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Cover Story

The 2012 Elections Have Little To Do With Obama's Record ...

Which Is Why We Are Voting For Him

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and**

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Let's cut to the chase. The November 2012 elections will be unlike anything that any of us can remember. It is not just that this will be a close election. It is also not just that the direction of Congress hangs in the balance. Rather, this will be one of the most polarized and critical elections in recent history.

Unfortunately what too few leftists and progressives have been prepared to accept is that the polarization is to a great extent centered on a revenge-seeking white supremacy; on race and the racial implications of the moves to the right in the US political system. It is also focused on a re-subjugation of women, harsh burdens on youth and the elderly, increased war dangers, and reaction all along the line for labor and the working class. No one on the left with any good sense should remain indifferent or stand idly by in the critical need to defeat Republicans this year.

U.S. Presidential elections are not what progressives want them to be

A large segment of what we will call the 'progressive forces' in US politics approach US elections generally, and Presidential elections in particular, as if: (1) we have more power on the ground than we actually possess, and (2) the elections are about expressing our political outrage at the system. Both get us off on the wrong foot.

The US electoral system is among the most undemocratic on the planet. Constructed in a manner so as to guarantee an ongoing dominance of a two party duopoly, the US electoral universe largely aims at reducing so-called legitimate discussion to certain restricted parameters acceptable to the ruling circles of the country. Almost all progressive measures, such as Medicare for All or Full Employment, are simply declared 'off the table.' In that sense there is no surprise that the Democratic and Republican parties are both parties of the ruling circles, even though they are quite distinct within that sphere.

The nature of the US electoral system--and specifically the ballot restrictions and 'winner-take-all' rules within it--encourages or pressures various class fractions and demographic constituency groups to establish elite-dominated electoral coalitions. The Democratic and Republican parties are, in effect, electoral coalitions or party-blocs of this sort, unrecognizable in most of the known universe as political parties united around a program and a degree of discipline to be accountable to it. We may want and fight for another kind of system, but it would be foolish to develop strategy and tactics not based on the one we actually have.

The winner-take-all nature of the system discourages independent political parties and candidacies on both the right and the left. For this reason the extreme right made a strategic decision in the aftermath of the 1964 Goldwater defeat to move into the Republican Party with a long-term objective of taking it over. This was approached at the level of both mass movement building, e.g., anti-busing, anti-abortion, as well as electoral candidacies. The GOP right's 'Southern Strategy' beginning in 1968 largely succeeded in chasing out most of the pro-New Deal Republicans from the party itself, as well as drawing in segregationist Democratic voters in the formerly 'Solid South.'

Efforts by progressives to realign or shift the Democratic Party, on the other hand, were blunted by the defeat of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964, and later the defeat of the McGovern candidacy in 1972, during which time key elements of the party's upper echelons were prepared to lose the election rather than witness a McGovern victory. In the 1980s a very different strategy was advanced by Rev. Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow insurgencies that aimed at building—at least initially—an independent, progressive organization capable of fielding candidates within the Democratic primaries. This approach—albeit independent of Jackson himself—had an important local victory with the election of Mayor Harold Washington in Chicago. At the national level, however, it ran into a different set of challenges by 1989.

In the absence of a comprehensive electoral strategy, progressive forces fall into one of three cul-de-sacs: (1) ad hoc electoralism, i.e., participating in the election cycle but with no long-term plan other than tailing the Democrats; (2) abandoning electoral politics altogether in favor of modern-day anarcho-syndicalist 'pressure politics from below'; or (3) satisfying ourselves with far more limited notions that we can best use the election period in order to 'expose' the true nature of the capitalist system in a massive way by attacking all of the mainstream candidates. We think all of these miss the key point.

Our elections are about money and the balance of power

Money is obvious, particularly in light of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision. The balance of power is primarily at the level of the balance within the ruling circles, as well as the level of grassroots power of the various mass movements. The party that wins will succeed on the basis of the sort of electoral coalition that they are able to assemble, co-opt or be pressured by, including but not limited to the policy and interest conflicts playing out within its own ranks.

The weakness of left and progressive forces means we have been largely unable to participate, in our own name and independent of the two party upper crust, in most national-level elections with any hope of success. In that sense most left and progressive interventions in the electoral arena at the national level, especially at the Presidential level, are ineffective acts of symbolic opposition or simply propaganda work aimed at uniting and recruiting far smaller circles of militants.

They are not aimed at a serious challenge for power but rather aim to demonstrate a point of view, or to put it more crassly, to 'fly the flag.'

The electoral arena is frequently not viewed as an effective site for structural reforms or a more fundamental changing of direction.

Our politics, in this sense, can be placed in two broad groupings—politics as self-expression and politics as strategy. In an overall sense, the left needs both of these—the audacity and energy of the former and the ability to unite all who can be united of the latter. But it is also important to know the difference between the two, and which to emphasize and when in any given set of battles.

Consider, for a moment, the reform struggles with which many of us are familiar. Let's say that a community is being organized to address a demand for jobs on a construction site. If the community is not entirely successful in this struggle, it does not mean that the struggle was wrong or inappropriate. It means that the progressives were too weak organizationally and the struggle must continue. The same is true in the electoral arena. The fact that it is generally difficult, in this period, to get progressives elected or that liberal and progressive

candidates may back down on a commitment once elected, does not condemn the arena of the struggle. It does, however, say something about how we might need to organize ourselves better in order to win and enforce accountability.

In part due to justified suspicion of the electoral system and a positive impulse for self-expression and making our values explicit, too many progressives view the electoral realm as simply a canvass upon which various pictures of the ideal future are painted. Instead of constructing a strategy for power that involves a combination of electoral and non-electoral activity, uniting both a militant minority and a progressive majority, there is an impulsive tendency to treat the electoral realm as an idea bazaar rather than as one of the key sites on which the struggle for progressive power unfolds.

The Shifts within the Right and the Rise of Irrationalism

Contrary to various myths, there was no 'golden age' in our country where politicians of both parties got along and politics was clean. U. S. politics has always been dirty. One can look at any number of elections in the 19th century, for instance, with the Hayes-Tilden election of 1876 being among the more notorious, to see examples of electoral chicanery. Elections have been bought and sold and there has been wide-spread voter disenfranchisement. In the late 19th century and early 20th century massive voter disenfranchisement unfolded as part of the rise of Jim Crow segregation. Due to gains by both the populist and socialists in this era, by the 1920s our election laws were 'reformed'—in all but a handful of states—to do away with 'fusion ballots' and other measures previously helpful to new insurgent forces forming independent parties and alliances.

What is significant about the current era has been the steady move of the Republican Party toward the right, not simply at the realm of neoliberal economics (which has also been true of much of the Democratic Party establishment) but also in other features of the 'ideology' and program of the Republicans. For this reason we find it useful to distinguish between conservatives and right-wing populists (and within right-wing populism, to put a spotlight on irrationalism). Right-wing populism is actually a radical critique of the existing system, but from the political right with all that that entails. Uniting with irrationalism, it seeks to build program and direction based largely upon myths, fears and prejudices.

Right-wing populism exists as the equivalent of the herpes virus within the capitalist system. It is always there--sometimes latent, at other times active—and it does not go away. In periods of system distress, evidence of right-wing populism erupts with more force. Of particular

importance in understanding right-wing populism is the complex intersection of race, anti-immigrant settler-ism, 'producerism,' homophobia and empire.

In the US, right-wing populism stands as the grassroots defender of white racial supremacy. It intertwines with the traditional myths associated with the "American Dream" and suggests that the US was always to be a white republic and that no one, no people, and no organization should stand in the way of such an understanding. It seeks enemies, and normally enemies based on demographics of 'The Other'. After all, right-wing populism sees itself in the legacy of the likes of Andrew Jackson and other proponents of Manifest Destiny, a view that saw no inconsistency between the notion of a white democratic republic, ethnic cleansing, slavery, and a continental (and later global) empire. 'Jacksonian Democracy' was primarily the complete codification and nationalization of white supremacy in our country's political life.

Irrationalism is rising as an endemic virus in our political landscape

Largely in times of crisis and uncertainty, virulent forms of irrationalism make an appearance. The threat to white racial supremacy that emerged in the 1960s, for instance, brought forward a backlash that included an irrationalist view of history, e.g., that the great early civilizations on Earth couldn't have arisen from peoples with darker skins, but instead were founded by creatures from other planets. Irrationalism, moreover, was not limited to the racial realm. Challenges to scientific theories such as evolution and climate change are currently on the rise. Irrationalism cries for a return to the past, and within that a mythical past. A component of various right-wing ideologies, especially fascism, irrationalism exists as a form of sophistry, and even worse. It often does not even pretend to hold to any degree of logic, but rather simply requires the acceptance of a series of non sequitur assertions.

Right-wing populism and irrationalism have received nationwide reach anchored in institutions such as the Fox network, but also right-wing religious institutions. Along with right-wing talk radio and websites, a virtual community of millions of voters has been founded whose views refuse critique from within. Worse, well-financed and well-endowed walls are established to ensure that the views are not challenged from without. In the 2008 campaign and its immediate aftermath, we witnessed segments of this community in the rise of the 'birther' movement and its backing by the likes of Donald Trump. Like many other cults there were no facts that adherents of the 'birthers' would

accept except those 'facts' which they, themselves, had established. Information contrary to their assertions was swept away. It didn't matter that we could prove Obama was born in the US, because their real point, the he was a Black man, was true.

The 2012 Republican primaries demonstrated the extent to which irrationalism and right-wing populism, in various incarnations, have captured the Republican Party. That approximately 60% of self-identified Republicans would continue to believe that President Obama is not a legitimate citizen of the USA points to the magnitude of self-delusion.

The Obama campaign of 2008 at the grassroots was nothing short of a mass revolt

The energy for the Obama campaign was aimed against eight years of Bush, long wars, neoliberal austerity and collapse, and Republican domination of the US government. It took the form of a movement-like embrace of the candidacy of Barack Obama. The nature of this embrace, however, set the stage for a series of both strategic and tactical problems that have befallen progressive forces since Election Day 2008.

The mis-analysis of Obama in 2007 and 2008 by so many people led to an overwhelming tendency to misread his candidacy. In that period, we—the authors of this essay—offered critical support and urged independent organization for the Obama candidacy in 2008 through the independent 'Progressives for Obama' project. We were frequently chastised by some allies at the time for being too critical, too idealistic, too 'left', and not willing to give Obama a chance to succeed. Yet our measured skepticism, and call for independence and initiative in a broader front, was not based on some naïve impatience. Instead, it was based on an assessment of who Obama was and the nature of his campaign for the Presidency.

Obama was and is a corporate liberal

Obama is an eloquent speaker who rose to the heights of US politics after a very difficult upbringing and some success in Chicago politics. But as a national figure, he always positioned himself not so much as a fighter for the disenfranchised but more as a mediator of conflict, as someone pained by the growth of irrationalism in the USA and the grotesque image of the USA that much of the world had come to see. To say that he was a reformer does not adequately describe either his character or his objectives. He was cast as the representative, wittingly or not, of the ill-conceived 'post-Black politics era' at a moment when much of white America wanted to believe that we had

become 'post-racial.' He was a political leader and candidate trying to speak to the center, in search of a safe harbor. He was the person to save US capitalism at a point where everything appeared to be imploding.

For millions, who Obama actually was, came to be secondary to what he represented for them. This was the result of a combination of wishful thinking, on the one hand, and strongly held progressive aspirations, on the other. In other words, masses of people wanted change that they could believe in. They saw in Obama the representative of that change and rallied to him. While it is quite likely that Hillary Clinton, had she received the nomination, would also have defeated McCain/Palin, it was the Obama ticket and campaign that actually inspired so many to believe that not only could there be an historical breakthrough at the level of racial symbolism—a Black person in the White House—but that other progressive changes could also unfold. With these aspirations, masses of people, including countless numbers of left and progressive activists, were prepared to ignore uncomfortable realities about candidate Obama and later President Obama.

There are two examples that are worth mentioning here. One, the matter of race. Two, the matter of war. With regard to race, Obama never pretended that he was anything other than Black. Ironically, in the early stages of his campaign many African Americans were far from certain how 'Black' he actually was. Yet the matter of race was less about who Obama was—except for the white supremacists—and more about race and racism in US history and current reality.

Nothing exemplified this better than the controversy surrounding Rev. Jeremiah Wright, followed by Obama's historic speech on race in Philadelphia. Wright, a liberation theologian and progressive activist, became a target for the political right as a way of 'smearing' Obama. Obama chose to distance himself from Wright, but in a very interesting way. He upheld much of Wright's basic views of US history while at the same time acting as if racist oppression was largely a matter of the past. In that sense he suggested that Wright's critique was outdated.

Wright's critique was far from being outdated. Yet in his famous speech on race, Obama said much more of substance than few mainstream politicians had ever done. In so doing, he opened the door to the perception that something quite new and innovative might appear in the White House. He made no promises, though, which is precisely why suggestions of betrayal are misplaced. There was no such commitment in the first place.

With regard to war, there was something similar. Obama came out against the Iraq War early, before it started. He opposed it at another rally after it was underway. To his credit, US troops have been withdrawn from Iraq. He never, however, came out against war in general, or certainly against imperialist war. In fact, he made it clear that there were wars that he supported, including but not limited to the Afghanistan war. Further, he suggested that if need be he would carry out bombings in Pakistan. Despite this, much of the antiwar movement and many other supporters assumed that Obama was the antiwar candidate in a wider sense than his opposition to the war in Iraq. Perhaps 'assumed' is not quite correct; they wanted him to be the antiwar candidate who was more in tune with their own views.

With Obama's election, the wishful thinking played itself out, to some degree, in the form of inaction and demobilization. Contrary to the complaints of some on the Left, Obama and his administration cannot actually be blamed for this. There were decisions made in important social movements and constituencies to (1) assume that Obama would do the 'right thing,' and, (2) provide Obama 'space' rather than place pressure on him and his administration. This was a strategic mistake. And when combined with a relative lack of consolidating grassroots campaign work into ongoing independent organization at the grassroots, with the exception of a few groups, such as the Progressive Democrats of America, it was an important opportunity largely lost.

There is one other point that is worth adding here. Many people failed to understand that the Obama administration was not and is not the same as Obama the individual, and occupying the Oval Office is not the same as an unrestricted ability to wield state power. 'Team Obama' is certainly chaired by Obama, but it remains a grouping of establishment forces that share a common framework—and common restrictive boundaries. It operates under different pressures and is responsive--or not--to various specific constituencies. For instance, in 2009, when President Zelaya of Honduras was overthrown in a coup, President Obama responded--initially--with a criticism of the coup. At the end of the day, however, the Obama administration did nothing to overturn the coup and to ensure that Honduras regained democracy. Instead the administration supported the 'coup people.' Did this mean that President Obama supported the coup? It does not really matter. What matters is that his administration backtracked on its alleged opposition to the coup and then did everything in their power to ensure that President Zelaya could not return. This is why the focus on Obama the personality is misleading and unhelpful.

No Struggle, No Progress

President Obama turned out not to be the progressive reformer that many people had hoped. At the same time, however, he touched off enough sore points for the political Right that he became a lightning rod for everything that they hated and feared. This is what helps us understand the circumstances under which the November 2012 election is taking place.

As a corporate liberal, Obama's strategy was quite rational in those terms. First, stabilize the economy. Second, move on health insurance. Third, move on jobs. Fourth, attempt a foreign policy breakthrough. Contrary to the hopes of much of his base, Obama proceeded to tackle each of these narrowly as a corporate 'bipartisan' reformer rather than as a wider progressive champion of the underdog. That does not mean that grassroots people gained nothing. Certainly preserving General Motors was to the benefit of countless auto workers and workers in related industries. Yet Obama's approach in each case was to make his determinations by first reading Wall Street and the corporate world and then extending the olive branch of bi-partisanship to his adversaries on the right. This, of course, led to endless and largely useless compromises, thereby demoralizing his base in the progressive grassroots.

While Obama's base was becoming demoralized, the political right was becoming energized

It did not matter that Obama was working to preserve capitalism. As far as the right was concerned, there were two sins under which he was operating: some small degree of economic re-distributionism and the fact that Obama was Black. The combination of both made Obama a demon, as far as the right was concerned, who personified Black power, anti-colonialism and socialism, all at the same time.

The Upset Right and November 2012

We stress the need to understand that Obama represents an irrational symbol for the political right, and a potent symbol that goes way beyond what Obama actually stands for and practices. The right, while taking aim at Obama, also seeks, quite methodically and rationally, to use him to turn back the clock. They have created a common front based on white revanchism (a little used but accurate term for an ideology of revenge), on political misogyny, on anti-'freeloader' themes aimed at youth, people of color and immigrants, and a partial defense of the so-called 1%. Rightwing populism asserts a 'producer' vs. 'parasites' outlook aimed at the unemployed and immigrants below them and 'Jewish bankers and Jewish media elites' above them. Let us emphasize that this is a front rather than one coherent organization or

platform. It is an amalgam, but an amalgam of ingredients that produces a particularly nasty US-flavored stew of right-wing populism.

Reports of declining Obama support among white workers is a good jumping off point in terms of understanding white revanchism. Obama never had a majority among them as a whole, although he did win a majority among younger white workers. White workers have been economically declining since the mid-1970s. This segment of a larger multinational and multiracial working class is in search of potential allies, but largely due to a combination of race and low unionization rates finds itself being swayed by right-wing populism. Along with other workers it is insecure and deeply distressed economically, but also finds itself in fear—psychologically—for its own existence as the demographics of the USA undergoes significant changes. They take note of projections that the US, by 2050, will be a majority of minorities of people of color. They perceive that they have gotten little from Obama, but more importantly they are deeply suspicious as to whether a Black leader can deliver anything at all to anyone.

Political misogyny—currently dubbed ‘the war on women’---has been on the rise in the US for some time. The ‘New Right’ in the 1970s built its base in right-wing churches around the issue in the battles over abortion and reproduction rights, setting the stage for Reagan’s victory. In the case of 2012, the attacks on Planned Parenthood along with the elitist dismissal of working mothers have been representative of the assertion of male supremacy, even when articulated by women.

This in turn is part of a global assault on women based in various religious fundamentalisms that have become a refuge for economically displaced men and for gender-uncomfortable people across the board.

The attack on ‘slacker,’ ‘criminal’ and ‘over-privileged’ youth, especially among minorities, is actually part of what started to unfold in the anti-healthcare antics of the Tea Party. Studies of the Tea Party movement have indicated that they have a conceptualization based on the “deserving” and “undeserving” populations. They and many others on the right are deeply suspicious, if not in outright opposition, to anything that they see as distributing away from them any of their hard-won gains. They believe that they earned and deserve what they have and that there is an undeserving population, to a great extent youth (but also including other groups), who are looking for handouts. This helps us understand that much of the right-wing populist movement is a generational movement of white baby-boomers and older who see the ship of empire foundering and wish to ensure that they have life preservers, if not life-boats.

The defenders of the 1% are an odd breed. Obviously that includes the upper crust, but it also includes a social base that believes that the upper crust earned their standing. Further, this social base believes or wishes to believe that they, too, will end up in that echelon. Adhering to variations of Reaganism, 'bootstrapping' or other such ideologies, they wish to believe that so-called free market capitalism is the eternal solution to all economic problems. Despite the fact that the Republican economic program is nothing more or less than a retreading of George W. Bush's failed approach, they believe that it can be done differently.

Empire, balance of forces and the lesser of two evils

The choice in November 2012 does not come down to empire vs. no-empire. While anyone can choose to vote for the Greens or other non-traditional political parties, the critical choice and battleground continues to exist in the context of a two-party system within the declining US empire. The balance of forces in 2012 is such that those who are arrayed against the empire are in no position to mount a significant electoral challenge on an anti-imperialist platform.

To assume that the November elections are a moment to display our antipathy toward empire, moreover, misses entirely what is unfolding.

This is not a referendum on the "America of Empire": it is a referendum pitting the "America of Popular Democracy"—the progressive majority representing the changing demographics of the US and the increasing demands for broad equality and economic relief, especially the unemployed and the elderly—against the forces of unfettered neoliberalism and far right irrationalism. Obama is the face on the political right's bull's eye, and stands as the key immediate obstacle to their deeper ambitions. We, on the left side of the aisle, recognize that he is not our advocate for the 99%. Yet and quite paradoxically, he is the face that the right is using to mobilize its base behind irrationalism and regression.

That's why we argue that Obama's record is really not what is at stake in this election

Had the progressive social movements mobilized to push Obama for major changes we could celebrate; had there been progressive electoral challenges in the 2010 mid-term elections and even in the lead up to 2012 (such as Norman Solomon's congressional challenge in California, which lost very narrowly), there might be something very different at stake this year. Instead what we have is the face of open reaction vs. the face of corporate liberalism, of 'austerity and war on steroids' vs. 'austerity and war in slow motion.'

This raises an interesting question about the matter of the "lesser of two evils," something which has become, over the years, a major concern for many progressives. Regularly in election cycles some progressives will dismiss supporting any Democratic Party candidate because of a perceived need to reject "lesser evil-ism", meaning that Democrats will always strike a pose as somewhat better than the GOP, but remain no different in substance. In using the anti-'lesser evil-ism' phraseology, the suggestion is that it really does not matter who wins because they are both bad. Eugene Debs is often quoted—better to vote for what you want and not get it, than to vote for what you oppose and get it. While this may make for strong and compelling rhetoric and assertions, it makes for a bad argument and bad politics.

In elections progressives need to be looking very coldly at a few questions:

1. Are progressive social movements strong enough to supersede or bypass the electoral arena altogether?
2. Is there a progressive candidate who can outshine both a reactionary and a mundane liberal, and win?
3. What would we seek to do in achieving victory?
4. What is at stake in that particular election?

In thinking through these questions, we think the matter of a lesser of two evils is a tactical question of simply voting for one candidate to defeat another, rather than a matter of principle. Politics is frequently about the lesser of two evils. World War II for the USA, Britain and the USSR was all about the lesser of two evils. Britain and the USA certainly viewed the USSR as a lesser evil compared with the Nazi Germany, and the USSR came to view the USA and Britain as the lesser evils. Neither side trusted the other, yet they found common cause against a particular enemy. There are many less dramatic examples, but the point is that it happens all the time. It's part of 'politics as strategy' mentioned earlier.

It is for these reasons that upholding the dismissal of the 'lesser evil-ism' is unhelpful. Yes, in this case, Obama is aptly described as the lesser of two evils. He certainly represents a contending faction of empire. He has continued the drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. His healthcare plan is nowhere near as helpful as would be Medicare for All. He has sidelined the Employee Free Choice Act that would promote unionization. What this tells us is that Obama is not a progressive. What it does not tell us is how to approach the elections.

Approaching November

The political right, more than anything, wishes to turn November 2012 into a repudiation of the changing demographics of the US and an opportunity to reaffirm not only the empire, but also white racial supremacy. In addition to focusing on Obama they have been making what are now well-publicized moves toward voter suppression, with a special emphasis on denying the ballot to minority, young, formerly incarcerated and elderly voters. This latter fact is what makes ridiculous the suggestion by some progressives that they will stay home and not vote at all.

The political right seeks an electoral turn-around reminiscent of the elections at the end of the 19th century in the South that disenfranchised African Americans and many poor whites. This will be their way of holding back the demographic and political clocks. And, much like the disenfranchisement efforts at the end of the 19th century, the efforts in 2012 are playing on racial fears among whites, including the paranoid notion that there has been significant voter fraud carried out by the poor and people of color (despite all of the research that demonstrates the contrary!).

Furthermore, this is part of a larger move toward greater repression, a move that began prior to Obama and has continued under him. It is a move away from democracy as neo-liberal capitalism faces greater resistance and the privileges of the "1%" are threatened. Specifically, the objective is to narrow the franchise in very practical terms. The political right wishes to eliminate from voting whole segments of the population, including the poor. Some right-wingers have even been so bold as to suggest that the poor should not be entitled to vote.

November 2012 becomes not a statement about the Obama presidency, but a defensive move by progressive forces to hold back the 'Caligulas' on the political right. It is about creating space and using mass campaigning to build new grassroots organization of our own. It is not about endorsing the Obama presidency or defending the official Democratic platform. But it is about resisting white revanchism and political misogyny by defeating Republicans and pressing Democrats with a grassroots insurgency, while advancing a platform of our own, one based on the 'People's Budget' and antiwar measures of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. In short, we need to do a little 'triangulating' of our own.

Why do we keep getting ourselves into this hole?

Our answer to this question is fairly straight forward. In the absence of a long-term progressive electoral strategy that is focused on winning power, we will find ourselves in this "Groundhog Day" scenario again and again. Such a strategy cannot be limited to the running of

symbolic candidates time and again as a way of rallying the troops.

Such an approach may feel good or help build socialist recruitment, but it does not win power. Nor can we simply tail the Democrats.

The central lesson we draw from the last four years has less to do with the Obama administration and more to do with the degree of effective organization of social movements and their relationship to the White House, Congress and other centers of power. The failure to put significant pressure on the Obama administration--combined with the lack of attention to the development of an independent progressive strategy, program and organizational base--has created a situation whereby frustration with a neo-liberal Democratic president could lead to a major demobilization. At bottom this means further rightward drift and the entry into power of the forces of irrationalism.

Crying over this situation or expressing our frustration with Obama is of little help at this point. While we will continue to push for more class struggle approaches in the campaign's messages, the choice that we actually face in the immediate battle revolves around who would we rather fight after November 2012: Obama or Romney? Under what administration are progressives more likely to have more room to operate? Under what administration is there a better chance of winning improvements in the conditions of the progressive majority of this country? These are the questions that we need to ask. Making a list of all of the things that Obama has not done and the fact that he was not a champion of the progressive movement misses a significant point: he was never the progressive champion. He became, however, the demon for the political right and the way in which they could focus their intense hatred of the reality of a changing US, and, indeed, a changing world.

We urge all progressives to deal with the reality of this political moment rather than the moment we wish that we were experiencing.

In order to engage in politics, we need the organizations to do politics with, organizations that belong to us at the grassroots. That ball is in our court, not Obama's. In 2008 and its aftermath, too many of us let that ball slip out of our hands, reducing us to sideline critics, reducing our politics to so much café chatter rather than real clout. Let's not make that mistake again.

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