

War, inequality and dictatorship: The critical issues excluded from the 2024 election

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The 2024 US presidential election is unfolding under conditions of unprecedented crisis and social breakdown. There is a pervasive sense that the political system is dysfunctional, incapable of responding to the needs of the people and heading toward violent domestic conflict.

With Election Day only 72 hours away, the political climate is rife with rumors of conspiracy. There is widespread expectation that the result of the election will be inconclusive, and—whatever the vote totals—Trump and his fascist co-conspirators will not accept an unfavorable outcome. The level of uncertainty and menace that surrounds the election process reflects the extent of the breakdown of American democracy.

It is evident that the political culture of the United States has hit rock bottom. Trump's semi-coherent stream of consciousness chauvinist filth is pitched to all that is debased and reactionary in American society. Kamala Harris epitomizes the cynicism and hypocrisy of a party that resorts to the platitudes, clichés and tropes of identity politics as a cover for the interests of the corporate-financial elite and the conspiracies of the intelligence agencies. Her defense of American imperialism, above all, the full support for the genocide in Gaza exposes her as a representative of a criminal capitalist oligarchy.

The idea of a “lesser evil” in this context is an absurdity. While one candidate promotes fascism, the other is running on a platform that includes support for war and genocide. Under these conditions, the choice is not between greater and lesser evils but between two paths to catastrophe. For all the mudslinging, the divisions between Trump and Harris are insignificant compared to the gulf that separates both parties from the working class.

The profound issues that affect the lives of millions are systematically ignored in this campaign. This is because they all arise from a basic source, unconditionally defended by the entire political establishment: the capitalist profit system. Moreover, none of the central issues confronting workers in the United States can be addressed outside of a global movement of the working class. The 2024 elections starkly poses the alternatives: capitalist barbarism or the reconstruction of society on the basis of socialism.

The elections are unfolding under conditions of escalating global war. Behind closed doors, there are discussions of massive expansion, whoever is in the White House. Prominent members of the oligarchy, like JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, are declaring that “World War III has already begun.” The United States is investing an unprecedented \$1.7 trillion in upgrading its nuclear arsenal—a bipartisan commitment that will advance regardless of the election's outcome.

The central priority of the four years of the Biden administration has been war—first, the instigation of the war against Russia in Ukraine,

then the genocide in Gaza, both fully backed by Harris. With unlimited US weapons pouring into Israel with the full support of both the Democrats and Republicans, they are complicit in the slaughter of tens of thousands in Gaza and the West Bank. A major escalation of the war against Iran could take place even in the weeks between the election and Inauguration Day in January. The Pentagon announced Friday that the White House has ordered additional US military forces to the Middle East, including B-52 bombers, fighter jets and Navy destroyers.

The posturing of Trump—who has called for the “obliteration” of Iran and for Israel to “finish the job” in Gaza—as an opponent of war is nothing short of ludicrous.

World war requires the subordination of all of society's resources to war. The lead article in the most recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, a leading publication of US geopolitical strategy, appears under the headline, “The Return of Total War.” The author, Mara Karlin of the Brookings Institution, writes:

In both Ukraine and the Middle East, what has become clear is that the relatively narrow scope that defined war during the post-9/11 era has dramatically widened. An era of limited war has ended; an age of comprehensive conflict has begun. Indeed, what the world is witnessing today is akin to what theorists in the past have called “total war,” in which combatants draw on vast resources, mobilize their societies, prioritize warfare over all other state activities, attack a broad variety of targets, and reshape their economies and those of other countries.

The “prioritization of warfare over all other state activities” means the ruthless subordination of the working class to war. Everything must be sacrificed to the altar of war and the vast resources required to wage it.

A principal factor in the ever more ruthless operations of imperialism is the escalating crisis of American capitalism. US debt has exploded to nearly \$36 trillion. The price of gold is at record levels, reflecting intense pressures on the dollar.

The ruling class has sought to stave off the economic crisis through a series of massive bailouts of the banks, including in 2008 and in 2020, the first year of the pandemic. This has only reproduced the crisis at a higher level, while contributing to an enormous increase in social inequality.

Wealth concentration in the United States has reached grotesque

levels, with a tiny elite controlling more wealth than the bottom half of the population. The wealth of US billionaires is now more than \$5.5 trillion, up nearly 90 percent since the beginning of the pandemic. The extreme concentration of wealth is defended by both parties, and the election campaigns of Harris and Trump are fueled with unprecedented sums of money from the rich.

Inflation has eroded real wages, making essential goods—from food to housing—unaffordable for millions. Close to one-third of all households and one-half of renter households spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Total consumer debt stands at nearly \$18 trillion, a record high, including \$1.75 trillion in student loan debt.

The working class is facing a massive social crisis that includes layoffs, school closures and a healthcare system on the brink of collapse. In education, the recent expiration of emergency funding has led to firings of educators and the shuttering of schools, affecting millions of students.

Through the Trump campaign, the Republican Party is developing a political movement that is acquiring a more openly fascist character. Alongside the normalization of genocide and nuclear war, fascism is being normalized in American politics.

Indeed, Election Day on November 5 will mark only one moment in an escalating crisis of the entire political system. Trump is already promoting the narrative of a “stolen election.” He is inciting violence and conspiring to reject, through legal cases and actions by state and local governments, any result that does not lead to his victory. If elected, Trump has threatened to deploy the military against “the enemy within” and organize the deportation of tens of millions of immigrants.

In recent weeks, Harris referred occasionally to Trump as a “fascist,” but this was quickly dropped. The Democrats’ focus, as expressed in Harris’s “closing argument” this week, is on maintaining “unity” with the Republicans to suppress opposition at home and wage war abroad. Their central concern is not the growth of the fascist right but the breakdown of the whole political system and the danger of a movement from below.

Both parties are deeply implicated in the dismantling of democratic rights and the turn to dictatorship. The Biden-Harris administration has itself overseen a wave of arrests and expulsions of students protesting against the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Both parties support the militarization of the state to quash dissent, whether that means cracking down on anti-war protests or mobilizing the police against striking workers.

It is now nearly five years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the greatest social and health crisis in the modern period. In the last election four years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic was the central issue—the focus of the fascistic agitation of the Republicans and pledges to “follow the science” by the Democrats. In this election, the ongoing pandemic has been entirely ignored, referred to only in the past tense, even as hundreds of people die every day.

The death toll since the last election is staggering: Over 1.2 million Americans have died from COVID-19-related causes, including over 400,000 deaths under Trump (through January 2021) and more than 800,000 under Biden. This figure is part of a global toll of 24 million excess deaths in the past four years. Tens of millions of people in the US, according to official figures, have been impacted by Long COVID.

This colossal level of death and debilitation is the direct consequence of ruling class policy. The Biden-Harris administration

fully implemented Trump’s criminal “herd immunity” policy, and in May 2023 allowed the expiration of emergency funding for COVID-19 relief, leaving hospitals and clinics overwhelmed, understaffed and underfunded.

At the same time, climate change is driving unprecedented ecological disasters, including two major hurricanes that have hit the United States over the past two months, producing devastating floods. Scientists warn of an escalating and existential crisis, but neither party will address the issue in a serious way, as any genuine response to climate change would threaten the interests of the corporations that fund both parties. The Democrats have abandoned even their token gestures, while the Republicans openly dismiss climate change as a hoax.

The political system in the United States is thoroughly sclerotic and undemocratic. Every aspect of its structure—from ballot access laws aimed at third parties, to the domination of money, to the role of the corporate media—is designed to systematically exclude any genuine expression of the interests of the working class.

Over the past year, there have been powerful demonstrations of mass social anger and opposition. Millions have protested the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. Workers have launched strike action in critical industries, including the ongoing strike by 33,000 workers at Boeing, a major military contractor and aerospace company, which the trade union apparatus is working desperately to shut down before Election Day.

The central issue is the development within the working class of a socialist political leadership. The crisis must be addressed at its root, and the root of the crisis is the capitalist profit system. And in an era of transnational corporations, global imperialist war and a global pandemic, there is no national solution. The international working class is the most powerful force on the planet, but it must be armed with a political program that articulates its real interests.

The Socialist Equality Party, as part of the International Committee of the Fourth International, is spearheading the fight for the establishment of the political independence of the working class on the basis of a socialist program and policies.

The SEP insists that the only way forward is for the working class to break with the Democratic and Republican parties and build an independent political movement, based on an international, anti-capitalist, and socialist program. Opposition to inequality, war and dictatorship requires the conquest of political power by the working class, in the United States and throughout the world, and the complete reorganization of society.



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