

Multi-millionaire “populist” to appear on writers’ picket line

Who is John Edwards?

By David Walsh
16 November 2007

Former Senator John Edwards of North Carolina, a leading candidate for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, is scheduled to appear Friday afternoon on the picket line of striking film and television writers. Edwards is a multi-millionaire and a big business politician whose particular strategy for political advancement is to play the “populist” card.

Edwards speaks of the “two Americas.” He claims to be the “only candidate who talks about poverty in America,” and he denounces the worst excesses of the big corporations. His record, his social position and the party he represents, however, expose these statements as fraudulent.

Edwards made his name and fortune (estimated in 2003 at between \$12.8 and \$60 million) as a personal injury lawyer. Elected to the US Senate in 1998 after spending \$6 million of his own money, Edwards distinguished himself as a militarist and enemy of democratic rights. He voted for the May 1999 air strikes in Kosovo, the authorization to use force in Afghanistan and the infamous Patriot Act—the blueprint for an American police state. Edwards personally co-sponsored the Senate version of the authorization to use military force against Iraq, passed in October 2002.

His disagreements with the Bush administration over the colonial-style occupation of Iraq remain to this day purely secondary. In a recent debate, Edwards admitted that, if elected, there would be thousands of US troops still in Iraq at the end of his first term in 2013.

In 2004, Senator Edwards joined the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, casting himself as an “advocate for the people.” According to the Center for Responsive Politics, his campaign netted more than \$33 million dollars in contributions—including \$10 million from lawyers and lobbyists alone.

Following the Democratic defeat in 2004, Edwards went to work for a mid-sized hedge fund, Fortress Investment Group of New York, a firm with \$30 billion in assets. *Business Week* noted the move in an article headlined “John Edwards Hits the Street,” commenting: “Wall Street has long provided a soft landing for out-of-work pols. But increasingly, the revolving door leads to private investment firms. The Street’s latest recruit: John Edwards, the ex-North Carolina senator and vice-presidential standard bearer for the Democratic Party in the 2004 elections.”

In May 2007, the *Washington Post* reported that Fortress “markedly expanded its subprime lending business while he [Edwards] worked there, becoming a major player in the high-risk mortgage sector Edwards has pilloried in his presidential campaign.” Subprime loans are aimed at buyers with poor credit histories and charge higher rates, i.e., they exploit the misery of the “other America” Edwards claims to represent.

Involved here is not simply Edwards’ individual and flagrant hypocrisy, but the specific role of the Democratic Party under conditions of the decline and crisis of American capitalism.

The Democrats are one of the political parties through which the corporate elite manages its affairs in America, but its modus operandi historically has been to present itself as the advocate of the “little people.” This imposture is what gives present-day Democratic Party statements and policies their half-hearted, impotent and unconvincing character: the Democrats defend the ruling elite, which is relentlessly assaulting living standards and democratic rights, while attempting to convince the working population that they represent its interests.

As we noted recently on the *World Socialist Web Site*, the Democratic Party is wedded to the Hollywood establishment. According to *opensecrets.org*, the Democrats have received more than \$14 million in contributions from the television, film and music industry for the 2008 election cycle, including \$11 million from individuals. Some 77 percent of the contributions from this sector has gone to the Democrats.

In March 2007, Edwards was active, along with Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, gathering donations from the Hollywood elite. His \$2,300-per-person event was held at the home of attorney Skip Brittenham. According to *LawFuel.com*, “Hollywood’s reigning king of the big deal... Brittenham represents more top studio executives than any Hollywood lawyer, not to mention some of the most bankable stars... and corporate clients such as Pixar Animation Studios.”

These facts demonstrate that Edwards’ support for striking writers is entirely phony.

The decision by the Writers Guild to provide Edwards a platform speaks to the dangers facing the film and television writers. Strikers are legitimately concerned about the danger of their strike becoming isolated. They recognize that pledges of “solidarity” from unions that instruct their

members to cross picket lines are not worth the paper they're written on.

But the promotion by the union leadership of the Democratic Party is part and parcel of a perspective that leads precisely to the isolation of the writers and the ultimate betrayal of their demands. It signifies the union's acceptance of the entire framework under which film, television and every other aspect of culture is subordinated to the profit drive of huge corporations and the mad pursuit of personal wealth by the financial aristocracy that dominates society.

The economic needs of writers, as well as their artistic and creative aspirations—and the elevation of the cultural level of the population as a whole—are incompatible with the existing economic and political system, of which the Democratic Party is an essential part. Moreover, the type of struggle required to effectively confront the industry moguls—one which sets out to mobilize the broadest possible movement of the working class—is anathema to the Democratic no less than the Republican politicians. Edwards and company would react to any such expansion of the struggle by supporting efforts to suppress it, either openly or tacitly.

Illusions in the Democratic politicians block film and television writers from finding their way to their true friends

and allies: fellow workers in the entertainment industry and the working population as a whole, massive numbers of whom also face roll-backs, wage-cuts and the destruction of jobs.

How, moreover, can writers pursue their craft under conditions where elementary democratic rights are under attack, as the government, with the complicity of the Democratic Congress, spies on its citizens and illegally detains and tortures suspects around the globe? And where George W. Bush, with Democratic Party connivance, lurches toward an attack on Iran, with potentially catastrophic consequences?

John Edwards' embrace is one that needs to be rejected. It's time for writers and other workers in this country to see through such hoaxes.

The writers need to orient themselves to the rest of the working population, which is overwhelmingly sympathetic to the strike, and to the great political questions facing American society: above all, the need to break from the two-party system and develop a socialist strategy that corresponds to the needs of broad layers of the population. Only by ending the stranglehold of the media conglomerates over entertainment and the media can film and television artists defend their social and cultural interests.