

Andy

Why I read the WSWS

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I started reading the World Socialist Web Site in 2001 or 2002. The first article I read was an interview with American Civil War historian James MacPherson. The emphasis placed on historical matters is what originally attracted me to the WSWS. When I was in college, I majored in history; later, I became a professional archivist, in which my duties involved the preservation of historically significant documents. Part of the reason I entered this field was because I became aware of how little understanding there is among the general population of history, and how the distortion of historical facts is used for political purposes. Thus, I have a special interest in the issue of historical falsification, and was very surprised to learn that historical truth is a cornerstone of Trotskyism.

It's not just the particular historical facts that interest me, though, but also the theory that underlies them. The Trotskyist movement's insistence that class is the most fundamental division of humans, and that the class-based system we live in is international, was again something I felt strong agreement with. I have read the articles relating to theory with particular interest. One thing I find fascinating is how disputes that have arisen in a tiny political movement are indicative of massive changes in conditions that have taken place in the international socio-economic system (for example, the events within the ICFI that occurred in the mid-1980s).

I find the arts reviews to be extremely useful in this regard. While they have caused me to see certain movies or read books that I might not have otherwise, they have also caused me to reevaluate the careers of certain artists of whom I once had different opinions. In a broader sense, though, the arts reviews are a demonstration that the underlying theory can be used to evaluate virtually anything.

Such is the case with my own family's history. My father's family immigrated to the United States from

different parts of Germany in 1850, following the suppression of revolutions across Europe. After they moved to America, they were supporters of the Republican Party during the Civil War, and became members of Milwaukee's German-American community. German-Americans had a vibrant community in the 19th and early 20th centuries. German was widely spoken in many parts of this country, German-language newspapers thrived, and many aspects of German culture were adopted in the general American culture.

World War I put an end to all of this. This period was a very traumatic time for German-Americans in general and for my ancestors. Once the US entered the war, what can only be described as an anti-German psychosis took root. Anything that was perceived as being pro-German was targeted. This included banning use of the German language in public and banning German-language instruction in schools, to acts of violence against people who were outspoken with their anti-war views. (This extended beyond the German-Americans, and included anyone who was considered anti-war or radical.) The pressure to conform was enormous. In my own family, my grandfather fought in the war. I also had a great-uncle who did not see eye-to-eye with my great-grandfather on a number of issues, and apparently ran away from home before the US entry into the war and joined the Canadian army. He never returned.

I believe this period influenced the psychology of numerous members of the family, some of whom became alcoholics, while others suffered from depression. Members of subsequent generations were affected as well. While certain factors, such as biology, genetics, or culture may predispose some people to addiction or mental illness, it seems clear that American-style capitalism creates very fertile ground

for problems such as these to crop up.

Politically, there were contradictions in the positions that different family members had. My grandmother was a supporter of the Republican Party for most of her life, with the exception of the 1930's when she supported Roosevelt and the Democrats. By the time I knew her, she was a staunch anti-communist, and had supported the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy. She was very fearful of the Soviet Union; I remember her justifying her position by quoting Khrushchev's famous comment of "We will bury you." My grandfather, on the other hand, knew Frank Zeidler, the former socialist mayor of Milwaukee. My father met him several decades after my grandfather died; Zeidler remembered my grandfather, and was complimentary of him.

In addition to reading the website, I have read numerous books published by Trotskyists and others, including Isaac Deutscher's trilogy, the Socialist Starter bundle [from Mehring Books], the Stalin's Terror bundle [from Mehring Books], *History of the Russian Revolution*, *The Revolution Betrayed*, and others. I find that I am able to independently analyze many topics I come across using the tools I have learned.

I regret that up to now, I have not been able to join the Socialist Equality Party. I do not feel that I have been in a position to devote the time and energy that would be required of me. This does not mean that I will not apply for membership at some point in the future. I have met a number of SEP members, and they all seem like fine people. I continue to read the WSWS daily and donate a small amount each month. Keep up the excellent work!



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