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USA

Occupy Obama

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A few weeks before the November 6 elections, the Republican and Democratic parties held their conventions. While the Republican Party represents the hard Right, the two candidates agree on most of the economic and social policies to be carried out, far from the demands of the “99 per cent”. Cinzia Arruzza in New York made this assessment for the September 13th issue of the weekly French newspaper *Tout est Ã Nous* (TEAN).

Between the end of August and the first week of September the national conventions of the Republican and Democratic parties were held. It is not sure that these two events have actually contributed to a shift of undecided voters. Faced with a candidate like Romney and a candidate for the Vice-Presidency like Paul Ryan, there is no choice: we must support Obama. This is the reasoning of all those who, four years ago, sincerely believed in the message of hope launched by the Obama campaign. And although four years later, many think that the “Yes we can” challenge has turned into a bitter “No, we couldn’t”, supporting Obama in the next elections in November would seem to be the only option.

The same Obama, in his discourse, has decided to readjust the tone compared to his first candidacy. He no longer speaks of change but of “new” and “going forward”. He no longer promises any historical turning point, but rather a slow path out of crisis and unemployment, provided that people roll up their sleeves. Besides, it is difficult to promise wonders when the economy is going backwards and four years of government have not at all changed the direction that American society is taking or attenuated the growth of social injustices. In any case, if the candidacy of Obama does not evoke the same enthusiasm and the same hopes as four years ago, the fear of a victory of the Republican Party, increasingly anchored further to the right and ever more aggressive on social issues, gender, and race, could play a decisive role in the re-election of Obama.

A poor balance sheet

A newspaper identified fifteen programmatic points on which Romney and Obama are pretty much in agreement. And they are not trifles.

Concerning jobs, Republicans and Democrats are basically in agreement on not funding public programmes aimed at increasing the level of employment. Both think that the solution must come from the private sector. Under the Obama administration, there has been no increase in the minimum wage, trade union rights and the right to strike have continued to be eroded and there has been no attempt to enforce existing laws protecting labour.

Similarly, after promising access to health for all, the Obama administration has simply implemented on the national level the health care reform programme designed by Romney in Massachusetts, which encouraged people to resort to private insurance. Not so long ago, Obama and Nancy Pelosi were continuing to stress the need to conclude an agreement with the Republicans about budget cuts in three fundamental areas of the American Welfare State: Medicare, Medicaid and social security.

Certainly, the Republicans are distinguished by an aggressive racism, but we should not forget that during the Obama administration a million immigrants have been deported, often without any trial, and after months spent in detention centres.

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On foreign policy, and also on environmental policy, there is nothing to celebrate, and the differences are limited to questions of style. The Obama administration has continued to pursue the NAFTA programme, the embargo on Cuba, the militarization of Africa (not to mention the intervention in Libya), and has not changed in substantial terms US policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Last but not least, like the Republicans, the Democrats have fallen over themselves to offer billions of dollars to Wall Street.

The truth is that between the Republicans and the Democrats, there is little to choose and that the only novelty in American politics in recent decades has been the Occupy movement. The election sequence, however, is trying to influence this movement, which seems to be in big trouble. Occupy Chicago organized three days of events and debates during the Democratic convention under the slogan "Occupy Obama. Stop the war of the president of the one per cent against the 99 per cent of the rest of the world".

And Occupy Wall Street launched three days of protests in New York on the anniversary of the occupation of Zuccotti Park. For the media, now focused on the upcoming elections, the movement is no longer news. Especially if it calls Obama into question...