

A query from an Australian reader about the WSWs

15 September 1998

I enjoy the WSWs site, and I agree with much (not all) of your views. A question that pops to mind is: Do you actually DO anything?. Now I'm not being rude, but it seems to me, that you cannot change everything all at once. For if you could, you would have done so. But the pace of change in our society is accelerating, and it does not bode well for the average person and families in our society. John Howard is pushing his tax reform agenda very hard at present, and many people are being duped by his package. Howard is a liar, (feel free to quote me) and in my opinion, a pawn of big business, attempting to convince the Australian public that, what is good for big business, is good for the people. When in fact the opposite is true. Now there are groups out there (I am in one of them) who are trying to show the populace that they are being screwed by the Liberal / Labor / National coalition. But I do not see or hear of the WSWs at the coalface. You run a great site! but is that all you do?

Regards, TF

Dear TF,

Allow me to begin by posing some questions to you. What do **you** think should be done? Why do you think the situation that you describe has developed? Who is responsible for it, and why has the working class been unable, thus far, to effectively combat it?

It would be difficult to find anyone in the Australian working class who does not believe that both capitalist parties have subjected them to a continuing assault, or that John Howard is a pawn of big business. Do you really think the issue is to convince them that this is the case? And even if it were, what happens after they have been convinced? The return of a Labor government? The election of yet another 'Independent'?

It seems to me, that behind your questions lies a quite widely-held conception that a few radical slogans, or protest marches or other militant action will somehow

resolve the profound and complex political problems that confront the working class, not only in Australia, but internationally. You mention, for example, that you belong to a group, which is 'at the coalface'. But what is its perspective? How does being 'at the coalface', wherever that may be, begin to tackle, let alone resolve, the political crisis workers confront.

Australian workers have had no shortage of experience with trade union militancy, protests and reformist politics of every conceivable variety. But what has been the result? The recent Australian waterfront conflict is a case in point. The outcome has been that the Maritime Union of Australia members, the wharfies, have lost half their jobs and are now obliged to work under precisely the conditions the government and stevedoring companies were demanding from the outset, including a three-year no strike agreement.

The politics of national reformism--pressuring governments for limited, piecemeal reforms within the framework of the nation state--embodied in the Labor Party and the unions throughout most of this century, has now evolved, organically, into the politics of 'international competitiveness'. Attempting to revive reformism is no less futile than attempting to defend jobs and living standards by subordinating workers to the profit requirements of big business. The old politics have proven to be completely bankrupt. They have led the working class to the present impasse.

What the working class requires, above all, is an alternative, socialist and anti-capitalist perspective--an outlook that challenges the very foundations of the present social and economic order and political structures, and seeks to re-organise society on the basis of genuine social equality. While there is no lack of disgust and hostility to the old organisations and parties, there has yet to emerge a consciousness, within

significant layers of the working class, of its own independent class interests, and an understanding of the need to build an independent political movement to fight for them.

The WSWs, therefore, does the most important thing of all. In the traditions of genuine Marxism, it advances an alternative socialist analysis and perspective. It encourages critical thought, and provides the means for the working class to begin to review and assimilate the crucial experiences through which it has passed throughout the twentieth century. Only on such a basis will a new political movement of the working class begin to emerge.

You mention you do not agree with all our views. We would be interested to know which ones you disagree with, and why.

The WSWs is the organ of the International Committee of the Fourth International, of which the Socialist Equality Party (formerly the Socialist Labour League) is the Australian section.

The SEP is currently intervening in the Australian federal elections, standing candidates both in the Senate and in the House of Representatives seats. Its election statement and campaign details can be located at www.sep.flex.com.au.

With regards,

Linda Tenenbaum



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact