

Where the International Socialist Organization stands on the 2012 election results

By David Walsh
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The International Socialist Organization (ISO) has responded to the 2012 US election with general satisfaction over Democrat Barack Obama's reelection and an ever greater, and thoroughly reactionary, obsession with race.

While the *Nation* magazine and those within its orbit openly campaign for the Democratic Party, the ISO prefers to remain nominally independent, all the better to channel disaffection of certain layers back toward the two-party system and bourgeois politics.

The ISO and its SocialistWorker.org web site promote the notion that a sufficiently large protest movement can shift the Democrats on the issues of greatest concern to the middle class "left" group's core supporters.

In 2008 the ISO hardly made a secret of its enthusiasm for Obama, both prior to and following the election. The organization has been somewhat more circumspect this year, adapting to the widespread disillusionment with the first African American president.

However, in response to the November 6 ballot, the ISO conveyed its general sense of relief and pleasure. In "We don't want 'four more-of-the-same years'" (November 7, 2012), the editors of SocialistWorker.org wrote, "Today, millions of people will feel satisfaction that Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan were kept out of the White House."

Millions of people might misguidedly have felt that way, but genuine socialists and class conscious workers certainly did not, in the wake of the reelection of an individual who presided over massive cuts in living standards and attacks on democratic rights in the US, and personally supervised, via the notorious "kill lists," the murder of countless political opponents and innocent civilians.

The editorial continues: "There's also pride that the

first African American president of a country founded on slavery will return to the White House, despite the racist abuse he endured from the beginning."

Since when has the victory of a capitalist politician belonging to any particular racial or ethnic group been a source of "pride" for an organization purporting to uphold the interests of the oppressed? The ISO here is taking sides with one faction of the political establishment, with the strongest connections to Wall Street and the financial aristocracy, and encouraging those it influences to do the same.

Moreover, while American and global capitalism were "founded on slavery" and every other form of barbaric oppression, the United States as a political entity arose out of immense revolutionary struggle and sacrifice, the ideals of the Enlightenment and the principle that all human beings were created equal.

The glaring contradiction between the latter conception and the continued existence of chattel slavery came to dominate American moral and political life within a few decades of the founding of the republic and helped lead to a second revolutionary struggle in 1861-65 which cost hundreds of thousands their lives.

The ISO goes on to say that the great question of the day is, "How can we make sure that four more years aren't four more-of-the-same years?" And their answer: by applying pressure on the Democrats to advance "the economic and political rights of the relatively powerless. Privacy, union rights, debtor's rights, activist rights, etc.," in a phrase from commentator Matt Stoller, which the editors cite approvingly. Not a word about the 23 million unemployed and under-employed, the 50 million who are food insecure, the vast numbers of people who have seen their conditions of life devastated.

SocialistWorker.org asserts that saying one thing during election campaigns and doing another once in office “is in the nature of the Democratic Party, as one of the two mainstream parties in a capitalist political system. Without pressure from below in the form of working-class resistance, the Democrats are molded by the continual pressure from above—from big business and the rich.”

The ISO’s position is absurd and self-contradictory. On the one hand, the Democratic Party is a mainstream bourgeois party. On the other, the task of the “working class” (the ISO means union officials, professional activists and such) is to resist the “molding” of the Democrats by big business and the rich. How can a representative of capitalist interests not represent capitalist interests?

The verbal gymnastics are necessary to obscure the character of the ISO’s activity, as a pressure group within the American political mainstream. The editorial proceeds to refer to the revolt by workers in Wisconsin in 2011 against the Scott Walker administration, the Occupy Wall Street movement and the recent Chicago teachers’ strike as models of social protest.

This is telling. Both the Wisconsin and Chicago struggles were sabotaged and betrayed by the union organizations, with the help of the ISO. The Occupy Wall Street movement, at least in its leading elements, transformed itself into a Democratic Party election vehicle.

Increasingly, as revealed above, the ISO and the middle class left view all questions, including the 2012 elections, through the prism of race. This both stems from and sustains their hostility to the working class. The ISO sees white workers as racist and reactionary, and the group defends Obama, who, after all, was a victim of “racist abuse,” against this supposed threat from the right.

SocialistWorker.org has written very little on the 2012 election results, in part because it doesn’t have much to add to the contention of the *Nation* and the liberal media that a progressive surge of women, gays and blacks blocked the reactionary designs of “white men.”

In reality, millions of white workers voted for Obama in 2008 in the naïve belief that a black president would be more sympathetic to their interests. The last four years has disabused many of them. The final results are not yet in, but it appears that between 5 and 8 million fewer votes were cast in 2012, and most of the voters who stayed at home were white.

Of course, the “party of the nonvoting” dwarfed the

winning candidate’s total too, as 90 to 95 million eligible voters abstained, including, it should be pointed out, some 8.5 million African Americans (more than a third of the eligible black voting population).

On the eve of the election, leading ISO member Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor posted a foul commentary (“Why they don’t challenge racism,” November 5, 2012), which treated as good coin an Associated Press report that “explicit racist attitudes toward African Americans have increased” in the past four years. Taylor took the opportunity to contend that this shabby and unsubstantiated piece of evidence demonstrated “the centrality of racism in American politics.” What Taylor means, in reality, is that the white population is imbued with racism, for which claim she provides, and can provide, absolutely no proof.

The piece is replete with references to “Black life,” “Black communities” and the need for a “Black agenda” and a “Black movement.” Essentially, Taylor complains that Obama did not pay sufficient attention during his first term to petty bourgeois African Americans like herself “whose vote was critical to the candidate becoming president in the first place” and who thus expected “that their particular issues” would receive some attention. The article reeks of selfishness and the striving for privileges.

The racist orientation of the middle class ex-left is reprehensible and sick, and sinister in its implications. Such outfits and individuals will more and more openly lend their support to “democratic” imperialism as it encounters the opposition of vast numbers of people to austerity, repression and war.

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