

# USA elections

## What the Tea Party really represents

As The Socialist goes to print, US electors will be voting in their mid-term congressional elections. The Democratic Party of president Barack Obama is expected to lose seats to the Republicans, whose Tea Party bloc is in the ascendency.

**Jesse Lessinger** of Socialist Alternative (the Socialist Party's USA counterpart), in an earlier article, explains the rise of the far-right Tea Party as a consequence of the failure of the Democrats to solve any of the major problems facing the country. It also shows the urgent need to develop independent working-class politics and struggle.

An analysis of the elections will be posted on the CWI's website - [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)



**US comedians Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert at their 'rally to restore sanity and/or fear' in Washington DC. The event, which was a counterpoint to the Republican right, attracted 215,000 people. By contrast a 'restoring honour' rally on 28 August organised by Tea Party promoter and Fox News host Glenn Beck attracted 87,000.**

**T**HE RECENT Republican election primaries became a battleground between Tea Party supporters, a self-proclaimed insurgent grassroots revolt, and the mainstream leadership of the GOP ('Grand Old Party' - a nickname for the Republican Party). In several Senate, House and gubernatorial [governorship] primaries throughout the country Tea Party candidates have upset the GOP leadership pick.

Their anti-establishment rhetoric tapped into conservative anger and has drawn support by railing against entrenched Washington insiders. Some of these politicians have unabashedly put forward ultra-conservative, extremist, and in some cases, racist and anti-immigrant views.

In Kentucky, Tea Partier Rand Paul, the son of prominent 'libertarian' Republican Congressman Ron Paul, stated that he believed the 1964 Civil Rights Act was an "over-reach" of government power.

Fox News's Glenn Beck, an outspoken promoter of the Tea Party, organised the 28 August "Restoring Honour" rally in Washington DC, called on the anniversary of Dr Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I have a dream" speech 47 years ago. It was another insult to black people and everyone in the US who cares about civil rights.

But do the successes of the Tea Party really mean that there is a massive shift to the right in the US? This is not supported by the evidence. Based on its 3 October poll, the Washington Post concluded: "Although Republicans, and many Democrats, have tried to demonise Washington, most major government programmes remain enormously popular."

The poll showed majorities wanting the government to be involved in schools and to help reduce poverty. In fact it found that support for government on a broad number of issues remains "high, in some cases where it was a decade ago."

Perhaps a small section of the population has moved to the right but the vast majority wants nothing to do with the right-wing Tea Party. In fact, a recent Gallup poll revealed that around 30% of people in the US viewed socialism as more favourable than capitalism, and among 18-30 year olds that figure went up to 43%.

But if the Tea Party crowd in reality represents only a very limited cross-section of society being mostly composed of older white males, why are they getting all the headlines? The

truth is that underneath the veil of dissent and anti-establishment rage are powerful corporations and leaders of the Republican Party, ie the very 'establishment' forces that this 'movement' supposedly has in its cross-hairs.

### Bailout anger

IN THE fall of 2008 the unprecedented \$787 billion bank bailouts sparked an explosion of anger amongst wide-sections of the population, left and right.

A month after Obama was in office, Rick Santelli of CNBC [cable and satellite TV news channel] called for "tea parties" to protest against Obama's spending programme. But this wasn't to oppose the hundreds of billions going to Wall Street and the big banks whose reckless behaviour played the decisive role in the worst economic crisis since the 1930s.

The real target was a \$75 billion programme to prevent home foreclosures. Why? Well, because tax dollars shouldn't go to pay "someone else's" mortgage.

The underlying theme from CNBC was that it would go towards those most affected by the sub-prime crisis, who were disproportionately working-class black families. In this fashion, genuine rage that existed against Wall Street and the big banks, was captured by the corporate media, and redirected at sections of working-class and middle-class America.

Most of the Tea Party events have since been sponsored by the "FreedomWorks" organisation, chaired by Dick Armey, the former House of Representatives majority leader for the Republican Party. Other important members include billionaire Steve Forbes and Matt Kibbe, former Republican national committee senior economist.

Another organisation behind the scenes of the Tea Party is "Americans for Prosperity" which is funded by billionaire David Koch of Koch Industries, which, among other things, deals in trading and financial services. And of course we can't forget those "fair and balanced" folks at Fox News.

The big business interest in all this has been primarily to block any kind of reform by the Obama administration, most importantly health care and financial regulation. They've exploited populist anger, turning it into a battering ram aimed against the interests of working class and middle class people who have suf-

fered the most from this crisis.

Understandably, many people are deeply troubled by the prospect of Tea Party right-wingers getting into office. The common argument which flows from this is that we therefore have to vote Democrat to keep them out, even if the Democrats, like candidate Andrew Cuomo of New York, have openly pledged to cut spending and attack workers living standards.

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Though this line of thinking seems to make sense it will in fact get us absolutely nowhere. The fundamental problem is that Democratic pro-corporate policies are as responsible for creating this crisis as Republican pro-corporate policies.

Although the Democrats certainly don't come out with the same right-wing garbage that spews from the mouths of some of these Tea Party politicians, they have shown no capacity to actually challenge this right-wing agenda in any real way, or to actually solve the economic problems like mass unemployment and cuts in services.

When the health care debate flared up last fall, with the Tea Party rage whipped up to a frenzy - and supported, not surprisingly, by the big health insurance and drug companies - the Democrats simply rolled over, dropped the "public option", and made many other concessions to the right. The financial regulation bill that was passed by Obama and the Democrats was defanged to the point where even Wall Street supported it!

### Democrats in crisis

THE POPULAR anger which provides the social base for this right-wing corporate-backed obstruction campaign is fuelled by the deep economic and social crisis. For nearly two years now the Democrats have been in power in the White House, have had a majority in the House and a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, and they have done virtually

nothing to reverse the crisis.

The Democrats cannot expose the corporate backing of the Tea Party because they receive the same corporate dollars. They cannot attack the right for wanting to cut the deficit by slashing social programmes because that's precisely what the Democrats are already doing!

On the state level, Democratic and Republican administrations alike have been slashing billions from state spending while the new bipartisan budget commission set up by Obama has its sights set on cutting social security after the mid-term elections.

Through Fox news and other corporate backers, the Tea Party has been given massive publicity. While it is a very diverse force, its message of blaming immigrants for the economic crisis and its barely veiled racism, is a warning to working people and young people of the potential threat of the right wing.

As scary as the Tea Party is, the real threat at present to working people comes from 'Corporate America' and both its parties. To cut across this we need our own independent political voice. We need to put blame where it should lie, on Wall Street, big business and the failing system of capitalism. Wall Street has two parties, we need one of our own.

When workers' organisations like unions remain tied to the Democrats they become incapable of challenging this corporate agenda. On 2 October the unions, for the first time in decades, mobilised for a demonstration in DC. But despite the demands for jobs and education, the message from the official leadership was once again to "vote Democrat."

We have to begin to develop independent working-class politics and struggle. The right has found an outlet for its anger and it is being exploited by big business for its own ends. The vast majority of working people are completely fed up with mass unemployment and home foreclosures. Young people are facing cuts in education and a future of wars and environmental degradation.

If a real lead is given, the enormous anger against the rich and Wall Street could also be harnessed to build a massive fightback in the clear interests of the working-class. It's time to start campaigns and coalitions and run independent candidates as a first step toward a mass party of working people with a programme to challenge the dictatorship of big business.

### the committee for a workers international

THE COMMITTEE for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. The CWI is organised in 40 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email [cwi@worldsoc.co.uk](mailto:cwi@worldsoc.co.uk)

### www.socialistworld.net

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:



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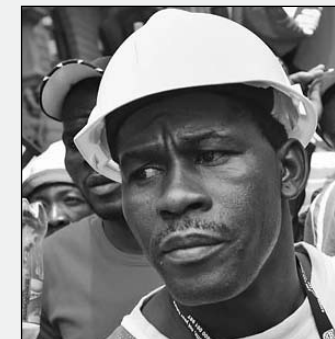
Sascha Stanicic, Sozialistische Alternative (SAV - CWI in Germany)



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