed, without providing a shred of evidence, that Vladimir Putin is the source of the hacked documents. It has thus sought to appropriate McCarthyism, once a hallmark of Republican Party demagoguery, as the property of the Democrats.

It requires no secret documents from WikiLeaks, however, to prove that Hillary Clinton is the stooge of the billionaires who dominate American politics and society. Press reports this weekend underscore the depth of support for Clinton in the financial aristocracy. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that of the \$88 million that billionaires have donated to the presidential candidates of the two main capitalist parties, \$70 million from 19 billionaires has gone to Clinton, while only \$18 million from five billionaires has gone to Trump.

The *New York Times* reported Sunday that so-called super PACs, political action committees set up by the super-rich and legalized by the Supreme Court’s notorious 2010 decision in the *Citizens United* case, have favored Clinton over Trump by a 2-1 margin. A dozen such groups have raised \$200 million and spent more than \$110 million on pro-Clinton advertising since May, according to reports filed with the Federal Election Commission.

Also on Sunday, Clinton received an endorsement from one of the most prominent bankers on Wall Street, Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, the investment banking firm that paid Clinton \$675,000 for three speeches in 2013. Blankfein praised, in particular, her willingness to work with Republicans, as she did while a US senator from New York, in which capacity she

aggressively defended the interests of Wall Street.

Clinton has also been endorsed by hundreds of ex-generals, ex-admirals, ex-intelligence officials and foreign policy specialists, both Republicans and Democrats. The reason is clear. These spokesmen for the military-intelligence apparatus view Trump as untested, erratic and unschooled in the foreign policy consensus of American imperialism. He has voiced opinions that are, in their view, dangerously isolationist and too conciliatory towards Moscow. At the same time, through his bigotry and embrace of economic nationalism, he threatens to disrupt the system of client states that serves US imperialist interests around the world.

In giving the American people the choice between Clinton and Trump, the two-party system in the United States has demonstrated that it is a political dead end.

The elections two weeks from now will resolve nothing. The pressing task is the building of a political leadership, based on a revolutionary socialist program, that will give a genuinely progressive expression to the interests of millions of workers and young people. This is the perspective the Socialist Equality Party has advanced in the 2016 elections, fought for by our candidates, Jerry White for president and Niles Niemuth for vice president.

On November 5, the SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality will hold a conference, “Socialism vs. Capitalism and War,” in Detroit, Michigan. In the weeks leading up to this conference, the SEP is holding a series of meetings throughout the country. The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on all of its readers to become involved in the campaign, make plans to attend the November 5 conference, join the SEP and IYSSE, and take an active role in building a political leadership to guide the mass struggles to come.



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