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# What Choice in 2012?

- IV Online magazine - 2012 - IV448 - May 2012 -

Publication date: Sunday 20 May 2012

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**The outcome of the November 2012 election is clear: It will be the most vicious and racist in modern U.S. history, and by far the most expensive of all time. Are critical issues at stake in this political year? Absolutely, yes**” but not the questions we’ll get to vote on.

Heading up the Republican side with his trusty Etch-A-Sketch, presidential candidate Mitt Romney will be trying to simultaneously erase both his “moderate” past, and his ties to a party platform that will be crafted to appease the hardcore religious and don’t-tax-the-rich right wing. Romney can run but he can’t really hide, either from the influence of the extreme right” which may demand veto power over the vice-presidential choice” or from the well-known fact that his one and only core political principle is that he should be president.

Space doesn’t permit us here to explore the politics of Romney’s erstwhile rival Rick Santorum” the man who wants to get the government out of the corporate boardroom and put it back where it belongs, in your bedroom. But even after Santorum’s withdrawal, the fact remains that the warring Republican factions, reactionary as they all are, really do despise each other. There’s only one thing that can unite them: their hate-Obama campaign, which will escalate to new levels of racism and lying that we have barely even imagined yet.

The Biggest Lie already out there is that “Barack Obama wants America to be a European-style socialist country.” One can only wish it were true (and that European nations one after another weren’t driving their own economies into the ground by swallowing the austerity poison pill). The Romney-Republican model for “jobs and prosperity” amounts to pushing down as many working people to as close to minimum wage as possible.

President Barack Obama and the Democrats will be running on his signature accomplishments” saving Wall Street’s butt, killing Osama bin Laden, and the Affordable Health Care Act. When Republicans chant “Drill Baby Drill,” the president responds that he’s actually expanded fracking and offshore oil drilling while they just talk about it. He’s also enlarged Bush’s drone warfare, domestic surveillance and immigrant deportation programs” with 30,000 people now in detention centers pending deportation, often deprived of even basic medical care.

As for health care reform, whatever rulings the Supreme Court hands down in June will be driven by politics, thinly veiled by pretexts of Constitutional law. One way or the other, that decision will reignite the health care debate. (Over half of all union contract fights today involve cuts to employee and retiree health care.) But the option of a true national “single-payer” insurance program” the way to cut through all the crap of individual mandates, employer conscience exemptions from birth control, thousands of pages of incomprehensible rules and all the rest” was excluded from the beginning as “not realistic.”

What an election year: Are we really ready for this?

## Massive Attacks on Rights

There are fundamental issues at stake in 2012, but they’re hardly what the capitalist parties’ presidential and congressional campaigns will be about. It’s the Occupy movement, since last fall, that’s pushed them to the foreground and represents the hope of keeping them there. Then, the murder of Trayvon Martin sparked massive national and international outrage over the blatant targeting of Black youth. That mass pressure forced the state of Florida, belatedly, to arrest and indict George Zimmerman for second-degree murder.

The plain fact is that racial profiling, police and vigilante violence, the suppression of voting rights, and the destruction of working people's rights are all parts of a common pattern. The same rightwing legislative machinery producing "stand your ground" laws has also generated anti-worker legislation all over the United States. The exposure of the role of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in writing the law that enabled Trayvon Martin's killer Zimmerman to claim "self-defense" is now forcing a number of major corporations to distance themselves from this vicious and shadowy organization.

The most critical questions facing our society can be briefly stated: (1) the domestic and global capitalist assault on working people's wages, living conditions and rights to basic social services; (2) an extreme attack on the most basic rights of women, African Americans and other people of color in the United States; and (3) the rising danger of new wars in the Middle East and Asia. (The electronic cutoff of Iranian banks from the international financial system could probably be interpreted as an act of war, should the Iranian regime feel pushed into a corner.)

By various means, the wishes of the majority of the U.S. population are effectively excluded from determining the outcome. Take, for example, the massive drive to block women's access to reproductive services, to disenfranchise huge sectors of people of color and the poor, and to block undocumented immigrants from employment, education, drivers' licenses and the necessities of life. These measures for the most part, certainly the most extreme ones, are in the hands of rightwing state legislatures that happily kowtow to the Koch Brothers, ALEC and the most bigoted elements of "Christian social conservatives."

The competing slogans of the capitalist parties – "restoring America's prosperity," "guaranteeing our future," "saving the middle class" and all the rest – are empty phrases deliberately crafted to hide their real programs. The living standards, job security and futures of the working class majority are under severe pressure from the combined effects of the systemic crisis of capitalism and policy decisions driven by Wall Street at the expense of "the 99%." The parties don't advertise themselves as managers of social decline and austerity, but that's what they are – and that's why so much "political debate" is a series of mystifications and outright lies.

## Politics of Austerity

The austerity drive is carried out on multiple levels, national, state and local, under the pretext of "fiscal necessity." The main political difference between the Republican and Democratic strategies – and it's a significant difference – amounts to whether the remnants of the once powerful organized labor movement should be utterly smashed, or rather enlisted as junior partners in the administration of austerity.

Thus Mitt Romney condemns the Obama administration's auto industry bailout on the basis that a "normal bankruptcy" could have produced a "healthier outcome" – by which he means, no doubt, an outcome with union contracts swept away and auto workers' wages at \$10 an hour or less. President Obama and his advisors can counter that there were no private investors to pick up GM and Chrysler's pieces, that government intervention was absolutely necessary and that the United Auto Workers leadership needed to be enlisted to cut the labor costs of new and future autoworkers in half.

Meanwhile, the plague of "right-to-work" laws and abolition of public workers' collective bargaining rights spreads through state legislatures, and (in the case of Michigan) municipal insolvencies bring down either a state-appointed "Emergency Manager" or, as the elites prefer, "consent agreements" where the local government participates in wiping out union contracts, slashing services and selling off public assets on the pretext of maintaining its "autonomy." (Dianne Feeley's article in this issue on the takeover of Detroit explores some of the details.)

## How to Fight Back?

In all these cases, the obstacles to people using “the political process” to stop these atrocities are formidable — but the extreme nature of the assault on basic rights has provoked a most welcome response. In Wisconsin, Governor Walker faces a recall election. In Ohio, the bill stripping public workers’ bargaining rights was defeated in a referendum last November, and repeal of a voter-suppression ID law is on the 2012 ballot (unless the legislature hastily repeals it first).

In Michigan, a series of petition drives have been launched to reverse the infamous “Emergency Manager” Public Act 4 and to preempt a bundle of anti-worker laws poised to be adopted by the Republican legislature.

The most promising of such efforts was the Millionaires Tax Initiative (MTI) in California, aimed at addressing the state’s massive budget crisis and economic inequality. Sadly, it was sidelined by the refusal of the leadership of major unions, particularly the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), to back the campaign (see the report, in this issue, by Bill Balderston and Claudette Begin). Nonetheless, the MTI was a signal of “the 99 percent” becoming a potential force in politics, spearheaded by Occupy and the tens of millions of people the movement has inspired.

MTI illustrated the possibility and the necessity of Occupy’s energy hooking up in the political arena with community, labor and insurgent social forces — not necessarily to elect candidates — and we anticipate that this kind of intervention will be part of the resurgence of Occupy.

We also know that there will be considerable tension between competing impulses — whether to take action around the critical issues of the moment, or to throw energy into working to save lesser-evil Democrats from another electoral debacle. In our view, the latter course is a dead-end strategy that only ensures choices more and more dismal with each succeeding electoral cycle. The question for Occupy, for labor and for the civil rights and social movements remains, as it has for decades: how to forge a powerful independent force to break the logjam of the two corporate capitalist parties.

## What Way Forward?

At best, democracy under capitalism allows people to exercise only very limited control over the conditions of our lives. Genuine democratic power requires replacing capitalism with workers’ control of production, and a profound restructuring of the economy to meet human needs and to avert environmental catastrophe.

Within the existing system, the struggle to expand the limited democracy we have depends most crucially on independent politics, meaning parties and movements outside the parties and institutions that represent and answer to the capitalist ruling class (the “one percent.”) To a greater extent than in most other capitalist states, the U.S. labor movement and its allies have remained trapped as pawns in the rulers’ political structures.

In our view, the Occupy movement carries the seeds of the new mass independent political force that’s desperately needed. There is no prospect that such a force will crystallize in the national electoral arena in 2012. If anything, the desperate urge that many activists feel to “defeat the right wing” will dilute Occupy’s power, as they feel compelled to turn energy to reelecting the corporate centrist president Obama — not because he is still seen as a transformative political leader, but simply because the alternative looks so hideous.

So is there any choice? First and foremost, what matters most is activist struggle — fighting home foreclosures and

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blocking evictions, standing up for heroic immigrant youth defying the threat of deportation, working on ballot initiatives against the wave of laws attacking workers, the poor and the rights of women â€” much more than the decision for or against casting an individual “lesser-evil” vote.

At the same time, we do consider that a vote for progressive parties on the ballot â€” Green Party or socialist candidates in particular, or local independent candidates representing the struggles of the movements â€” represents an important symbolic call for the mass independent political force that will be needed to carry forward the struggle for democracy, against an increasingly brutal and repressive political order.

At this point, the campaigns of the Green Party and other potential alternatives to the capitalist parties haven't yet crystallized. We will follow these with interest as they develop. In any case, with all due recognition of the Occupy movement's uncertainties and difficulties as it emerges from the winter cold into the election blizzard of 2012, we proclaim with no hesitation: “Occupy Is Our Party.”