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Radicals, Activists and the 2012 Elections in the United States Emancipation from Mental Slavery

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Introduction

The US society is at a crossroads. A massive debt, a devalued dollar and the unchecked political and economic power of the banks threaten the entire humanity as these financial aristocrats feed the fuel of war to maintain their power. Two weeks before the election the US military and the Israeli Defense forces are carrying out largest-ever joint US-Israeli military exercise in preparation for war against the people of Iran. In the midst of this economic crisis, the worse since 1933, comes another electoral contest. The election is itself being fought like a war with the air war, the ground war and the war against women and the poor. According to Newt Gingrich, formerly a candidate for the presidency from the Republican Party, this will be the most important elections in the United States since 1860.

On November 6 citizens of the United States will vote in national elections. By law, these elections for the president of the United States are held every four years on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Since 1845, this has been the day designated for holding U.S. presidential and congressional elections. At the time when Congress made this decision, African Americans were enslaved. They were excluded from this form of democracy by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. The elections of 1860 brought Abraham, Lincoln to the presidency and the Southern states (the Confederacy) seceded leading to a massive war between the states. It was only after that war when Africans in the United States

were recognized as citizens and were allowed to vote after the passing of the 14th amendment. This year, the contest is between the sitting President, Barack Obama, a candidate for the Democratic Party and Mitt Romney, the candidate for the Republican Party. That Obama is a descendant of Africans is of tremendous importance, but is no more important than the office which he holds. Obama is the president of the United States and at the same time identified by the media as an African American.

This contradiction has posed real questions for radicals and activists inside the United States. Aware of the contradiction between the history of enslavement and the power of the office of the president, there are those from the ranks of the anti capitalist forces who have argued that it does not matter who holds the office of the President. The argument from this section of the progressives holds that the United States is an imperialist state that acts in the interest of finance capital. One commentator from the 'left' even described Obama as the more 'effective evil.' Other sections of the peace and justice forces have worked consistently to oppose militarism abroad and to work for social injustice at home. Out of the pedantic work of this section arose the Occupy Wall Street movement that brought into clear focus the political power and undemocratic nature of the top one per cent of the population.

The Republican Party has mobilized on the basis of overt racism. This racism has taken many forms but the most brazen has been the numerous efforts to roll back the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in order to disenfranchise millions of Black and Latino voters. This unashamed reflex of white supremacy was best expressed in the disrespect displayed by Mitt Romney towards Barack Obama during the second debate. It is this contradiction of the disrespect and open racism of the Republicans that calls for clarity from radicals and activists. In our contribution this week we argue that all those who have the opportunity to vote on November 6, must go out to vote to defeat the Romney candidacy. The contradictions of the expanded militarism and drone strikes, unemployment, underemployment, environmental degradation, and the tenuous nature of the dollar as the currency of world trade cannot be solved by the Democratic Party.

The challenge will be to defeat Romney while building a movement that is based on reversing the priorities of the militarists so that the society can make a break with the power of the financial aristocracy and the traditions of racial genocide.

The World is watching

From every corner of the world there is interest in the forthcoming presidential elections in the United States. As the corporate media pronounce on the so called surge of Mitt Romney and the possibility of his emergence as the victor, so the concern rises in all parts of the world. This writer has been called and contacted from friends and associates in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. The question posed, why is Romney winning? There is fear that the belligerent pronouncements of Mitt Romney will take the world back to the prolonged tensions of the cold war. In an earlier debate, Romney had identified Russia as the number one political foe of the United States. This statement by Romney and his open embrace of the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu had endeared him to the neo-conservative forces that had launched the Wars against the peoples of Afghanistan and Iran. One billionaire, Sheldon Adleson has contributed millions to the campaign of the Republican Party and has promised to spend one hundred million dollars to defeat Barack Obama. Sheldon Adleson, the Koch brothers, Karl Rove Rush Limbaugh are not satisfied with the covert war being waged against Iran and the drone strikes ordered by the Obama administration. These militarists along with the Republican candidate are stoking the fires of all out war. This militarism is consistent with those who believe that a full scale war will pull the United States out of the depression.

Oil companies, Wall Street bankers, journalists from the main stream and many who pretended to be Liberals now vow that Obama must be a one term President. Even the so called liberal mayor of New York, the billionaire Bloomberg has organized his own super PAC to influence the election. Bloomberg's rationale, he wants to ensure that Elizabeth Warren does not win the Senate seat in Massachusetts. Elizabeth Warren is a vigorous supporter of Consumer Protection legislation to rein in the power of Wall Street bankers and billionaires such as the Bloomborgs.

Bob Woodward is another 'liberal' who has written a book which was to serve as part of the campaign against the incumbent President. His book, ***The Price of Politics***, was launched to coincide with the last three months of the electoral campaign. The principal argument of the book is that Barack Obama has been indecisive and has not taken charge of the challenge of dealing with the debt limit crisis and that Obama was as partisan and dogmatic as John Boehner, Speaker of the House of Representative.

Moving the country to the extreme right

Journalists from the print and television media such as Bob Woodward and Tom Brokaw have been campaigning for Wall Street while appearing to be objective and neutral. These commentators appealed to the mainstream of US society to remind them that Obama did not come from the mainstream. These pundits were the more sophisticated representatives of a tide in US politics that had been expressed by the Tea Party. For one year, the reality of the economic pressures on the youth and poor had given birth to the transnational Occupy Wall Street Movement. These same pundits mocked the Occupy movement to charge that it was a leaderless movement, when it was this character of self organization that made this movement a force to challenge the right wing turn of the Tea Party and their corporate sponsors.

Up to the time of the first Presidential debates in early October, the pressures from the corporate media had been to push the society so far to the conservative side of politics that whoever won the elections, the Wall Street magnates would benefit. Despite spending nearly a billion dollars through direct contributions to Romney and the Super PACs, the far right had become disillusioned with Mitt Romney and planned to shift resources to Senate and Congressional races so that if and when Obama won, his hands would be tied by Congress. After the disappointing performance of Obama in the first debate, the media that began to write about the surge of Mitt Romney, and pointed to his good 'poll numbers.' In this psychological warfare against the US citizens the corporate media were in cahoots with the big spenders in the campaign. As long as the race for the presidency appeared close, there would be millions spent on advertising. The media had a vested interest in perpetrating the idea that Romney was a possible winner. The advertising dollars provided a windfall for TV stations all over the country.

The other area where there was broad agreement from a vast array of media pundits was that four more years of having a black man in the White House was dangerous. The crudest manifestation of this racist formulation had been presented by the Tea party with posters saying "Take Back Our Country," and "Put the White Back in the White House." Newt Gingrich, one of the contestants for the Republican Party (before he was defeated by Mitt Romney) had placed his own stamp on this racist rhetoric by labeling Barack Obama the 'first food stamp president.' Where Ronald Reagan had utilized the code words, 'welfare queens' to disparage, Black voters, the Tea Party fuelled the political

power of the conservatives in state legislatures all over the country who were working to roll back the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Voter ID legislation and other impediments were invoked and challenged the Department of Justice. The fact that the Obama team controlled the executive branch was one obstacle in this massive effort to disenfranchise black and brown voters.

This drive at disenfranchisement is inspired by the long term fear of the Republican Party in relation to the demographic changes in the society. The Latino population is the fastest growing section of the population and by 2016 the growth of this population will shift the dynamic of political power away from the conservatives.

Mitt Romney supports the far right position on immigration and called for Immigrants to self deport, even while claiming that his father was an immigrant who had been born in Mexico. After winning the Republican nomination, Romney unveiled an ad that touted his immigrant roots. This was after taking a hard core anti immigrant position during the primaries vowing to veto the DREAM Act –a measure that would give immigrants a path to legalization as long they meet a strict set of criteria, including graduating from a U.S. high school, going to college or serving in the military, and staying out of trouble with police.

Mormons – racism and sexism

The ad which touted Romney's Mormon links reminded voters of the deep racism of the organization to which Romney belongs, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mitt Romney is an elder in this religious organization and up to 1978 black people were regarded as second class citizens in this organization. Brigham Young one of the key architects of Mormonism in the United States had described black people as cursed with dark skin as punishment for Cain's murder of his brother. This curse of Cain is held by conservative racists all over the United States and had been mobilized as part of the pro-slavery arguments. This same line of argument is carried to Africa today by Christian fundamentalists who work in cahoots with the US military that supports the US Africa Command.

Brigham Young had written in 1852 that "Any man having one drop of the seed of Cane in him cannot hold the priesthood." Young deemed black-white intermarriage so sinful that he suggested that a man could atone for it only by having "his head cut off" and spilling "his blood upon the ground." Other Mormon leaders convinced themselves that

the pre-existent spirits of black people had sinned in heaven by supporting Lucifer in his rebellion against God. From this line of reasoning among the Mormons, One could then see that Barack Obama as a child of an inter racial relationship was the product of a sinful relationship.

From such a background it was not difficult to see Romney in actions when in the second Presidential debate he more or less told Barack Obama to be silent. The sexism and racism of Romney was on clear display during the second Presidential debates when he was short and rude to the female moderator and basically told Obama to wait his turn to speak. The only overt manifestation of this racism that was missing was the words 'shut up boy.' Where the words were missing, the body language and gestures of Mitt Romney spoke volumes to what was going on in his head. The Children of Romney, brought up in a household of privilege could not bear watching the debate and Tagg Romney, 42, confessed during a radio interview that he felt like storming the stage and throwing a punch at President Obama during the second debate on October 16. This disrespect of Mitt Romney was so blatant that the main stream media editorialized,

"But you don't do that with a female moderator. It's problematic. Secondly, you don't run over the president of the United States. Whether that president's a Republican or whether that president is a Democrat. There are independent voters who believe that a president should be treated with deference because he is the commander in chief."

The War against Women

For centuries, the racism and sexism had held back the creative possibilities of the United States. In this campaign, this racism and sexism has taken the form of an unprecedented campaign against the rights of women. Throughout the world of the Tea party there have been initiatives to criminalize abortion. The most recent iteration of the debate on the rights of women took place this week when a candidate for Senate in the State of Indiana, Richard E. Mourdock, said in a Tuesday night debate that pregnancy is "something that God intended to happen" even if it is the result of rape. This statement reinforced the opposition of another conservative candidate in the state of Missouri, Tod Akin who in response to a question whether abortion should be permitted in the case of incest or rape told a television station that,

“It seems to me, from what I understand from doctors, that’s really rare, if it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down. But let’s assume that maybe that didn’t work or something: I think there should be some punishment, but the punishment ought to be of the rapist, and not attacking the child.”

Both Richard Mourdock and Todd Akin forgot that rape is not a women’s issue, but a crime issue. However, the conservatives who are against abortion among white women are so strident that in the state of Virginia the conservative Tea party leaders proposed a law that women seeking abortions in Virginia would have to undergo an invasive ultrasound scan first - a move supposedly designed to inform the women about the dangers of abortion.

These initiatives by the conservative forces have led to the view that this election is also a war against women. In the words of David Plouffe, potentially, abortion will be criminalized and women will be denied contraceptive services.

This war against women has included the efforts to cut off funding for Planned Parenthood, the aggressive anti abortion debates, the opposition to equal pay for women. All of this was topped by the statement of Mitt Romney that when he was Governor of Massachusetts he requested “binders full of women,” in order to find women who could serve in his government.

Fiscal cliff or nationalizing the banks

It is on the question of the war and the economy where the voices of the left are needed. The corporate media and the mainstream academics have been debating the possibilities of a ‘fiscal cliff’ if the US government does not take drastic measures to rein in the federal debt. Readers of Pambazuka will remember that in 2011 during the debt ceiling debate, both Congress and the presidency postponed real actions to deal with the US debt. The fiscal cliff that is now in vogue refers to the fact that by January 2013, if no agreement is reached, a variety of taxes, affecting all Americans, will increase significantly on Jan. 1. The government will begin to make deep cuts to domestic and defense spending. Many economists from the conservative side argue that increasing taxes on the rich will deepen the recession. The “fiscal cliff” is the formulation coined by the corporate media to highlight a series of tax and fiscal measures now scheduled to take place automatically on or just after January 1. These include:

- The expiration of the Bush tax cuts first enacted in 2001 and extended in 2010 for two years. Taxes would rise across-the-board, both for low- and middle-income families and the wealthy.
- An across-the-board spending cut, imposed by the debt-ceiling bill passed by Congress and signed by Obama in August 2011, which begins to hit in January 2013, totaling \$1 trillion over ten years.
- The expiration of the payroll tax cut, enacted in December 2010 and extended through 2012, which would amount to a 3.1 percent increase in taxes on every American worker.
- The expiration of extended unemployment benefits, adopted during the economic slump that followed the 2008 crash.

The chief executives of 15 of the biggest U.S. financial companies warned in a letter to President Barack Obama and Congress that failure to head off the "fiscal cliff" could lead to a sharp rise in interest rates, a downgrade of America's credit rating and a recession. The letter was signed by 15 CEOs of banks, brokerages and insurance companies and by the head of the Financial Services Forum, the industry lobby. Among the signatories are Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan Chase; Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs; Michael Corbat, the newly installed CEO of Citibank; John Stumpf, CEO of Wells Fargo; and Brian Moynihan, CEO of Bank of America. JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon said he will "do whatever it takes" to persuade Congress to find a way to prevent massive spending cuts and tax increases from automatically taking effect at the beginning of next year.

Goldman Sachs has made it clear that it wants to see the Obama administration defeated.

This debate on the fiscal cliff and the intervention of the CEO's was designed to foreclose discussion on alternatives that would hold the financial barons accountable.

These bankers have organized so that whoever occupies the White House after January 1, the 'austerity' program of big capital will be implemented. The corporate media and the bankers are pushing the society to accept a cut in social services so that the government will cut Medicare, Medicaid and other social programs. Language about "concrete steps to restore the United States' long-term fiscal footing" and "legislation that truly restores the nation's long-term fiscal soundness" are designed to divert attention from the fact that the top one per cent are the ones who have benefited from the financial crisis.

The challenges for the peace Movement

During the so called Foreign policy debate what was striking was the level of unanimity among the two candidates. The US military is overstretched. There are overt and covert wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Palestine, Mali, Libya, Somalia and Central Africa. This week the US military and the Israelis have embarked on a major military exercise. Thus far, the peace movement and the rank and file soldiers have been the main deterrent to full scale war against Iran. This election is taking place when the triggers of open warfare are great. Sections of the Republican Party have embarked on bashing China as a prelude to the kind of propaganda that can lay the foundation for military action. US military maneuvers in the South China Sea and the sable rattling of sections of the US foreign policy establishment are meant to plunge the US into war, regardless of who wins the election. There is no doubt that Mitt Romney will be a willing ally of the militarists but Barack Obama can only resist the militarists if there is a robust peace and justice movement

In every locality, individuals and local organizing committees have been finding their own modest way to engage the process of raising questions that are central to the concerns of the oppressed. It is from the ranks of the most oppressed sections of the US population and from the prison reform movement as a whole, where the links between militarism abroad and the prison industrial complex have been made. It is this cross-section of the society that continues to raise the question of the war, racism and sexism.

This writer is opposed to Mitt Romney and the Republicans. This opposition to Romney does not mean a blanket endorsement of the alternative. The most important task of the moment is to act against the further entrenchment of the neo-conservative (some would say neo-fascist) forces. This writer is again recalling the activism of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass in another era. Their campaign against slavery did not say to Abraham Lincoln that they were against him. They campaigned to the point where their plan for ending slavery precipitated a major split among the rulers.

The US is approaching a similar situation where the ruling class cannot rule in the old ways. In my book on the 2008 electoral process, I called this a revolutionary era.

There is no timetable for revolution.

The elections in the USA form once component of the struggles to advance Peace, environmental justice and health for all. The initiative is in the hands of those who will mobilize to defeat Romney and to hold Obama accountable.

The mobilization for the elections must be part of a call for the creation of the pre conditions for organizing African Americans, women, oppressed immigrant groups, gays and lesbians, Latino/Latina, First Nation peoples, poor whites, the unemployed, and all peace loving peoples.

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