

US elections

Bankruptcy of Democrats leads to spectacular fall

THE US 2010 mid-term elections revealed the deepening instability of the two-party system and capitalism.

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The shallow analysis of Fox News and most media pundits is that the sweeping Republican victory and gains for Tea Party candidates demonstrate a swing to the right by the American people and a rejection of president Barack Obama's "left-wing" agenda.

In reality, the over-arching feature of the campaign was a bitter anti-incumbent mood. The election was dominated by intense anger and hostility to the political establishment driven by the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s. With the Democrats controlling Congress and the White House, they took the brunt of voters' rage.

Nearly nine in ten voters said they were worried about the economy, and the majority said the economy has worsened since Obama was elected. Under Obama working people have seen unemployment rise to 23 million, devastating cuts to public services, and millions of home foreclosures.

The Democrats' failure to deal with the economic crisis facing working people fuelled the popular anger that allowed Republicans and the Tea Party to hypocritically masquerade, with the aid of Fox News, as insurgents challenging the establishment.

The Tea Party has drawn behind it the anger of a section of mainly conservative, older, white, middle and working class people. However, behind the scenes it is financed and manipulated by big business interests.

Obama's failings

ONLY TWO years ago Obama and the Democrats were swept to power by tens of millions of workers and young people disgusted with George Bush's pro-war, corporate agenda.

But the huge hopes for progressive change have been dashed. Rather than using their popular mandate to push for bold policies like a massive public works jobs programme, raising the minimum wage, and single-payer healthcare, the Democrats focused on the needs of Corporate America.

Immediately after taking office Obama continued Bush's huge bailout of Wall Street. His stimulus plan helped avoid a depression, but was too timid to create the millions of jobs needed.

Despite running as a peace candidate, Obama escalated the war in Afghanistan, increased the military budget, and renewed the Patriot Act. Obama's administration also stepped up deportations and raids against immigrants and defended Don't Ask, Don't Tell [the discriminatory practice in the US military which prevents gay people from revealing their sexual orientation while barring openly gay people from serving in the armed forces].

Obama declared single-payer universal health care "off the table" from the start, eventually compromised away the public option, and allowed the final bill to become so watered down it actually ended up strengthening the insurance companies at the root of the problem.



US anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan speaking at Socialism 2010.

photo Paul Mattsson

This is not accidental. The Democrats have always been a big business party. As Justice [the paper of Socialist Alternative] warned before Obama's election, they would inevitably betray and disappoint those who looked to them as an alternative.

This led to a low turnout of Democratic voters in this election, which was decisive in the Republican victory. Exit polls show a major fall in turnout of Democratic voters. Young people aged 18 to 29 were only 10% of voters, down from 18% in 2008. Those over 65 comprised 15% of the vote in 2008 but 24% in 2010. Only 41% of eligible voters went to the polls, and they were disproportionately wealthier, whiter, older, and more conservative sections of the public.

The 2010 elections demonstrate the complete bankruptcy of the strategy that Democratic leaders argued for over the past two years in response to any demands from the left. We were told that bold pro-worker policies such as single-payer healthcare or public works jobs programmes were "unrealistic" because they would alienate moderate swing voters and Republicans. Yet what results do they have to show for their two years of "realism"?

No mandate

THE FARCE of Republican claims to have a "popular mandate" was shown by an AFL-CIO union federation exit poll of voters' opinions on specific Republican policies.

Just 34% of all voters and 49% of Republicans support extending tax cuts for the wealthy. Only 29% of all voters and 35% of Republicans support raising the Social Security retirement age, while only 28% of all voters and 45% of Republicans support privatising Social Security.

At the same time, large majorities support clear pro-worker policies. 77% of all voters and 63% of Republicans supported job creation by rebuilding the nation's infrastructure of roads, bridges, schools and energy systems. 65% of all voters and 47% of Republicans agreed that unemployment insurance benefits should be extended.

Rather than a growth in support for Republicans, in reality, there is widespread anger at both parties. Former chief strategist for George W Bush, Matthew Dowd, explained this clearly: "We simultaneously have two

political parties who are disliked and distrusted by the voters ... We have candidates throughout the country who would be unelectable in any normal election environment...

"Nevada is a perfect example of this... Both [Democrat Harry] Reid and Republican Sharron Angle are unelectable, but since they are running against each other, someone has to win. And that is true throughout the country, where even though Republicans are disliked as much as Democrats, they will win a majority of the contests because they just so happen to be not in charge. And when the election is over, most of these voters will continue to be dissatisfied and will be looking to take their frustration out again sometime soon in another election" (ABC-news.com, 30/10/10).

Learning the lessons

THE 2010 elections were dominated by unprecedented sums of corporate cash. Total spending was approximately \$4 billion, according to the Centre for Responsive Politics, and 74% of this came from corporations (opensecrets.org). Both parties raked in billions from corporations.

The interests of workers and young people cannot be represented by either corporate party. The failure of the leaders of the unions - as well as the anti-war, civil rights, environmental and women's organisations - to provide a serious left challenge and an alternative party to the Democrats has allowed the Tea Party to partially fill the vacuum and tap into the growing discontent in society.

Four unions alone still wasted an incredible \$220 million trying to elect Democrats. The labour movement also mobilised 200,000 union volunteers, distributed 19.4 million fliers, knocked on 9.3 million doors, and made millions of phone calls (AFL-CIO, 3/11/10).

If all this money and energy had instead been directed toward organising mass rallies for real change, such as single-payer health care, or funding left-wing independent candidates, a real alternative to the Tea Party could have been built.

Stormy period ahead

WITH CONTROL of the House and a larger minority in the Senate, the Republicans are set to pursue an aggressive right-wing, pro-capitalist agenda. They are demanding that

Obama extends Bush's tax cuts for the rich and threatening to cut off funding, if not repeal, the Democrats' health care bill.

Republicans are calling for spending on domestic programmes to be immediately slashed by at least 20% - \$100 billion in a single year - despite the fact that such measures would seriously aggravate the economic crisis. Big business is also increasingly demanding that Social Security be "reformed," ie attacked. There will also be stepped up pressure on unions, immigrants, women and LGBT people.

Obama has indicated a renewed willingness to compromise and cut deals with Republicans, especially on privatising education, 'free trade' agreements, global warming legislation, and cutting the deficit. However, given the intransigence of the Republicans, it is likely they will end up clashing with Obama on a number of issues, resulting in a tense gridlock between the Democratic White House and Senate and the Republican House.

Under pressure from the right-wing Tea Party, an emboldened Republican party could over-reach by aggressively pursuing right-wing policies that are out of touch with public opinion.

Although many on the left will be temporarily disappointed by this election, with stepped up attacks coming from the Republicans and big business, a mood will inevitably grow among workers and youth to resist and fight back.

Under the remorseless pressure of the economic downturn, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the general crises shaking US capitalism, anger and frustration will grow towards both parties, Republican and Democratic, who are now sharing power. Neither party has the luxury of being in opposition any more. Instead, they will both be increasingly discredited by their record in office.

The left will face historic challenges but also many opportunities. We must work to build grassroots movements of workers and young people to resist the right and big business.

But for our movements to acquire the necessary unity and cohesion to challenge the consolidated power of big business, we must unite to build a genuine mass left-wing political alternative to the two parties of big business and their crisis-ridden system.

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

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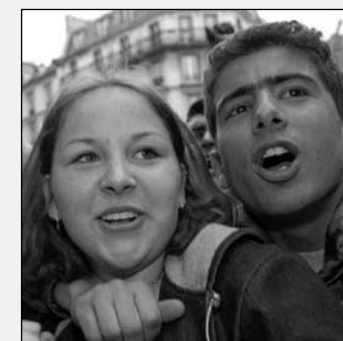
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New pro-capitalist measures introduced by Raul Castro

Tony Saunois, CWI



France

"A lot of youth and workers hope that the mobilisation will have a new upturn"

Interview with Alex Lecoq, Gauche Revolutionnaire (CWI in France), a student in Rouen



China: Thousands riot against land seizure in Yunnan province

A force of 2,000 People's Armed Police (PAP) was used to suppress massive protest by villagers in China's southwest.

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