



The real choice is building the working-class struggle

Republicans and Democrats bow before big business

The mid-term elections are approaching during a period when the working people are being hammered by the Great Recession. The Republicans and Democrats attack each other, but it's not the masses' troubles that concern either party. They are each bound hand and foot to the big corporations and their capitalist free-enterprise system that caused the economic crash.

The working class has every reason to hate the Republicans, who just want to let the capitalist run wild. Tea Party fanatics are gaining clout in the party, some dreaming of ending Social Security, Medicare, and minimum wages laws.

Don't think that that makes the Democrats your friends, however. The Obama administration strives to protect the capitalists' profits too, thus undermining real relief for the workers and poor.

Workers may vote or abstain. In either case, there's growing cynicism since the capitalist parties offer a bleak choice. But there is an alternative. It's time to use our disgust with the capitalist-controlled parties to build new organizations of struggle that stand up to the capitalists.

The Republicans' pledge to America's capitalists

The Republican national leadership recently summed up its stand in its document *A Pledge to America*. It rails against "an arrogant and out-of-touch government of self-appointed elites". Of course it's true that elites use the government against the masses. But who are the elites? It's the capitalists, dominated by a handful of billionaire tycoons. And the capitalists run both parties, giving more or less support to one or the other depending on their needs of the moment.

Far from opposing the real elites, the Republican document is a pledge to them. It says that every problem will be solved if only the capitalists are free to do whatever they want.

You want jobs? If only the capitalists are free from government interference there will allegedly be jobs galore. The *Pledge* rails that "Excessive federal regulation is a de facto tax on employers and consumers that stifles job creation..." Evidently, the Republicans hope that no one remembers the track record of deregulation. Energy deregulation gave us power blackouts, soaring prices, bankruptcy for California and the collapse of Enron. And deregulation of Wall St. helped foster the Great Recession and the death of millions of jobs with it.

The *Pledge* wails about "de facto taxes" on employers caused by regulation. Never mind that lack of regulations for off-shore drilling and the "free enterprise" drive for profits led to BP's environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, the death of 11 workers, and ruining the economy along the Gulf Coast. Never mind the death of 29 coal miners in April caused by the Massey coal company's repeated violations of safety regulations.

The other main economic theme raised by the Republicans is cutting taxes. Of course workers would like to see the tax burden on them reduced. But what the *Pledge* touts is continuing the Bush tax cuts for the rich. This supposedly will lead to more business investment, and hence more jobs. But as the rich got tax

breaks, massive job cuts, deindustrialization, and the number of companies fleeing to low-wage countries continued to grow.

Republican pledge to do nothing for health care

The Republican stand on health care is the present profit-driven system is fine and just needs more deregulation. There's no mention of how the 40-50 million uninsured will get insurance. The *Pledge* promises to repeal the Obama plan, even though it keeps in place the greedy private insurance industry loved by the Republicans, and would rapidly expand its growth. But because it would require government expenditures so more people can buy insurance, the Republicans condemn it.

Building up the war machine and police-state

For all their talk of smaller government, when it comes to building up the war machine the sky's the limit. The US military machine is a \$1 trillion monster designed to impose the will of "our" capitalists around the world. Republican "budget-cutters" are ready to spend billions more on a giant new missile system.

Here in the US, the Republicans are for beefing up the police state. They are especially interested in persecuting poor Mexican workers who cross the border looking for work. They want increased military operations on the border. And they want racial-profiling laws, such as the Arizona law that allows police to detain anyone they think looks "illegal."

Obama bails out the greedy, not the needy

Given the stand of the Republicans, it might seem that the Democrats deserve support. But they too are fans of free-market economics. They offer a few crumbs for the masses, but real relief never arrives because corporate profits come first.

Compare the Obama administration's attitude toward the Wall St. financial sharks to their attitude toward the suffering workers and unemployed. Obama promised trillions of dollars to save the banks and financial swindlers. Now their profits are soaring again, and they are laughing at the token regulation. Meanwhile millions of unemployed face homelessness and hunger, and the employed face wage cuts and overwork.

Obama's auto bailout is another example. The Republicans mainly opposed the bailout, based on their view that the free market should be allowed to destroy the economy and workers jobs without the government interfering. In contrast, Obama intervened, but not on behalf of the workers, but the auto capitalists. GM and Chrysler got over \$50 billion in aid, but Obama approved of the auto companies' plans to quickly eliminate another 21,000 jobs. And Obama insisted that the remaining workers get hammered with huge wage and benefit cuts. New hires now work for near poverty-level wages.

The lavish rescues of the capitalist are accompanied by a few crumbs for the masses. Obama's "economic stimulus" package offers a bit of help here and there. But there's a giant gap between what the workers and poor need, and what Obama is doing. Public services and schools continue to face major cuts.

Job cuts continue, and no one thinks unemployment rates will significantly drop for years. The mortgage relief program has been a joke. Poverty rates are growing. Wall St. is rescued while the workers and poor are ravaged.

Free-market environmental policy

Obama claims to be a champion of environmental protection. But his free-market views undermine this. He won't contemplate serious planning and regulation. Instead, he advocates that global warming will be solved by issuing pollution permits to the capitalists that they can trade with one another, like stocks are brought and sold on the stock market. This system has been tried many times around the world and is a proven failure.

Health care sacrificed for insurance industry profits

Obama's health care plan is tailored to suit the profit-hungry private insurance industry. About 50 million people lack insurance, while the insured are being hammered with soaring costs and restrictions on medical treatment. The private insurance companies should be eliminated. Government national health insurance for all, such as extending an improved form of Medicare to everyone, would be a real improvement.

Instead, Obama wants to save the miserable private insurance system. His plan makes the uninsured buy insurance from the private insurers, providing them with millions of new customers. Those who can't afford insurance are supposed to get government subsidies. But the greedy insurers will keep costs soaring, straining budget allocations and eroding coverage. This system has been tried in some US states before and has never worked.

What's the reality behind Obama's free-market solution to health care? It's that the extension of health coverage won't even begin until 2013. Even then there are projections that 24 million people will still lack insurance by 2019.

As the first provisions of the health care bill start to go into effect, it's already in trouble. For instance, the bill prohibits insurance companies that insure children from denying them insurance because of pre-existing conditions. But some insurers are saying they will simply no longer offer insurance for children.

Moreover, the Obama plan was supposed to guarantee that all insurance plans provide a certain minimum level of coverage. But the Obama administration is already providing waivers to "mini-med" insurance companies that limit benefits to a few thousand dollars. Such companies, which provide insurance to corporate giants like McDonald's, Denny's and Jack in the Box, won't have to raise their coverage for at least four years.

Obama's anti-immigrant policy

While the Republicans attack Obama for not cracking down on illegal immigrants, quite the opposite is true. Yes, the Obama administration disagrees with the blatantly racist Arizona law. But it is unleashing raids on workplaces and has rounded up more immigrant workers than Bush. It is also beefing up border patrols. Obama also claims he has a plan to provide a path to legalization for undocumented workers. But this process would be so full of obstacles that only a handful of immigrants would qualify.

Imperialism, Obama-style

The Republicans poke at Obama as being weak on so-called "national defense". But in reality, Obama is scarcely different than Bush on these matters. He has escalated the war in Afghanistan and spread it into Pakistan. The US occupation of Iraq continues, with 50,000 soldiers still there and threats of more if the situation deteriorates. And the troops aren't there to provide

freedom, but are defending pro-US reactionaries from rival anti-US reactionaries.

The Bush administration gained notoriety for its use of torture. But Obama, like Bush, is using the excuse of protecting state secrets to stop the investigation of torture and other abuses. Moreover, he is extending the use of "extraordinary rendition" where people are rounded up and taken to secret bases around the world where the CIA and local tyrannical governments torture them. And the Obama administration is continuing spying on and harassing progressive activists in the US.

The workers and the elections

Workers, what then should our attitude be toward the mid-term elections? The sellout union leaderships, as usual, are trying to whip up enthusiasm for workers to support the Democrats. They are terrified of a real struggle against the capitalists. So no matter how many times the Democrats stab us in the back, the union hierarchies find an excuse to back them.

We should use the elections to expose that both parties are enemies of the workers and oppressed. The real choice is this: relying on the parties of the capitalists or getting organized for a class struggle against the capitalists and their political servants.

Workers, we need to fight for own demands. We need government-run jobs programs, a big extension and improvement of unemployment insurance so that it provides decent income without constant threats to end at any moment; and a moratorium on home foreclosures. We need big funding hikes for public schools and extra support for students in poor districts, instead of privatizing education and scapegoating teachers.

We should demand national health insurance, not compulsory private insurance.

We need stronger regulations against global warming and other environmental dangers. We need a comprehensive national program to convert to alternative energy.

We need to fight the war machine tooth and nail. We must demand an end to the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and to other smaller US military adventures.

The capitalist politicians will cry that there's no money to provide relief for the masses. Really? What about the trillions offered the bankers? The trillion-dollar military? Or raising taxes on the wealthy whose fortunes come by driving workers down?

But our demands on these and other matters will not count unless we build up mass actions and organizations to carry them out. New organizations based on the rank-and-file workers, not the no-struggle union leaders, should be built. We should take part in workplace struggles but also in ant-racist, anti-war, and pro-environmental struggles. All our problems have one solution – moving the class struggle forward. This will be a difficult and protracted process. But the present crises will start people looking for alternatives. Let's use the mid-term elections as a way to build our struggles against the evils coming from capitalism and the political parties that serve the capitalists. ■

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