

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## Gas prices and presidential politics

By Art Perlo

In the first presidential debate, Mitt Romney blamed Barack Obama for gas prices doubling. Examining that subject actually provides a powerful reason to re-elect President Obama.

Indeed, when Obama took office in January 2009, the U.S. average for regular gas was \$1.77/gal. It is more than double that today. Of course this hurts working families, who are reminded of the impact every time they fill up the tank.

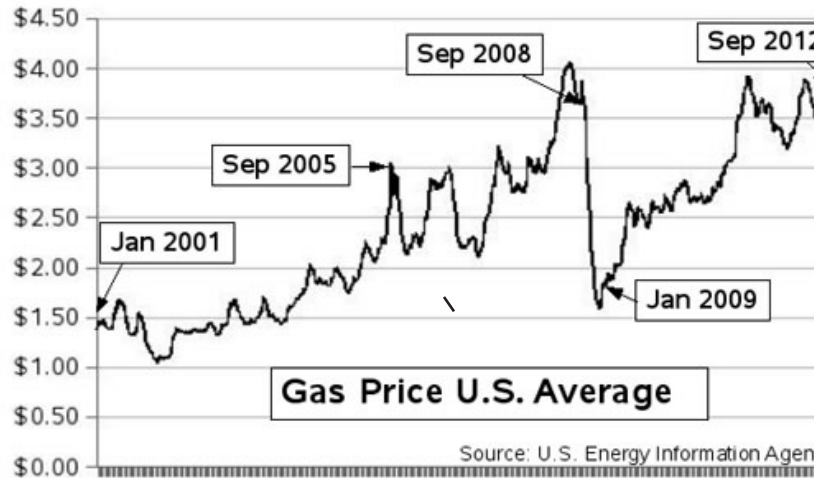
But wait! The \$3.75 average price of gas is only ten cents higher than it had been at this point in the 2008 presidential campaign. And today's price is 25 cents lower than it was at the high point of the Bush administration.

The real issue is: who is to blame for the high prices, and what can be done to stabilize costs?

The graph of gas prices shows an overall upward trend since the end of 2001, with a lot of zigs and zags. At the end of 2008, there was a sharp drop -- then the upward trend began again. The price jumps around enough that you can "prove" anything you want.

But the price of gas is not set by the President of the United States. It is mainly set by global supply and demand for oil. Increased demand from fast-growing economies in Asia and Latin America over the last decade contributed to the upward trend in prices. But limiting supply -- especially through war and the threat of war -- is the main factor in the wild price swings of the past decade.

When President George W. Bush launched the



war in Iraq, he knocked out an important piece of global oil production. The result was an escalation in oil prices and oil company profits. War and the threat of war in Libya, Syria, and Iran contributed to the three recent spikes in gas prices.

The oil industry reaps huge profits from high oil prices. And Wall Street profits from the uncertainties of war and instability. Fortunes are made and lost by betting on future oil prices. Speculation contributed to the big spike in prices through most of 2008, and the temporary crash at the end of that year.

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California is currently experiencing a gas price spike of 50-cents above the national average, attributed to refinery and pipeline closings. It

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is also possible for major producers can use their monopoly power to create shortages in order to raise prices. A dramatic example was California's artificial electricity shortage in 2001, deliberately created by energy monopolies.

Some questions: Would it be conceivable for top oil industry executives, eager for a Romney victory, to engineer temporary shortages and price hikes to discredit the Obama administration? If Obama is responsible for high gas prices, how come the big oil companies aren't supporting him?

On the whole, gas prices and consumers' energy costs are likely to be higher under Romney.

In the policy area with the biggest short-term impact, Romney is more likely to provoke war with Iran, knocking out a major world oil supplier and threatening supplies from the whole region.

Over the long haul, even if Romney padlocked the EPA and lifted all restrictions on drilling, it would be many years before new supplies come on line. The new production would be a drop in the global supply and have negligible effect on price.

Romney would halt the Obama administra-

tion's progress toward more efficient cars. Americans will need to fill up more often and, because total demand will be higher, the cost of each tank will be higher. Romney would continue subsidizing big oil.

Romney would leave us more dependent than ever on fossil fuels and the handful of energy conglomerates that dominate the oil industry. It will be easier for them to manipulate supplies and prices, holding our economy and our very survival hostage to their power and profits.

A comprehensive energy policy for the U.S. would go a lot further than anything now in place. But compared with the Obama administration, Romney's policy is likely to cost consumers more, not less. And there is no question that the environment, climate, and public health would suffer from a Romney administration. On these issues, there is a clear choice. And it is not the choice Romney had in mind when he opened his mouth about gas prices.



**Art Perlo writes for the People's World.**

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## 2012: Time for the left to step to the plate

PW Editorial Board

**F**or the past year the left has debated the merits of participation in the election process. As you might expect, not everyone is on the same page. Some say that the differences between the two presidential candidates, Obama and Romney, are not significant enough to warrant involvement in the elections, while others maintain they are.

At this point, nearly everyone on the left has made up his or her mind one way or another. And it is unlikely that their minds are going to change in the next four weeks, no matter how compelling the argument from the other side.

Thus it is time to draw down the curtain on this debate; it has exhausted itself.

For those on the left like myself who believe that the outcome does matter, it is time to turn our attention in another direction - that is, to join labor, people of color, women, youth, gays and lesbians, and other social groups who have been concretely engaged in the elections since the beginning of this year.

Indeed, while the left has been debating the significance of this election over the past several months, ordinary people have been doing the hard grassroots electoral activity that is at the core of any successful strategy to defeat right-wing extremism at the ballot box:

\* Registering voters and at the same time fighting off the campaign of the right wing to disenfranchise millions of eligible voters.

\* Politically engaging voters in the workplace and neighborhood.

\* Making phone calls and riding buses into swing states.

\* Raising money.

In short, the broad democratic movement has been doing the sweated labor in the trenches of mainstream politics.

Now this may not sound sexy to some people on the left; it may not sound visionary enough; it may even feel much too pedestrian. But isn't this what the realistic left should be doing too as the clock ticks down on the 2012 elections?

In 1936, the left didn't sit out the elections. Nor did it stand apart from the main organizations of the people's movement. Nor did it confine its role to popularizing anti-capitalist alternatives. It was part of the on-the-ground mass mobilizations to re-elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the White House and New Dealers to Congress.

With phone banks looking for callers, buses to battleground states searching for people to fill seats, and the organizers of labor and neighborhood walks welcoming volunteers, isn't it our time to step to the plate?

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# Mali stalemate is dangerous dilemma for Africa

By Emile Schepers

**T**he probability of outside military intervention in the West African country of Mali, with possible participation of both regional armies and, at least indirectly, of NATO forces, has increased sharply. French President Francois Hollande (pictured, right) has announced that he will ask UN Security Council sanction for such an action by African troops. The United States is likely to support this. The Malian government, after much wrangling, now is definitely asking for intervention.

With the fall of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi last year, vast quantities of armaments fell into the hands of irregular fighters in neighboring countries. In Mali, this led to a surge of armed Tuareg separatist activity. Tuareg rebels, grouped in the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), aim at creating an independent state (Azawad) over vast desert regions of Mali, Algeria, Libya, Niger and Burkina Faso.

On March 21 of this year, Captain Amadou Sanogo, a U.S.-trained army officer, overthrew the government of President Amadou Toumani Touré which, Sanogo complained, was not providing enough support for Malian soldiers fighting the Tuareg rebellion. But instead of bolstering the fight, the coup completely disorganized it, and the rebels took advantage of the situation to seize the entire northern two-thirds of the country, including the historic city of Timbuktu.

Mali's neighbors were shocked by the Tuareg rebel advance and also by the fact that it opened the door to militant Islamic extremist salafist forces linked to al Qaeda, whom the MNLA considered to be tactical allies but who soon eclipsed and pushed aside the Tuareg group. The salafists have established themselves as rulers of Timbuktu, Gao and other places in the North. While the MNLA advocates a separate Tuareg state, the salafist groups do not want to break up Mali but want to force their brand of Islam on the country.

In April, Sanogo was pressured by neighboring countries into stepping aside to make way for a veteran civilian politician, Diancounda Traouré, to take the position of "interim president." But the soldiers did not step completely out of the picture and Sanogo still asserts some power. Meanwhile,



the salafists, said to include many non-Malians, were consolidating their hold on the north. NATO powers were becoming worried that Mali would become the launching pad for new al-Qaeda style terrorist attacks.

In the north, the new rulers, including Ansar Dine, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, have been implementing their own interpretation of sharia law. Child soldiers are being recruited.

The Economic Community of West African States has wanted to organize a regional military intervention in Mali, but this has been opposed by Sanogo and his supporters. But now ECOWAS and the Malian government appear to have agreed on an intervention. There was also a large demonstration in Mali's capital, Bamako, demanding ECOWAS intervention.

Many commentators have concluded that rebel groups, including the similar Boko Haram ("Western Education is Evil") group in Nigeria, are able to recruit followers because of the economic neglect of the population.

People in countries neighboring Mali, such as Mauritania, express worry that an armed intervention, especially if it involves Western troops, might create an even bigger conflict. Others are extremely suspicious of any French involvement, given the heavy handed role France has sometimes played in the region since independence.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has called for extreme caution in any action in Mali.

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## Valley protests Hyatt abuse

By Henry Millstein

A broad cross section of Silicon Valley joined Hyatt hotel workers in front of the Hyatt Regency Santa Clara last week, speaking out against Hyatt's abuse of women workers.

The Oct. 12 action was initiated by Unite Here Local 19, which represents the Hyatt workers in the area. It commemorated the first anniversary of the firing of workers Martha and Lorena Reyes, and supported the campaign to boycott Hyatt that the union has launched.

The two sisters were among many Hyatt women workers who found their faces pasted atop bikini-clad images on the company's bulletin board. Humiliated, Martha Reyes tore down the photographs of herself and her sister. About a month later, Hyatt Regency Santa Clara fired both sisters. On Nov. 18, 2011, Martha and Lorena Reyes each filed a retaliation charge against the hotel with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Their cases are still under investigation at the EEOC.

"Hyatt hasn't even apologized to us yet, and that really upsets me. It's the least they could do," said Martha Reyes. "We've filed our charges and come out publicly asking for an apology and for our jobs back," adds Lorena Reyes.

Shouts of "No justice, no peace!" and "¡Si se puede!" rang out across the Hyatt parking lot Oct. 12, from both Hyatt workers and about 80 labor, religious, and community representatives marching and picketing in front of the hotel. A "Women's Rights Quilt" was displayed bearing personal messages of support for the women and all workers.

Unite Here says it is determined to keep struggling until the Reyes sisters are reinstated and all Hyatt workers are treated with justice. And to judge from the spirit at the rally here, many Silicon Valley residents are standing behind them.

## Obama mantiene ligera ventaja sobre Romney

By Prensa Latina

El presidente Barack Obama mantiene una ligera ventaja sobre su rival republicano Mitt Romney en cuanto a intenciones de votos con vista a las elecciones del 6 de noviembre, reveló hoy una encuesta.

La pesquisa más reciente de la cadena televisiva ABC y el diario The Washington Post reveló que Obama tiene el 49 por ciento de las preferencias de los electores y Romney el 46 por ciento, puntuación que está dentro del margen de error del sondeo.

El mandatario aparece con una ventaja de cinco puntos porcentuales (51-46) en nueve estados decisivos para los comicios: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia y Wisconsin.

De acuerdo con la investigación, solo 42 por ciento de los electores consideran que el país marcha en la dirección correcta, aunque la cifra es 13 puntos porcentuales más alta que el cotejo realizado en agosto, una información positiva para el jefe de la Casa Blanca, según los encuestadores.

La pesquisa reveló además que 51 por ciento de los posibles votantes confían en que la economía mejorará bajo un gobierno de Romney, y 48 por ciento bajo un nuevo mandato de Obama.

Por otra parte, 57 por ciento de los probables electores estiman que el aspirante republicano haría más en favor de los ricos que de la clase media, mientras que 68 por ciento de ellos consideran que Obama favorece a la clase media.

En cuanto al factor racial, Romney supera a Obama por 11 puntos entre los electores blancos, pero el presidente cuenta con una abrumadora mayoría de 73 por ciento contra 18 por ciento entre los no blancos, según

el sondeo.

Ambos contrincantes sostendrán mañana su segundo debate presidencial televisivo, que se realizará en Hempstead, Nueva York.

En otras noticias, el presidente estadounidense, Barack Obama, afina hoy la estrategia a seguir en el segundo debate electoral con su rival republicano, Mitt Romney, con la premura de recuperar la primacía en intenciones de voto camino a las elecciones del 6 de noviembre.

Ambos candidatos paralizaron sus actos proselitistas durante el fin de semana y se abocaron en la preparación para el enfrentamiento televisivo de mañana en la universidad Hofstra de Hempstead, Nueva York.

Obama trabaja en un centro turístico de Virginia con vistas a mejorar su desempeño en público y reconquistar la confianza de seguidores y correligionarios, tras decepcionarlos con una actuación poco contundente el pasado día 3, en el primer encuentro frente a Romney.

Varias encuestas realizadas después de ese debate reflejaron una notable caída del mandatario en intención de votos y un repunte de al menos cuatro puntos porcentuales para el candidato conservador a nivel nacional.

Uno de sus asesores, el legislador Robert Gibbs, prometió la víspera que el pretendiente demócrata, que aspira a la reelección, aparecerá "más agresivo y enérgico" en la nueva discusión presidencial.

"Ustedes verán a (Obama) vehementemente al referirse a las opciones que tiene el país y a la hora de ilustrarlas a los electores", dijo Gibbs.

Los participantes a la cita son electores indecisos seleccionados por la encuestadora Gallup.

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