Impressions of political life in the US

17 July 1998

This is my second letter to you. I really appreciate your well-thought-out replies and the availability of the Web site for labor news not generally available in the media.

I am a blue-collar worker in a power plant. I have been a progressive all my life and will continue to be one after I retire. But find the concept of an international workers uprising unlikely at best. The 'workers' I associate with at the plant are hardly radicals: Rush Limbaugh is a hero; social awareness is 'welfare'; sexism and racism are rampant. I have found this attitude in most of the workplaces I've visited in the last decade.

I am gratified to see organizations (as in New York) realizing they are being used to further management's and the stockholders' purposes. But, by far, most laborers can't see past the next check or weekend. In fact, most of my peers do not consider themselves labor! They believe the 'team player' BS they have been handed by management.

On the political side, my work within the Democratic party, particularly working with candidates and party 'regulars,' has shown that 'electability' is the prime prerequisite for candidacy, regardless of political philosophy. Those who are electable make no stand and make nebulous replies to pointed questions. Our last State assembly did not follow that precedent: labor activists nominated TWO labor oriented candidates for major offices. I fully expect them to lose to the well-financed Republican opponents, but at least the voters will get a real choice.

While my letter is pessimistic, I am not one to give up hope for progress but it seems farther from reach than ever. Pardon my heresy (I am aware of how this particular subject is sensitive to the 4th International), but is the goal of a worldwide rebellion of labor realistic? Might there be some incremental path available to keep us all from another period of oppression as the last millennium is ushered in?

Struggling in Colorado,
CG

Dear CG,

However your observations may correspond to certain aspects of the present political situation, they remain rather superficial. There is a particular danger in drawing broad generalizations from impressions that don't get to the heart of the matter.

First, can one really explain the political confusion that exists without considering the impact of the deluge of nationalist, chauvinist and anti-socialist poison to which workers have been subjected for decades by both big business and by the union officials?

The political confusion, though an important feature of the present situation which cannot be ignored, should be kept in perspective. The same ideas to which you refer were also to be found among workers in the 1920s and early 1930s, i.e., just before the eruption of mass working class struggles. In the final analysis, the Marxian insight retains its validity: it is social being that determines social consciousness. The class struggle, for all its ebbs and flows, not only has not ended, but is now entering another stage, creating the conditions for long-standing notions to be reevaluated.

We are obliged to point out that the contradictory character of workers' political views is also expressed in *your* letter. It seems to us that the pessimism that you express is related to your long-standing support for the Democratic Party, which, as a political organization of big business in the US, has worked with the Republicans to create the conditions for the exploitation of the working class to which you object. In fact, the Democrats' collaboration with the Republicans reached a new level during the Clinton administration, as social programs like welfare were cut and taxes for the wealthy were reduced with bipartisan support.

The *WSWS* maintains that a progressive resolution to the crisis that workers face cannot be found by searching among the capitalist candidates for a

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supposed 'lesser evil.' Instead it is incumbent upon workers to build a new, independent socialist party whose aim is to reorganize economic life in the interest of all. Is such a worldwide political rebellion of labor realistic? To this we must reply that it is far more realistic than the chimera of harmony between capital and labor.

We hope that you'll take the above points in the fraternal spirit with which they are intended. We welcome a continued correspondence with you on these issues.

Sincerely,
WSWS Editorial Board
17 July 1998

See Also:
The Starr investigation: a creeping coup d'etat

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