

# An exchange of letters on the role of religion in the US

9 March 2007

*The following is an exchange of letters with a reader on the article “Stop the US war drive against Iran!”*

You say, “The opposition of the WSWs to the imperialist onslaught against Iran does not imply political support for the reactionary clericalist regime of President Ahmadinejad. The Iranian government represents an unstable coalition of bourgeois capitalist interests that employs religious demagoguery and occasional anti-imperialist sloganeering to maintain a tenuous grip on mass support.”

The context and the particulars are different, but religion is employed in the same way by Bush, yet you rarely acknowledge this. The war in the Middle East, the promotion of social inequality, the disinformation about global warming do, as your analysis states, have their roots in the crisis of capitalism.

However, if the crisis of leadership in the working class is to be overcome to develop the socialist solution, the role of religion must be understood. A significant portion of the working class believes these events are fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and we are in “the last days.” Until this is confronted, analyzed and understood, they will remain passive to the drive to war.

KD

14 February 2007

Dear KD,

Thank you for your letter. The role played by religion in the crisis of leadership in the working class and the fight against US militarism is an important issue.

I must disagree, however, with your assessment that “a significant portion of the working class believes” that current developments in capitalist society are a “fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and we are in ‘the last days.’” That being said, the WSWs has written frequently about the role religion does play to aid in maintaining support for the political establishment in

the US.

I would point to two experiences of recent years that have received considerable coverage on the WSWs.

First is the result of the 2004 presidential election. Writing on the reelection of George W. Bush we wrote in “After the 2004 elections: the political and social crisis will intensify” that this victory was achieved “largely through the mobilization of the evangelical Christian vote on the basis of overtly religious appeals.” We said that the Republicans’ strategy was to “create a popular base for social reaction and militarism by sponsoring Christian fundamentalism and utilizing so-called ‘wedge’ issues such as gay marriage, abortion and school prayer.” Critical for the political establishment have been the professional Christian fundamentalist zealots cultivated by the Bush administration and the Republicans to boost their support.

We explained, however, that this strategy was able to win out in 2004 largely due to the failure of either party, Democrat or Republican, to speak to the issues confronting working people—the war in Iraq, the attacks on jobs and social conditions, and mounting social inequality. The refusal of the Democrats—the nominal “opposition” party—to oppose the Bush administration and the Republican right on these questions created the conditions where they could capitalize on religious backwardness and confusion in the working class.

There definitely do exist backward elements of US society who believe we are living “in the last days.” But while religious beliefs are widespread in the American population, I don’t think such fanatical conceptions make up a “significant portion.” Also, socialists do not challenge religious conceptions in the working class in a vacuum. The same individuals who hold these conceptions are being radicalized by the war in Iraq and are affected in their daily lives by growing

social and economic polarization and attacks on their basic democratic rights.

As we wrote in November 2004, “Objective conditions will supply ample fuel for social and political struggle. The quagmire in Iraq and the future military adventures that will follow, the deepening economic crisis of American capitalism—marked by soaring deficits and a weakening dollar—will compel the second Bush administration to launch new attacks on the working class, including millions of workers who voted to return Bush to power.” Since these lines were written, opposition in the US to the Iraq war and occupation has grown at a rapid pace.

The WSWS has written extensively on another issue, the Terry Schiavo case. In that case in 2005, Congress and the Bush administration intervened against the wishes of Terry Schiavo’s husband to draft a bill to halt the removal of her feeding tube—the course of action she had indicated she would want if she ever ended up in such an irreversible vegetative state.

The emergency bill rammed through Congress had nothing to do with concern for Terry’s life, but was carried out at the instigation of the Christian fundamentalist base of the Republican right. As we noted at the time, the overwhelming majority of Americans looked on at this invasion into the most intimate sphere of private family life with disgust. Opinion polls showed that there was relatively little public support for their actions.

The Democratic Party, instead of condemning this intervention, chose to cower before the Christian right. Rather, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid prevailed on the entire 44-member Democratic caucus to refrain from objecting and blocking passage of the legislation.

This was yet another demonstration of the present state of affairs in America: the vast majority of the population is excluded from official political life. The widespread opposition to the military crimes of the US government in Afghanistan and Iraq—and their preparations for war against Iran—can find no expression in either big-business party.

The role of socialists is to intervene to fight for an alternative perspective—one that begins from the interests of the mass majority of working people in opposition to the profit system in whose interest these imperialist wars are being prosecuted. While the government will attempt to use “hot button” issues

such as abortion and same-sex marriage in an effort to whip up the most backward and ignorant elements, those who may believe we are in the “last days” are in a small minority in the US.

It is not a question of combating religion and then moving on to resolve the crisis of working class leadership. We oppose religious conceptions, but we do so with the understanding that the objective crisis is propelling masses of people into struggle against the system. The government’s military aggression—as well as the growing attacks on social programs and democratic rights—will serve as profoundly revolutionizing forces in the coming period.

Sincerely,

Kate Randall for the WSWS

8 March 2007



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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