

# Lessons from history: the 2000 elections and the new "irrepressible conflict"—questions and discussion

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*We are publishing here the discussion from the question and answer period that followed a lecture by David North, chairman of the World Socialist Web Site editorial board and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of the US. The lecture, entitled "Lessons from history: the 2000 elections and the new 'irrepressible conflict'" was given at a public meeting of the SEP of Australia held December 3 in Sydney.*

*The WSWS posted the text of David North's lecture on December 11.*

*Question:* Has there ever been a situation where the president cannot be chosen and the previous one stays in power? Can Clinton stay on as president?

*David North:* No. Clinton could not stay on in office. There is a provision in the Constitution that prohibits any individual from serving as president for more than two terms. There was a president who served more than two terms and that was Franklin Roosevelt, who was elected four times. An amendment was passed providing for a two-term limit, so the present crisis cannot be solved that way.

*Question:* I am interested in how the separation of powers in the United States system between the legal power and political power compares to Australia's system, where you have the concept of the separation of powers bridged by the attorney general. The two powers in America are now intermingling and in conflict. Can you give us an overall picture of the separation of powers in comparison to the Australian model?

*DN:* I can't make a comparison with the Australian model because I am not familiar with how it operates here. There is a tripartite system of government in America—the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

The critical event in establishing the role of the judiciary in the separation of powers occurred in 1803. There was a case known as *Marbury v. Madison*. The principle of judicial review was established under the leadership of the then-Chief Justice John Marshall. This means that the Supreme Court is the ultimate arbiter of the US Constitution. It interprets this document and explains what the law is. Congress can pass a law and the president can sign the law. But the Supreme Court has the power to rule on the constitutionality of any piece of legislation enacted by the Congress or any action taken by the president. Its power is enormous and highly controversial.

The role of the Supreme Court has shifted at different times in history. During the tenure of Marshall, the Court achieved great prestige. This was squandered by his successor, Roger Taney, who presided over the Court when it ruled against the petition of Dred Scott. The Court's affirmation of slavery shattered its prestige for decades.

There is always a potential for a major constitutional crisis when, for example, the opinion of the Court and the actions of the executive collide. In the 1930s, in the midst of the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration clashed with the Supreme Court. Entering office in 1933, Roosevelt introduced legislation aimed at assuaging growing mass

opposition to capitalism. Laws enacted by the Congress, controlled by pro-Roosevelt Democrats, established the basic foundation of the New Deal. These laws offered social concessions to the working class that were abhorred by big business.

Lawsuits were initiated against various acts of the New Deal, and they eventually reached the Supreme Court. Many of the justices were hard-nosed reactionaries in their 70s. They were known as the "nine old men." In 1935-36, as the lawsuits came before the justices, they ruled against the Roosevelt administration, rejecting a number of critical New Deal statutes and programs as unconstitutional.

Roosevelt then devised a plan to overcome the opposition of the old and entrenched reactionaries on the Court. As there was no constitutional requirement that there be only nine justices on the Court, Roosevelt proposed to add justices to the Supreme Court. For every justice over the age of 70 he would add an additional justice. This became known as the "court-packing scheme."

This proposal sparked intense opposition. Roosevelt was in a difficult political situation. It was not clear whether he had sufficient political support to carry this court-packing scheme through. But what led to a resolution of this crisis was a reversal in the position of a number of the Supreme Court justices. They began approving legislation and Roosevelt withdrew his proposal. Some of the judges retired and Roosevelt appointed a number of new Supreme Court justices, whose views were in line with his own. A constitutional crisis was broken.

In the 1950s and 60s, in particular, workers came to view the Supreme Court as the guarantor of democratic rights. This had to do with decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which undermined the legal basis of segregation and the doctrine of "separate but equal." During the 1960s, the decision of the Court led to a significant expansion of civil and democratic rights. There are, as a consequence, considerable illusions in the role of the Supreme Court that persist to this day.

But the Supreme Court has long since passed its democratic heyday. Its rulings have become increasingly reactionary. One of the major issues raised by Gore was that a Republican administration, if it came to office, would have the opportunity to name three or four new justices. This could turn the Court even further to the right and lead to the abolition of the right to abortion and other democratic rights.

Bush, by the way, is not too well informed about the constitutional structure of the US. In a televised press conference, Bush offered the following interpretation of the separation of powers. In our system of government, he said, the legislature passes laws and then the executive interprets them. He forgot all about the judiciary.

This is a complex system. While I've given you a general overview, there is, of course, much more detail involved.

*Question:* There have been pictures of demonstrations outside the courts

in support of Gore broadcast on CNN. Is this very widespread?

*DN:* There have been isolated demonstrations in support of Gore—or, more accurately, against the Republicans' theft of the election. But these do not amount to anything really significant. There has been no independent intervention by the working class.

Gore is not a popular figure, to put it mildly. But there are very few illusions among black workers about the Republican candidate. They see Bush as an enemy of democratic rights, which they secured through the civil rights movement. There is a high degree of political abhorrence over the implications of a Bush victory.

As to the broader sections of the working class, I would say that it is still very confused. There has been for years an extraordinary level of political apathy in the United States. This is, to a great extent, the product of the betrayal of the working class by the trade unions. For decades, the right-wing trade union bureaucracy did everything it could to suppress class consciousness. It subordinated the independent interests of the working class to a bankrupt political alliance with the Democratic Party. The policies of the AFL-CIO, the main trade union federation, left the working class more or less defenceless against the onslaught of the Reagan administration.

There certainly have been changes in the political orientation of the working class. The old loyalty felt by workers to the Democratic Party has more or less disappeared. A generation ago, many workers still recalled the administration of Franklin Roosevelt with great affection. He was credited with the social reforms that were associated with the New Deal. Workers in the United States tend to be extremely generous in their assessment of bourgeois politicians who show some degree of sympathy for their plight, and this Roosevelt often did very effectively.

It is true that the more oppressed layers of the working class still vote for the Democrats. But even this support is less an expression of positive affection than of hatred and fear of the Republican alternative. Remember, there has been no significant piece of reformist legislation enacted into law for nearly 30 years. Many of the reforms associated with Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" have been destroyed through years of budget-cutting.

When Clinton won the presidency in 1992 there was a certain degree of enthusiasm. It was believed by many workers that he would carry through some promises to improve basic health care. But when that wasn't done, it deepened the alienation of workers from the entire political set-up.

That is why the candidacy of Gore never generated any excitement, let alone deep support. But, as the election revealed, he received a big vote in the major urban areas. These were votes that expressed a genuine loathing and fear of the Republicans. This has deepened in recent weeks. One senses that there is a growing understanding that the Republicans are engaged in an attack on democratic rights, and that the election is being stolen.

There is a great deal of confusion as well. I wouldn't want to give you the impression that the American working class understands what is going on here. I think they are probably just as confused as Australian workers are about it.

Political class consciousness is not spontaneous. It has to be cultivated. Of course, events do occur which accelerate the processes by which people become conscious. What has been happening in America during the last three weeks is of enormous importance: people are following politics.

This opens up the possibility of a genuine growth of class consciousness. It is reflected in the growth in the readership of the *World Socialist Web Site*. We are receiving an enormous number of letters, with which we are finding it hard to keep up. This is an immensely important indication of broader processes.

We have to remember that the crisis itself is inevitably interacting with a deterioration in the economic situation. There are many signs that workers

are becoming increasingly aggressive. There is a certain degree of confidence among workers after years of full employment. How are workers going to react to the growth of unemployment under conditions in which their families cannot afford to be a week or two without a pay cheque?

I recently asked a skilled worker, who enjoys a fairly comfortable standard of living, how he would be affected by a prolonged layoff. He replied: "Well, I'd be alright for one week. After two weeks it gets rough. Three weeks is serious. After four weeks, I'm out of here."

There are many indications that the downturn that is now developing may be far worse than a soft landing. Sections of workers have had access to credit that has given them a standard of living beyond their actual earning power. Americans are in debt. What happens if they experience a protracted bout of unemployment? No one knows, but I would expect that we are going to see serious unrest. This will be compounded under conditions in which the president will be seen as illegitimate. And workers will attribute, especially in the event of a Bush victory, the deterioration in their economic position to a political conspiracy. There will be very, very little credibility or political capital for a president to call upon.

*Question:* I have three questions. How could the US Supreme Court support the interpretation of Justice Scalia, who stated that the people do not have the right to vote, but rather that it is the state (in this case the state of Florida) that has the right to appoint the electors?

Second, why is the US capitalist regime undermining the system that served it so well for the past 150 years? Surely, if they deny something that is so essential to their system, i.e., the basic right to vote, then one may legitimately pose the question: what is next?

And third, if the US administration can deprive the American people of such a basic right, then what are they prepared to impose upon the people everywhere else in the world?

*DN:* Thank you for this important series of questions. First of all, in response to your question as to how the Supreme Court will rule, this is very difficult to say. There are many issues involved, including the politics of the Supreme Court itself. It is hard to predict how far they will or will not go.

The point I was making, however, is that the position of Scalia certainly indicates a trajectory of political thought within the highest reaches of the American ruling elite. It shows that the criminal activities surrounding the Florida election and its aftermath are not unrelated to broader trends.

In fact, this crisis did not fall out of the sky. We should keep in mind that prior to the election there had been a protracted political crisis in the United States that involved a right-wing conspiracy to remove an elected president from office—the impeachment scandal.

Let me put this in a broader context. Let us go back to what was clearly a turning point in the affairs of world capitalism. As Nick Beams has explained many times, the heyday of the post-war capitalist boom, and of America's dominant role within it, came to an end in the 1960s. At that point cracks in the foundations of the post-war order, the Bretton Woods system, came to the fore. The social crisis in America assumed a very sharp form, and many battles took place. From that point on one sees a growing tendency within the American bourgeoisie to move towards extra-constitutional forms of rule.

There was the infamous Watergate scandal of 1972 to 1974, which ended ultimately in the resignation of President Nixon. Then there was the more serious Iran-Contra crisis, which revealed that extra-constitutional institutions were being set up out of the basement of the White House, run by an adventurer by the name of Oliver North and various other shady operatives, to conduct wars in violation of Congressional statutes. This ended in a huge scandal but was not pursued by the Democrats all that aggressively. Mr. North himself went on to become a major right-wing personality and political figure.

And then there was the most extraordinary development, the

impeachment crisis of 1998-99. This was an attempt to parlay a sex scandal, which had itself been carefully orchestrated by extreme right-wing figures in the precincts of the Republican Party—with collaborators in the judiciary and in the legislature—to bring about the removal of the president from office.

I think one of the great achievements of the *World Socialist Web Site* was its analysis of this crisis. We explained the issues many times. We argued, not as defenders of the Democratic Party and Bill Clinton, but as defenders of the basic democratic rights of the American people.

There is a vast difference between a movement against bourgeois democracy from the left and a movement against bourgeois democracy from the right. And woe to the socialist organisation which does not understand the difference and which adopts a formal, mechanical and vulgar “plague on both your houses” position.

Our aim, and it was the same during the impeachment crisis, is to mobilise the working class independently of the Democratic Party. In fact, our most effective argument against the Democratic Party was precisely its inability to conduct a campaign to expose the conspirators. This enabled us to warn the working class not to place any political confidence in the Democratic Party or any section of the bourgeoisie to defend its democratic rights.

The impeachment crisis ended in the failure of the Senate to convict President Clinton. What led to this failure was the overwhelming opposition of the American public to the removal of the president. Many people said that they did not think Clinton's behaviour was in accordance with proper Victorian standards, but this was not a reason to remove a president from office. The Republican Party could never really get around this. One senses in some of the actions of the Republican Party a degree of desperation that their agenda can never find sufficient social support to be implemented. Therefore they feel compelled to resort to ever more undemocratic methods.

How the Supreme Court will rule is unclear. But I think the general tendency is the elaboration of ever more undemocratic conceptions.

Why are they breaking with a system that has served them so well? This is also an important question.

The answer must be found in a consideration of the historical dilemma that confronts world capitalism. There must be an objective reason, that is, there must be motives beyond the immediate motives of this or that political player driving in that direction. The very fact that they are prepared to go so far, that they exhibit such a careless and indifferent attitude to democratic rights, which served as the foundation of bourgeois rule, points to this.

There are powerful objective forces at work, including changes in the social composition of the bourgeoisie itself and the means of accumulation of surplus value—the very desperate character of that process within the framework of the global organisation of production—which make the bourgeoisie more and more hostile to anything that undermines its ability to extract surplus value from the working class.

To sum it up, all the provisions within bourgeois democracy that provide workers and sections of the middle class any means of defending themselves against the demands and encroachments of capital must be swept away. All political, economic, social and moral restraints on the exploitation of labor, the realization of profit and the accumulation of personal wealth must be wiped out.

There is another important aspect of this issue. If one reflects on the nature of contemporary society—and this has many programmatic implications for the International Committee—it is clear that we live in a mass society. By this I mean that society is confronted with extraordinarily complex social problems—health care, education, care for the elderly, the environment. All of this requires the highest degree of collective planning and effort to provide resources essential for the functioning of mass society, for funding an infrastructure to meet the

pressing social needs of hundreds of millions, really billions, of people.

The objective tendencies, therefore, of modern economic development clash increasingly with a society whose underlying principle is private ownership of the means of production and the right to privately dispose of the surplus value and profit produced at the point of production.

Capital strives for the greatest accumulation of profit and the personal appropriation of that profit. That is a social tendency profoundly antagonistic to the objective social needs of contemporary mass society.

We are often asked, “How strong do you think socialism is in America?” It is not very strong as a conscious political tendency. But read the ravings of these columnists. They compare Gore to Lenin. The right wing believes America is teetering on the brink of a communist revolution. What do they mean by this? Everywhere they see the encroachment of the masses, the growing prerogatives of the working masses. This, for them, has to be reversed. It fuels an enormous social anger, which manifests itself in what appears at times to be irrational politics. But it has an objective basis.

Trotsky explained very well that for a revolution to take place it is not enough for the masses to understand that they cannot live in the old way. The ruling classes must become convinced that they cannot rule in the old way either. So a change in the methods of rule is itself an important objective indication of the approach of revolution, or the development of a revolutionary state within society.

Finally, what are they prepared to do around the world? Both parties are committed to the defence of imperialism. Gore has been explicit in his commitment to the use of military force when required by the global interests of the United States. I suspect, however, that a Bush administration will be even more reckless in its use of military force. A Bush administration will be one of numerous provocations and bloody international adventures. These guys will be very aggressive on every level.

In relationship to democratic rights, one of Gore's people correctly said: “If they don't count your vote now, how do you know that they will count your vote in the future.” What does that mean about your democratic rights? How do you know there is going to be another election? This is what he is saying.

So basic democratic issues are at stake. To the extent that they are now being fought out within the bourgeoisie, it is only a matter of time before the working class begins to adopt an attitude toward such issues. It is inconceivable that at some point there will not be a response within the working class to this. I cannot give you a timetable, but ultimately these contradictions are going to work their way into the masses. And there have been isolated signs that this is already happening.

*Question:* Could the Speaker of the House become the president?

*DN:* I believe that if there is no president and no vice-president, the third in line is the Speaker of the House. But I do not really know what would happen if there is no resolution of this crisis.

*Question:* This seems to be a return to the sort of McCarthyism that prevailed in the 1950s. You have indicated some of the international implications, but I would suggest that all of this will depend on how quickly the media puts the lid on the crisis, and they are doing this by trivialising the situation.

*DN:* There has not been anything in the media that could be described as an intelligent analysis of the existing situation. The American media is the most backward and cynical in the entire world. It plays an unspeakable role in its efforts to poison and disorient public opinion. Their line has been: this is not a constitutional crisis. But it appears that this argument is wearing a bit thin.

Certainly there is talk of the deadline on December 12. And a lot of hope is being invested in the ability of the Supreme Court to issue a decision that in some way brings this to a conclusion. But I think what

they are going to find out is that there is no solution. The ratification of Bush's election will not bring this crisis to an end. It will just be another stage in an ongoing and deepening political crisis.

At some point someone is going to count the votes, and it will probably turn out that the Bush administration is illegitimate. What happens then? A Bush victory will be surrounded by the taint of fraud and corruption. On the other hand, and this is what makes the situation so difficult for the ruling elites, what is the alternative? There have been many reports that the Republican Party, or at least elements in the Republican Party, would not be prepared to accept a Gore presidency. I think it has occurred to sections of the ruling class that they could be facing right-wing terrorism if Gore is made president.

At any rate, if Gore were to become president, his administration would be characterised by the most craven cowardice before the extreme right, which would deepen the sense of alienation in the working class. One must also add to this picture that even apart from the final outcome of the presidential situation, the Congress is split down the middle. There is a 50/50 tie in the Senate. I do not know when this has happened before, certainly not in my lifetime. This means that the vice president has to be present at every session of the Senate whenever there is a vote, because he casts the tie-breaking vote.

The difference in the House of Representatives is a handful of votes and the Supreme Court is split 5/4. Every institution of American democracy is polarised. Look at the election result—the cities versus the rural areas, inner cities against the suburbs. There is even an extraordinary polarisation of men and women voters. Had only men voted, Bush would have won in a landslide. Had only women voted, it would have been a Gore landslide. There are so many different social tensions at work here.

Some of these divisions are of a superficial character and will change as political consciousness develops within the working class. But every level indicates an extreme crisis within society. Far from the election being an aberration, it is, as an objective phenomenon, a revelation of deep, deep contradictions within America, which must have their base in the relationship between classes.

*Question:* You spoke about the growth and development of an explosive surge in the working class in America, and the working class coming onto the scene of history. What do you see are the implications, because over the past 10 or 15 years there has been a profound change in the social composition of the working class? There has been a huge increase in the number of information workers, who are no longer the stereotype—male, industrial proletariat. What implications do you think this change in social composition of the working class will have on the social crisis?

*DN:* There has been a vast broadening of the working class. One has to understand the working class not as a fixed thing, but a social category. The forms taken by the proletariat must change with the changes in the forms of production itself. Naturally, when we speak about class and class consciousness, these are influenced by numerous factors. But ultimately, the working class consists of all those who are engaged in the production of surplus value, whose principal income is their wages. That is the bedrock foundation in defining the working class.

The emergence of new industries has produced new forms of labour and other changes. For example, there has recently been the emergence of demands from workers at Amazon.com to be unionised. This is an interesting development. Initially, many people who went to work at Amazon were not much interested in wages because they were enchanted by the idea that they were going to become millionaires from their stock options. And so Amazon, a company that never made a profit, went from 2 to 1,000 points in a very short time and people felt great. In the meantime, it has collapsed and the share value has dropped to around 25. All at once, the workers realise that this was all pie in the sky and that their compensation depends upon decent wages. This produces the emergence of forms of consciousness associated with more traditional

sections of the working class.

Information workers, technology workers represent new sections of the working class. What we are seeing throughout the world is a vast expansion of the proletariat, to use a classical term. Another crucial aspect of the contemporary structure of society is a deterioration of the intermediate strata—the middle class. Its economic significance continues to decline. It no longer provides a sufficient basis for a social buffer on which democratic forms can comfortably rest. The implication of all this is that society is extremely polarised.

Again we come back to the central issue: the surprising characteristics of elections always are to be derived from what they reveal about the objective state of society. In other words, an election takes place, people expect one thing to happen and something else does. We are obliged to explain why this has happened. What are the objective conditions within society that have produced this unbelievable result in the United States?

It is necessary to trace this back to the social organisation of America, the class structure, in which there is a polarisation between those who possess a colossal amount of wealth and a vast layer of society largely dependant on wages for its existence. This includes workers in technology and services industries and so on.

*Question:* Talking about technology, what role is the Internet going to play in opening up discussions worldwide?

*DN:* We have made a significant investment in our belief in the role of the Internet. This is a revolutionary medium. When we began discussions within the International Committee in 1997, we stressed that the Internet would prove to be the new medium that would permit the development of a new international revolutionary movement. What we post on the Internet is read everyday by thousands of people.

We have already had meetings with people from different parts of the world and the United States who have come into contact with us solely through the Internet. The concerns and fears that somehow we would be cut off from the working class have been shown to be unfounded.

The experiences we have had over the last two years have ably demonstrated that the *World Socialist Web Site* has become a factor in world politics. People at demonstrations know the *World Socialist Web Site*. It is influencing political discussion. It is a factor in international debate and contributing to the development of a new cadre of socialists who will be instrumental in bringing Marxist thought into the working class by many means, including more traditional means. So yes, the Internet is very important and highly positive.

*Question:* When did universal suffrage begin in the United States and how has this been encroached upon?

*DN:* Universal suffrage did not exist in the United States until 1920 when a constitutional amendment, the 19th Amendment, finally gave women the right to vote. In the course of the early 19th century, restrictions on suffrage relaxed and property requirements were removed. As a result of the Civil War, there were three major constitutional amendments—the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments—which Lincoln called “a new birth of freedom.”

The development of the right to vote—universal suffrage—was a product of colossal revolutionary struggles. At some level, consciousness of that fact exists within broad sections of the working class. American workers don't expect a lot, but they do expect to have the right to vote. Any attempt to restrict that right will be met with determined popular opposition.

*Nick Beams:* I would like to add a point. I was reading a recent book about universal suffrage and democracy in the 19th century. It points out that the great bourgeois democratic thinkers—it cites de Tocqueville—when push came to shove were not very democratic. In fact, they preferred Bonapartist forms of rule. A study of this question indicates that there is not a great inclination in the bourgeoisie for universal suffrage and democracy. This is a right that was obtained, in all countries, through

political struggle, in one form or the other, by the workers.

*Question:* Not many people voted in the elections. Could you give some detail on the Electoral College system?

*DN:* It appears that around 51 percent voted, but as you can see a large number of Americans do not have a lot of confidence in the elections. There is a deep degree of social alienation from the whole political process.

This crisis has called into question the legitimacy of the Electoral College system. Although it would be legitimate to initiate a campaign demanding the abolition of what is an undemocratic anachronism, its elimination would pose extraordinary problems.

The American Constitution is something of a masterpiece. How do you change it without introducing into a discussion of that change the deep social divisions that exist within society? It would call into question the viability of the existing federal structure, the delicate balance between the national government and the states.

In fact, such a discussion could unleash forces that would once again pose the breakdown of the Union. After all, if the elimination of the Electoral College is seen as detrimental to the political stature of certain states, would they continue to accept affiliation to the Union? If Gore were to be elected, one of the outcomes would be growing defiance of the federal government by reactionary state administrations, which would take the opportunity to attack those aspects of the federal Constitution and federal system, such as civil rights, that they don't like.

The right to vote, the elimination of segregation, was the product of the application of the federal Constitution, which had been long defied within many states. An attempt to alter the Electoral College, or remove it, would reveal profound divisions.

I would like to make the point that although we would consider as legitimate demands for proportional representation, the aim of our party is not to establish a more perfect form of bourgeois democracy. This is not our perspective.

Bourgeois democracy is suffering a fatal and terminal illness. That does not mean we take an indifferent attitude to the defence of that which is progressive in bourgeois democracy. We must understand that the defence of democratic rights depends ultimately on the building up of the independent strength of the working class and the fight to establish its political power.

This is a complex issue, which has to be posed in a very thoughtful manner. I do not believe that we can achieve, through proportional representation, a further perfection of bourgeois democracy. That doesn't mean that we should simply discard or ignore it. But we should adopt, even if we were to support it, a very critical attitude. It would have to be placed within the context of the broader social demands and political aspirations of the working class.

*Question:* Has there been any reaction from the AFL-CIO bureaucracy to the crisis?

*DN:* I think it has been heard snoring somewhere. No, there has not been any reaction—or at least nothing that merits significant comment. There have been reports that AFL-CIO President Sweeney has been in touch with Gore, and I am sure he has. But has there been any talk by the AFL-CIO of undertaking an independent mobilisation of the working class? Has there been a statement from the AFL-CIO warning the Republican Party that it is not going to stand idly by while an election is stolen? No, there has been nothing like that.

*Question:* I want to ask about the power of the Florida secretary of state and the moves that are being made to appoint electors from the state legislature.

*DN:* The Florida secretary of state, Miss Katherine Harris, who is a multi-millionaire right-winger and very active in Republican politics, announced that she was going to certify the election, ignoring the fact that there was still the issue of a possible recount. The certification itself has a

number of legal implications highly injurious to Gore. The statute says that she has the right to certify by a certain date, properly using her discretion. She clearly did not use discretion, if discretion is defined as thoughtful judgment weighing up the overall situation. She did nothing of the sort.

Harris made the claim that she was acting according to the statute, which says that an election has to be certified by such and such a date. The Florida Supreme Court overruled her and enjoined her from certifying. She then certified on the earliest possible date set by the Florida Supreme Court. Again she clearly overreached herself. All of this is part of a political process.

*Question:* How can she have the power to do that?

*DN:* She is given certain authority. The question is, did she exercise her power under the constitution of the state. The Florida Supreme Court said no, she didn't. She was applying the most reactionary interpretation to the statute, one that served the immediate interests of George Bush.

*Question:* You mentioned the likelihood of increased military provocations if Bush comes to power. What impact will these provocations have on relations with Europe, Japan and China?

*DN:* I can't imagine that they will be very good, especially given that some of the countries you mentioned might be the object of these provocations.

We saw in the Balkan War an increasing nervousness about American military aims. There was the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia, which clearly was a provocation. There were sections of the military that were opposed to the Clinton administration's relationship with China. This is one of the stories that has not been discussed or investigated in sufficient detail.

Clearly there is going to be a great deal of nervousness about an American government that is driven by short-term interests and has very little concern in preserving the old international institutions.

There are people around Bush who want to abolish the United Nations and get out of the World Trade Organisation. This is not a very far-sighted or advanced section of the American ruling elite. So there must be a great deal of nervousness about what this is going to mean for international relations.

I suspect that Europeans will want to insulate themselves from American military command and to develop their own forces. And others, including the Chinese, will seek better means of defending themselves. There is going to be a colossal increase in military expenditure and that in itself will become a factor in the situation.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to explain the current situation in America. These are events of monumental significance that you are following through the *World Socialist Web Site*. Everything must be done to expand the knowledge of this analysis within the Australian working class.



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