

Writers' strike ends its second week

Mr. Edwards goes to the picket line

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Former North Carolina Senator and would-be Democratic Party presidential nominee John Edwards appeared on the film and television writers' picket line outside NBC studios in Burbank, California Friday afternoon. Invited by the leadership of the Writers Guild of America, Edwards made a brief showing and expressed his support for the writers. Several hundred strikers and supporters were on hand, not a particularly impressive turnout since the candidates' appearance had been well advertised by the union leadership.

Some 12,000 film and television writers have been on strike since November 5 in a bitter conflict with the studios and networks over revenue from material distributed over the Internet and other new media. No talks have taken place since the walk-out began and none are planned.

Edwards is a millionaire politician seeking the Democratic Party nomination through an extremely limited appeal to widespread resentment against social inequality and corporate power. An Edwards supporter would be hard-pressed to outline a single concrete measure the former senator intends to take against big business; instead Edwards mouths populist and nationalist generalities about the raw deal American workers are experiencing.

There is nothing for the working population in Edwards's program. He is a staunch defender of the profit system. His web site explains that he stands for "a strong, principled national security policy" as the "foundation of America's strength." His disagreements with the Bush administration and his Democratic rivals are of an entirely secondary and tactical character. He speaks of the need to "strengthen homeland security, stand by our soldiers at every turn, while respecting the Constitution and living up to our ideals in the fight against terrorism."

This utterly conventional big business politician is being promoted by sections of the labor bureaucracy and the left protest organizations as a breath of fresh air. His appearance at the writers' picket line was of a piece with his entire campaign. In a glorified photo opportunity, Edwards appeared, surrounded by handlers and the media, in loosened tie and rolled up sleeves, spoke briefly and shook hands with some in the crowd.

In his comments, he lashed the media giants and declared through a bullhorn, "I am in this cause with you. This is about justice and fairness and equality. ... I'm with you. I'm going to be with you every day when I'm president of the United States."

Edwards's showing elicited a variety of responses from the strikers and supporters. Some applauded enthusiastically, others politely. Some in the crowd commented cynically on the stage-managed character of the affair, others credited the former senator with putting in an appearance at all. Perhaps, if one had to come up with such a formulation, this might have been the 'average' response: "What's the harm? Perhaps he's just doing this for short-term political gain,

but how can it hurt?" As one striker put it, "Support is support."

We disagree. In an article posted on the *World Socialist Web Site*, which WSWs and Socialist Equality Party supporters distributed to those assembled, and in our discussions with strikers, we contended that there was a definite and distinct harm in Edwards's presence.

We argued that an orientation by the Writers Guild leadership to the Democratic Party, one of the two major parties defending business interests in America, precluded one based on the need of the writers to appeal to the entire film workers' community and the working population as a whole on an anti-capitalist program.

Such an expansion of the strike, the shutting down of film and television production, the raising of social and political demands—among them, the transformation of the media conglomerates into public services—would bring the writers and their allies into a direct conflict with the entire political establishment, including the Democratic Party. Edwards would not come within five miles of such a militant, determined and socialist-minded struggle.

Our intervention provoked a variety of responses. A small minority of Democratic Party loyalists and Edwards admirers was distinctly hostile. A larger portion of the crowd listened respectfully, agreed that the Democrats had not carried out the will of the people since November 2006, but still held on to the illusion that they were the lesser of two evils. Another small minority agreed that Edwards was phony as a three-dollar bill.

The following is a sampling of the discussions we held.

Teddy Tenenbaum, a 13-year WGA member, who writes for "Ghost Whisperer": "I think the strike is at a crucial stage after this first couple of weeks. We're in danger of not going back to the negotiating table because of the holiday season coming up and the intransigence of the producers."

We asked Tenenbaum's opinion about Edwards showing up on the picket line and the role of the Democratic Party more generally.

"I think the Democratic Party as a whole," he said, "has not done everything it intended to do when coming into power. There are some who are pushing better and some who are pushing less.

"Unfortunately, we live in a country where the two-party system dominates, basically two agendas and only two agendas, unlike many European countries. Until we can bring in a third, or fourth or fifth party that has some power, I have to give my support to a party that is closer to my beliefs.

"I do agree that the Democrats took over Congress in large part because of an anti-war sentiment in the population. Yes, they probably could have ended the war January 6. But a lot of this comes down to, at least for me, the division between philosophy and practicality. It's very hard to get done practically what we believe philosophically, such as cutting off all funding for the troops, because you know that

Bush will use that against the Democrats. So the Democrats had to tread this very fine line.

"I agree 100 percent that the population wants to bring back the troops, but how to you do that? And I agree that it's an illegal war and that not one American soldier should be there. But I tend to agree with the Colin Powell argument, that once you've broken it, you have to fix it. Finding a world solution that involves humanitarianism. But this is not the agenda of either party. At this point, I think they both have a political agenda. I do think that many, many Democrats contributed to getting us into this criminal war.

"Although I don't know as much about socialism as you, both of my grandparents—Milton and Bertha Tenenbaum—were persecuted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Their case is not well known, but they were admonished because they were Communist Party members at one point.

"I know there were many, many Communist Party members involved in the founding of WGA. Because I don't have much background, I don't know internationally how socialism would work, but it's domestically that socialism makes a lot of sense.

"Even though we don't agree, I appreciate your web site and read the material every time I'm handed it."

Writer David Gross spoke with us.

In regard to the issues in the strike, he said, "It's the common tale of the corporate empire wanting to take everything. It's clear that there's a right side and a wrong side, and the WGA is clearly on the right side. It's seems pretty accurate that 70 percent of the population supports us because we see the reaction to the picket line.

"I'm a comedy writer. I'm at a pivotal point; I've been an assistant to a writer for the last 5 years and I've just sold my pilot. I feel like I'm on the cusp of the movement because all these people are out here fighting so that young writers like us will have a chance to make a living.

"I think it's scary that only a handful of corporations have all the power. You can make the analogy to Halliburton and Iraq. I think it's scary when more and more control gets into the hands of fewer and fewer people.

"Maybe as your leaflet says, Edwards is phony, but I'd rather believe he brings attention to the strike. I agree that to have a serious strike you're going to have to shut down production in this industry. I can't say whether in that event, Edwards would come around the strike. I understand that support is support is support and at the end of the day, you might need the help of these millionaires. I'd rather not think of them, as you say, as 'false friends' of the strike.

"I think everybody's pretty frustrated with the way Congress has acted since the last elections. There's a resounding concern that it has done nothing to bring the war to an end, but the word seems to be that they are going to cut off the funding. I'm also one of many people who disagree with going to war against Iran. It's a complex situation; the writers haven't had to face this since 1988."

One writer initially expressed support for Edwards to a WSWS supporter. He felt obliged, however, to return and explain his position, "Look, the leaders [of the Writers Guild] have invited Edwards for a reason. They're not stupid. I don't want to be a spoil sport about it. Maybe we can use him; maybe, like you say, he's using us. We'll see

...

"I see what you're saying about appealing to the working population of Los Angeles and beyond ... but that would take a lot of work. Now, don't get me wrong. I really have no faith in the Democrats. They're a bunch of ninnies. They are shameful. Look at

what they've done since the election last year: nothing. They've practically acted as the Republicans' best friend in time of need.

"I don't know, though. Who are you going to vote for? Who? There's nobody, really. Like you said, the politicians are in the pockets of the same people we're striking against, even if they're Democrats. But I don't see anything that can be done.

"I guess I am voting for the Democrats, for the lesser of two evils, as the saying goes, but I don't think I'll like myself in the morning.

"A political party of the working-class? Boy, that's going to take some doing in this country.

"I think people in the country are really pissed off, though, but they don't see an alternative. But you know what? This fight isn't going to be won without some bruising, if that's what it takes."

Others, a minority, were even more skeptical or consciously hostile to Edwards and the Democrats.

Actress Lucia Marano commented: "I'm a SAG [Screen Actors Guild] member here to support the strike. I've appeared in television soap operas and other features.

"I'm happy to take your handout. I am a socialist.

"Right now we see no democracy and only cutthroat capitalism. The Dick Cheney's and Rupert Murdoch's are running everything.

"There are supposed to be some checks and balances on the excesses of capitalism, but they are doing away with them.

"The Democrats like Edwards should be strongly criticized. Why are the liberals so afraid to stand up to all the attacks on democracy and living standards?"

Jennifer, a writer-producer, approached us with the WSWS comment on Edwards in her hand. She expressed sympathy for its general outlook. We asked her what she thought of the Edwards appearance. "I think," she said, "photo opportunities are a necessity for every political candidate. This is one of his.

"I don't know whether overt political hypocrisy is involved. It's the political system we have. The politicians need money to run, this is one of the places they come, to the entertainment industry."

As to the issue of Edwards's sincerity or insincerity, we made the point that no one could be a US Senator or a serious candidate for the presidential nomination of one of the two major parties without having been carefully vetted by the powers that be.

"I read one of your statements the other day," she said, "and I agreed with much of it. Are you running candidates? Who are you supporting?"

The strike continues, as does the political discussion.



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