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Why Support Obama in 2012?

By Joe Navarro

BC Guest Commentator

People often ask me who I will vote for in the November 2012 presidential election. It is a given that I will not vote for the Romney/Ryan team.

Romney has demonstrated that he will represent capitalist interests at the expense of working class people's jobs and livelihoods. His record at Bain Capital is an indication that profits outweigh any consideration for maintaining jobs and economic security for working people. He wants to eliminate support to seniors—the baby boomers—by reducing Social Security and Medicare benefits.

His jobs and economy rescue vision is a version of Reagan's trickle down theory, where capitalists would be given tax-breaks and greater opportunities to exploit workers, thus increasing profits, which presumably help the economy and reduce the national debt. However, we have seen how this has played out in the real world. Capitalists made record profits and workers' paychecks were reduced, jobs declined and the overall health of the working class had deteriorated.

Romney and Ryan have great appeal from the right-wing, especially those who use the bible to arm themselves with rhetorical weapons that promote hatred and intolerance, in the forms of racism, sexism, the war on women's reproductive rights, homophobia and xenophobia. It is ironic that he would court the Evangelicals who would easily denounce his Mormon roots.

Romney has consistently rejected any policy decisions of Obama, always trying to appear more aggressive than Obama and willing to

use the military to invade other nations. In reality it cannot be said that Obama is a "dove" when it comes to Middle East policies, where as commander-in-chief approves of indiscriminate drone attacks on civilians, arming and supporting unknown insurgents, and support of the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

However, I would argue that on some issues there are differences between Obama and Romney. In their desperate attempts to unseat Obama the Republicans—Tea Party activists and political strategists like Carl Rove—have made an effort to red-bait Obama, calling him a socialist (even though he is clearly not) and to stubbornly argue that he's actually a Muslim and not a U.S. born citizen. Clearly race has everything to do with this election.

There are many on the left who argue that there is no difference between Obama and Romney, and no difference between Democrats and Republicans. From the perspective of both candidates and their respective parties, I would agree that Democrats and Republicans, Obama and Romney, have the same goal of preserving capitalism and continuing a system of privilege and elitism, where capitalists have dominion over this nation economically and politically, and they both pursue the same imperialist agenda. However, I believe they have differences as to how capitalism would be best preserved.

The left, a broad range of progressive activists, from socialists to reformers, including Democrats, also has differences about how to look at Obama. From the socialist left, which believes that nothing will improve unless the capitalist system is replaced by socialism, there is an ambivalent attitude about supporting Obama. The left-leaning liberals and reformers tend to support Obama uncritically in spite of his pro-war, anti-immigrant, and anti-democratic policies that include domestic spying on activists.

I do not believe that there is a strong socialist current in this nation now. Hoping that people will reject elections and embrace socialism and strive for socialist laws, along with socialist economic and military policies would only be wishful thinking and a waste of time. I believe that people who consider themselves leftists, progressives or socialists should have a strategy for the elections. I would view involvement in the current elections as a temporary effort to forestall the right-wing's ability to control this nation completely and use this time as a period of struggling to defend the rights of people. This is also an opportunity to engage people in discourse about the current economic and political system we live in and how it affects people's lives.

At the same time I would caution that there are two potentially negative outcomes from participation (or non-participation) in elections: participation could undermine the credibility of a group by making it seem naïve and willing accomplices to bad policies; and, non-participation would also ruin the credibility of a group, making it seem cynical and arrogant.

I will support Obama in the election. I supported his first campaign because it was an important formal step in breaking down the barriers to lily-white institutions, particularly the White House. It was a successful historical effort by millions of people to elect an African-American as president. 2008 was the year that people voted for what they believed was a platform for peace, equality and hope for a better nation. When Obama, the candidate for president, ran his campaign many people thought they heard a candidate who would work for equality, economic prosperity for working people, taxing the rich, affordable health care, ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, open dialogue with the rest of the world, support immigrant rights, women's rights and LGBT rights. There was a progressive undercurrent in his message that attracted many people. It was definitely better than McCain/Palin.

I will support Obama this election, even though I do not agree with many of his policies. At the same time I do support his policies that will assist elderly people, provide health care that is more affordable, and taxing the wealthiest Americans. I believe that the progressive activists in this country will have an opportunity to push this administration to support policies to improve the lives of workers, oppressed nationalities, immigrants, women and LGBT people.

Obama can be supported and criticized at the same time. Clearly, Obama's efforts to carry out his campaign promises are dismal. He has become a disappointment to many people in this nation. To me this election is a question of preventing the worst right-wing candidates from getting elected. It means preventing (at least for now) worse draconian policies and allowing the oldest people of this country to hold on to some of their benefits, and allowing the health care act to assist more people with medical care costs.

In the electoral arena I am a Green Party member. I support the idea of forming an independent third party. The Green Party is a liberal to left party and I believe that most members do not conceive of the Green Party being an anti-capitalist party. That poses great limitations.

On broader political level my philosophy socialist, meaning that I believe in equitable distribution of wealth and creating a government that is democratic and represented by the majority—working class people. My vision of a government is one which works to ensure equality and secure people’s human and democratic rights; and, prevent social inequality and exploitation based on race, class, gender and sexual orientation. I believe that as a long term strategy, socialists should work toward forming a socialist party, which will enjoy broad-based support (which will only take place if it actually leads social movements). Until that happens the “left” will always be forced to choose the side that is not the most vehemently oppressive.

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