

# Exchanges with our readers

5 July 2002

*The following are two letters from readers followed by replies from the WSWS Editorial Board.*

Hello,

I am a subscriber to the WSWS “newsletter” as it is good to know (and live) the truth. What I have to say is not a criticism, merely an observation. When I was growing up, the word “socialist” was a no-no. It was linked to the “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”

I’ve grown out of that “link,” though it took a very, very long time. Relentless propaganda from the capitalists of this world is hard to overcome, but overcome it I have.

I now know that “Socialism” (in theory, and without the troops and guns) is the way the world should be, but I would never call myself a “socialist,” not only because of the stigma that many people attach to the word (and there are many, many people who do) and apart from that I would never call myself anything other than a human being.

I just think the use of the word “socialist” plays into the hands of the capitalists who can then raise “the word” communist, whereas “Equality Party” may indeed ring a bell with those seeking “equality” (and there are many of them, too, as no doubt you already know). Even “Social Equality Party” sounds vastly different to “Socialist Equality Party.” I know it’s the same thing, but from the people I talk too, “Socialist” means “communist”, and in this country (Australia) “that ain’t good.”

The “Socialist Equality Party” have what I believe is the humanely correct philosophy on how life is meant to be, I just think the word “socialist” holds a lot of people back, even those seeking equality.

In Australia, 3 letters, “ist,” it is my belief, are the difference between living in a society based on ideology, and a society based on reality.

The “reality” being myself and every other “Australian”.

The “ideology” being the “laws” that require us to

be, not the voluntary beings that in essence we are, but the machines or robots most “laws” demand us to be.

Yours in pursuit of a truly just and equal society,

TT

1 June 2002

Dear TT,

Thank you for your letter and your appreciation of the work of the *World Socialist Web Site*. We hope you will continue to read the WSWS and let us know if you have any questions.

With regard to your comment on the word “socialist,” we respectfully decline to abandon the term. The fact is that we are socialists, and we base ourselves on an entire history of socialist thought and practice. The word has a programmatic content. The struggle for socialism is the struggle for the democratic control of the means of production; it is the struggle for the revolutionary transformation of society as a whole and the abolition of capitalist property relations. This is what it means to be a socialist, and the word is associated with this content by broad sections of the population—that socialism is a more egalitarian alternative to capitalism. Of course, we also struggle for equality, for social equality, but this can be achieved only through socialism.

In general, one cannot solve complex political problems by means of terminological maneuvers. If there are many people who associate socialism with Stalinism, this cannot be overcome by a change of words. It would be like trying to teach a student advanced mathematics by abandoning the word “calculus,” which after all calls to mind all manner of horrors that are not really inherent in the subject matter itself.

If we were to take your advice, moreover, and abandon “socialism,” it would suggest more than just a change of words. It would suggest an abandonment of the struggle for the education of the population in the history of the twentieth century—the crimes of Stalinism

and the Social Democratic parties—and the real heritage of the socialist movement. It would suggest an adaptation to the prevailing consciousness of sections of the population which may have many misconceptions. This attitude toward politics leads inevitably to a practice of orienting to whatever political tendency exists on the grounds that criticizing these tendencies might offend the sympathies of those taking part in them. Rather than adapt to the prevailing consciousness, our task is to fight against whatever misconceptions and prejudices exist, to educate the population and create a genuine mass socialist consciousness. This is the task the *World Socialist Web Site* sets for itself.

Sincerely,

Joseph Kay,  
for the WSWS  
Dear Editors,

I've been reading your articles for about a year now. Not knowing much about socialism, I was initially attracted to the forthright way you reported the outrages which have been in the news. However, I couldn't figure out why you were so adamantly against reform. If I understand you correctly, you have been saying that it is getting harder and harder for companies to make a profit, that this was predicted, and that even St. Nick, if he wanted to stay in business, would be cooking the books, and by hook or by crook making sure he had cornered the markets for life's necessities like oil, water and grain. If people saw the necessity to switch over to a socialist system, could it be handled as smoothly as we handled Y2K? How would people who have been on the lookout for a global dictatorship be assured that socialism wasn't that nightmare? And, since it is to be democratic, how would people have a voice in how it was set up? What ideas are there for how to do this?

Thanks,

JH

3 June 2002

Dear JH,

Thank you for your letter. Our attitude to reform is that the objective logic of the capitalist system prevents any reforms that will seriously advance the interests of the majority of the population. The wholesale corruption and criminality of American corporations—reflected in the anti-democratic and

reckless actions of the American government—has its source not simply in the greed of this or that individual which can be regulated by certain laws, but in the objective crisis of the entire mode of capitalist production. Ultimately this is rooted in the declining rate of profit, which increasingly makes speculation, plunder and theft the modus operandi of American, and indeed international, capital. For a detailed analysis of this process, please see a lecture given earlier this year, "The World Economic Crisis: 1991-2001" (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/mar2002/lec1-m14.shtml>).

In response to your other questions, please see a recent exchange on "Some questions and answers on life under socialism", where these questions are considered along with some others. You may also find of interest, "Another question on socialist planning".

Sincerely,

Joseph Kay,  
For the WSWS



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**