



the

Socialist

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JULY/AUGUST 2008

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ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!



VOTE SOCIALIST IN 2008

The ***Socialist***

JULY/AUGUST

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POETIC INTRO...

free verse!

Jim D. Deuchars

to bring about a world
that's less possessive
to bring about a world
where almost everything is plural
we'll emancipate contractions
and bring suffrage to shortenin'
(we'll be far less 'condescending', too!)
we only need to loose the chains of our apostrophes.

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The Socialist is always looking for interesting insightful, well written material. In particular we are look-ing for work that highlights the struggles and triumphs of the working class. We will accept news articles and stories about organizing and protests, but we are also looking for short fic-tion, poetry, and music/arts/theater/film review. Please mark all letters to the editor as such and limit let-ters to 250 words; articles should not exceed 1,500 words. Submit as an e-mail attachments Microsoft Word .doc or .rtf format.

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LAY-OUT

Greg Pason

PRINTING

Saltus Press

Cartoon (p. 11)

Gary Martin

Eugene Victor Debs and the Socialist Presidential Campaign

Editorial

Eugene Victor Debs, who was the Socialist Party candidate for president five times between 1900 and 1920, had a lot to say about the importance of participating in elections to further the cause of socialism. His experience as an organizer of railway workers led him to hope that the Socialist Party could become the labor party for the USA. "The laboring man has found that in unions he can win his fight for



existence, but now he is beginning to learn that success in his battle is impossible without unity in politics."

The 1900 platform listed two long range goals: the organization of the working class into a political party and the abolition of wage slavery by establishing a national system of cooperative industry based on common ownership. In 1904 Debs had as his running mate, Benjamin Hanford, a popular New York typographer who attracted national attention with his mythical "Jimmie Higgens," a whimsical cartoon character who represented the rank-and-file Socialist who did all the work, while party leaders took all the credit.

Debs praised workers for learning how to strike together, to unite against injunctions, even to die together. He asked them to vote together and to "place the union label" on the ballot.

The 1904 election results showed that the Socialists had quadrupled their voting strength since 1900 with Debs receiving 402,321 votes, surpassing the anti-labor Democratic Party candidate. Theodore Roosevelt who won with a two million vote majority, said this represented a threat, "far more ominous than any Populist or similar movement in time past."

He felt pressured into making progressive reforms while in office to diminish the appeal of socialism.

Four years later, Debs criticized Roosevelt and his successor Taft from "The Red Special," the Socialist Party campaign train, which crossed the country and enabled him to reach a wider audience. He blamed the politicians for the recession of 1907 which had created mass unemployment and empty dinner pails.

On average, Debs gave two major speeches each day and many short talks at whistle-stops. He often told audiences that he was not appealing to them to vote for him as much as for them to read the socialist literature and to prepare to solve "the problems that the rising generation faced." A pre-election upturn in the economy and Taft's promise of "full dinner pails" attracted voters and Debs received only 18,472 more votes than he had in 1904.

In explaining his philosophy in 1908, Debs said, "We aren't playing to win—not yet. We want a majority of Socialists, not of votes. There would be no use getting into power with a people that did not understand; with a lot of officeholders undisciplined by service in the party...I am running for president to serve a very humble purpose: to teach social consciousness and to ask men to sacrifice the present for the future, to throw away their votes to mark the rising tide of protest."

Debs most pithy statement about elections was, "I'd rather vote for what I want and not get it than to vote for what I don't want and get it."

This year, some of our readers will have the opportunity to vote for Socialist Party-USA candidates Brian Moore and Stewart Alexander, but many won't. Since Deb's day our two business parties have made it harder for us to get on the ballot in more than a handful of states by making ballot access requirements so difficult. We urge you to look for Moore and Alexander on your state ballot in November and vote for a life-affirming future where people come before profits.

from the SPUSA Statement of Principles...

THE SOCIALIST PARTY strives to establish a radical democracy that places people's lives under their own control - a non-racist, classless, feminist socialist society... where working people own and control the means of production and distribution through democratically-controlled public agencies; where full employment is realized for everyone who wants to work; where workers have the right to form unions freely, and to strike and engage in other forms of job actions; and where the production of society is used for the benefit of all humanity, not for the private profit of a few. We believe socialism and democracy are one and indivisible. The working class is in a key and central position to fight back against the ruling capitalist class and its power. The working class is the major force worldwide that can lead the way to a socialist future - to a real radical democracy from below. The Socialist Party fights for progressive changes compatible with a socialist future. We support militant working class struggles and electoral action, independent of the capitalist controlled two-party system, to present socialist alternatives. We strive for democratic revolutions - radical and fundamental changes in the structure and quality of economic, political, and personal relations - to abolish the power now exercised by the few who control great wealth and the government. The Socialist Party is a democratic, multi-tendency organization, with structure and practices visible and accessible to all members. **Join us today**

Why Americans Should Vote Socialist

Brian Moore, Socialist Party USA Presidential Candidate

If there ever was a time for Americans to recognize the merits of socialism, this is it!

Job losses, pension downsizing, fewer, if any, health benefits, stagnate salaries not keeping up with inflation, outsourcing of jobs, wall-street bailouts, corporate welfare and tax loopholes are just a small sample of what is going on in our corporate-directed society.

The conditions facing the average American, not to speak of the rest of the world, are stark. 15 million homes are now in foreclosure, people are working two or three jobs, they are spending longer hours commuting and have less buying power than ever before.

We are a country of poverty, crime and national debt. In the face of corporate profits we see spiraling gas prices, higher food costs, increasing taxes and polluted streams and air from the very factories and companies that make the profits.

And in our personal lives we are daily experiencing invasions of privacy, loss of basic and fundamental freedoms and unending wars by our country—is this what America is all about? Must we continue putting blind faith in a free-market system that operates without logic or purpose other than profit?

We are humiliated by our country's foreign policy, its' tolerance of torture and curtailing of prisoner rights, absence of basic diplomacy and a bullying attitude toward other countries.

Our economy rewards those in control with inherited wealth and power, motivated by profit and greed, all earned on the backs of working people.

The way to get ahead in America is through a cowboy mentality of self-interest, ambition, assertiveness, taking the initiative, beating out your colleague and fellow man, and getting to the top first. The nation is steeped in competitiveness, militarism, nationalism, and so-called patriotism by waving the flag, wearing lapel pins and supporting illegal, immoral wars—"my country, right or wrong!"

An idea of patriotism based on serving one's neighbor, cleaning a lake, improving the quality of food, finding solutions to medical conditions is lost in our materialistic, consumer-driven society.

How can an industrialized nation like America, which is supposedly a world-leader, tolerate so much poverty, unemployment, crime and national debt?

An alternative, socialist economy, is there for the taking. Americans, whether they want to or not, are now being forced to look for more radical solutions and answers before they stumble into poverty and lose their ability to survive or function with any kind of quality in their lives. What better time is there to educate Americans about the positive features of socialism, and how it contains answers and solutions to our broken, unfair system?



Socialism is based on egalitarianism, cooperation, equality, and responsibility to one's neighbor and fellows. Socialism is a more humane approach to living, whose mission is to assure each individual's ability to fulfill one's own vocation and purpose. Control and decision-making, in the workplaces and communities, are put in the hands of workers and citizens. Decisions are made democratically - from the bottom-up. People will be able to control their own destiny, improve the quality of their lives, and create a society which prioritizes the fulfillment of human needs.

Socialism's early pioneer, and former presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs, said in 1924 that Socialism is inevitable, and has a force and a power all its own. Mr. Debs predicted that Socialism would not be dependent on any one personality or leader, but would emerge due to its attractiveness and sound principles.

Voting for the Socialist Party USA in the 2008 presidential election is a great way to express your hopes and dreams for a more democratic, more healthy and more peaceful future.

FREE! Have a Computer?

PRINT.

Edwin Laing's popular primer on democratic socialism, "You Don't Have to be a Saint to be a Socialist," is now available for FREE print download in two separate page arrangement formats at a new web location, correcting the errors in the May Day issue of *The Socialist*: <http://spboston.org/files/f/fb/Primer-print.pdf>

This version is formatted to be printed out on double-sided sheets (flip on the short edge) and folded in half to produce a 5.5"-by-8.5" pamphlet.

<http://spboston.org/files/0/0b/Primer.pdf>

This version has the same half-page format as above, but with all the pages in order so that it can be read online more easily.

FREEAUDIO:

The updated longer version of "Saint" in audio form (suitable for serial broadcast) (77 minutes). Download at <http://www.radio4all.net/proginfo.php?id=14518>

A Funny Thing Happened to Me on the Way to the White House

David McReynolds

In 1958 I tried to run for Congress - we didn't get enough signatures to qualify and it was a disheartening write-in campaign in Lower Manhattan. In 1968 I did run for Congress in the same district, as the Peace and Freedom Party's candidate, got the endorsement of the Village Voice and pulled nearly 5% of the vote. An exciting campaign at the height of the Vietnam War.

But it had not occurred to me to run for President in 1980 - in part because the Presidential campaigns of minor parties are entirely token, there being no chance of winning. (Bernie Sanders in Vermont showed that socialists can get elected to Mayor, to Congress, and even to the Senate if they build on the grassroots). However, Maggie Phair put the bug in my ear, and with my very human ego, the idea took root and I supported the idea of a national campaign, and asked for the nomination.

We did run, and Sister Diane Drufenbrock agreed to be the Vice Presidential candidate. So far as I know, this was the first time an openly gay candidate had run for President. And certainly it was the first time a Catholic nun had run for national office. (I understand that new rules by the church would make it impossible for Sister Diane to do this again).

I learned something very quickly about the business of running for President - people think you have the answers to all questions. It seemed to me only a matter of minutes after the nomination and I was being asked for advice on love, marriage, the care of pets, and gardening. Not to mention, of course, questions about domestic and foreign policy. I was treated with deference by the media wherever I went.

There is a reason for this - the United States has no royalty, no inherited aristocracy (though we certainly have an upper class!), so the President and his family have always been treated as a kind of equivalent of the British Royal Family. (Think of Kennedy and "Camelot"). While it was abundantly clear to me that I didn't have the chance of a snowball in hell of getting anywhere near the White House, the media treats Presidential candidates with the deference which, in Europe, is accord to "royal pretenders". After all, in Europe we have seen royal families return to their thrones (Greece and Spain). So, for the media, who have no idea how tiny the Socialist Party is, a candidate for President might - who knows - get elected.

That was perhaps the most amusing aspect of running for President. I encountered the same thing when, in 2000, I ran again (and in that case it was a draft, initiated by Shaun Richman). The running mate in that campaign was a wonderful woman, Mary Cal Hollis, of Colorado. Because she had a young child, Mary Cal was not able to do much active campaigning but certainly brought distinction to the ticket.

In 1980 the tensions of the Cold War were extremely sharp. In December of 1979 NATO began to modernize its short range nuclear missiles in Europe, leading to the founding of END (European Nuclear Disarmament), a movement which demanded a nuclear free Europe "from Poland to Portugal". Reagan was running for President on a profoundly military platform. The US, having lost in Vietnam in 1975, forced into a humiliating retreat, lifting the last of the US diplomats from the roof of the Embassy in Saigon by helicopter, welcomed tough talk, and military threats, of which the placing of short range missiles in Europe was the most dangerous.

For those who, at this distance in time, may not realize what this meant, it guaranteed that in the event of an outbreak of nuclear war, the US would try to limit the nuclear battlefield to Europe. The short range missiles could threaten all of European Russia with a possible "first strike". US strategy terrified the Europeans, who had barely survived two world wars and did not want their cities to become a nuclear wasteland.

As someone who had been on the staff of War Resisters League since 1960, and had been involved in international work, having traveled both to Europe and Asia, I was aware of the dangers of the US provocation and saw the 1980 campaign as a chance to challenge the whole military policy of the US, and to point out that the military/industrial complex was in fact the real government of the US, and the basis of the US economy. Few issues provide as clear a basis for arguing for social ownership and democratic control of the basic means of production.

It was a good campaign. Sister Diane was an excellent running mate. I campaigned from coast-to-coast, by car, by bus, by train, by airplane. The best audiences were campus groups (I wish I could say we made inroads into labor, but the "base" we had to



organize around consisted mainly of student, church and peace groups).

The campaign in 2000 was, of course, the campaign which Gore won but which the Supreme Court gave to Bush by one vote. Just to clarify, for any who were not around in 2000, Al Gore not only won the popular vote against Bush by a clear margin, but he would have won the electoral vote except for one mistake - Gore asked for a recount in only four counties: Broward, Miami Dade, Palm Beach, and Volusia. That recount did not change the result of the Florida vote but there is a consensus by objective observers that, if Gore had demanded a recount of all the Florida votes he would have won Florida by a narrow margin and become President. Ralph Nader was often blamed for costing Gore the election, which wasn't fair to Nader. Any of the minor party candidates, Nader, the Workers World candidate, myself - I was on the ballot in Florida - or Pat Buchanan, would have provided the margin of votes. A fair count of all the votes would have given Gore a clear victory.

Again, for me personally, the issue of the military/industrial complex was central, but I also felt, as I had twenty years earlier, that the value of a campaign was to let Americans see what a socialist looked like, and to make as clear and forceful an attack on capitalism as I could.

I've no regrets about either campaign. It was, of course, a very great honor to have twice been the Socialist Party's candidate for President. Particularly considering those who had come before me - Eugene Victor Debs, Norman Thomas, and Frank Zeidler. Any of us who have run for President know that we quite literally stand on the backs of the many activists who did the grueling work of getting the ticket on the ballot, of lining up speaking dates, of approaching the TV and radio stations, the newspapers, etc. The candidates get the glory - but it is not a

glory we have earned. The credit goes to the many workers at every level of a campaign, both those in the Socialist Party and those drawn to the campaign. In both 1980 and 2000 I stressed the need for local candidates, reminding people that I had no chance whatever of winning, but that local organizations committed to independent electoral action could win office.

This is a year when there is a very strong case for having a national ticket. Brian Moore and Stewart Alexander are a great team. We need to realize we aren't running against Obama or McCain - we are running to highlight the issues of capitalism, of the dangers to the environment, the support the capitalist system has given to the most repressive regimes, and the fear it has demonstrated about all moves toward social revolution. There are also basic issues we should raise - the alienation of people from the means of production, the ways in which capitalism turns our wants and needs into commodities. We live in a society where our culture is used as a marketing tool, where we dumb down our youth. Socialism does not mean more government control - it means an increase in freedom, an increase in the sense of involvement by people at every level of our society. It is not just that we should have medical care for all, or housing as a human right - capitalism, pressed hard enough, can provide that. What it cannot provide is a society in which we place human beings, not profit, at the center of society.

We can't win the national office - but we can win hearts and minds, and lay the basis for the serious job of local campaigns.

David McReynolds is retired, lives on the Lower East Side with his two cats, is active in community work and, like other former socialist candidates, such as Eric Chester, who ran for Vice President in 1996, would welcome the chance to lecture on campus.

The 2008 Presidential Election: Politics as Usual

Eric Chester

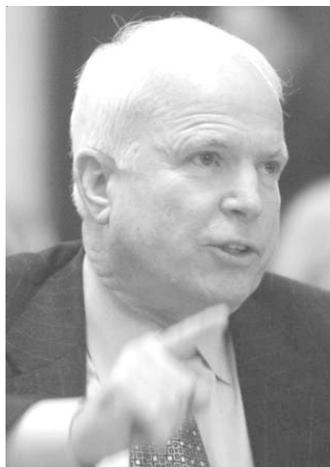
2008 would seem to be a turning point in U.S. politics, with the Democratic Party poised to sweep the November elections, and with the Democratic presidential nomination going to a person of color, Barack Obama. Nevertheless, beneath the hype and glitz this is very much politics as usual. In reality, all of the mainstream candidates, including Senator John McCain, the candidate for the Republican Party, remain beholden to the same corporate interests that rule the United States, and much of the rest of the world.

Globalization and Empire

The globalized integration of the capitalist market economy has had a disastrous impact on the United States. Factories have been relocated to countries with lower wages and fewer environmental controls. The massive outsourcing of jobs, and investment, has devastated urban areas, while significantly widening the gap between the rich and the poor. It has also led to the virtual disintegration of trade unions in the private sector. Now, only 7% of the private sector workforce is unionized, and strikes have become a rarity.

Thus, the globalization of capital has drastically and irrevocably shifted the balance of class forces toward the capitalist class. The dominant ideology within the U.S. working class has

always been pragmatic liberal reformism, and yet globalization has undermined the basis of reformism, leaving liberals adrift. In this context, the Democratic Party has moved even further into the corporate center. Democratic candidates in the past promised a great deal and delivered little. Now, the Democratic mainstream promises little beyond being slightly better than Republican conservatives.



The United States remains the sole global superpower. In spite of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the total absence of a credible military threat, U.S. military forces continue to mushroom. With the U.S. military budget now exceeding 700 billion dollars a year, ten times that of any other country, the resulting squeeze in the federal budget has brought a shredding of the already meager social safety net. Needless to say, the Democratic presidential nominees are unwilling to challenge this absurd waste of scarce resources.

U.S. imperialism remains a primary threat to world peace. The occupation of Iraq has continued for five years, with no sign of an imminent end. As a result, the Iraq war has become intensely unpopular. In spite of this, the Democratic presidential candidate refuses to support

a rapid withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Iraq. Instead, Obama proposes to implement a more sophisticated strategy. Iraqi soldiers would replace U.S. soldiers in the routine policing of hostile neighborhoods. Although some troops would be withdrawn, tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers would remain, withdrawing to isolated bases where they would serve as a reserve force and as specialized hit squads of counter-insurgency forces. This would reduce U.S. casualties, thereby making an indefinite occupation of Iraq more palatable to popular opinion.

The Democratic Alternative

George W. Bush has been a disaster as president. Corporate rule is blatant and unvarnished. The rich receive tax cuts while the poor suffer additional cutbacks in basic services. Liberals, therefore, have become increasingly desperate to have Bush and the Republicans turned out of office. Still, the Democrats have controlled Congress since 2006 and little has changed. The Democratic majority in the House of Representatives could have used its power over the budget to force an end to the war. Instead, the Democrats handed Bush a blank check.

This recent experience provides yet another chapter in the sordid history of the Democratic Party, and yet it has failed to shake liberal opinion. Overwhelmingly, progressives remain committed to the Democrats. Most have jumped on the Obama bandwagon.

This year, both Obama and primary loser Hillary Clinton have greatly outpaced John McCain in attracting hundreds of millions of dollars in contributions. The Democratic Party is no longer just a capitalist party committed to the defense of the existing system, but rather it has become the primary vehicle for corporate interests in the electoral arena.

Ralph Nader and the Greens

For those who have become disillusioned with the two-party shell game, Ralph Nader provides a third choice. Nader has been in the public eye for more than three decades, developing a certain credibility that enables him to gain access to corporate media, and to raise millions of dollars in campaign contributions.

Nader's politics have remained consistent over the decades. He is convinced that the system can be reformed, that capitalism can be regulated, and that greater transparency can guarantee the accountability of corporations to consumers.

Nader is unable to totally break from the Democratic Party. Although he believes that the Democratic Party is dominated by its corporate wing, he still looks toward an anti-corporate wing working from within, and he sees his role as strengthening that anti-corporate wing by bringing pressure from outside. Thus, Nader not only adheres to a reformist position in relation to the capitalist system, but also in relation to the Democratic Party.

Still, Nader's campaign has positive aspects. At a time when

most liberals accept whatever the Democrats offer, Nader insists that the willingness to tolerate the lesser evil can only imply a passive acquiescence to a disastrous future. He is not afraid to stand as an independent candidate even if this leads to a Republican victory, as, in all likelihood, it did in 2000, when George W. Bush defeated Al Gore.



Nevertheless, Ralph Nader does not present democratic socialists with a meaningful alternative. He has no interest in building a political party, but rather he views himself as an iconic figure free from any organizational constraints. Furthermore, he lacks a class analysis of the current system, and he is unable and unwilling to articulate a vision of an alternative society.

Matt Gonzalez's decision to join Nader's ticket was sharply criticized by three leading California Green Party members who are also local elected officials. All three publicly support Obama.

The Green Party has consistently failed to provide an organizational venue for those committed to a truly independent politics. While Nader campaigns as an independent, the Green Party presidential nominee is likely to be Cynthia McKinney, who has spent most of her career as a stalwart of the Democratic Party. McKinney served several terms as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Her politics are similar to those of Nader, but she lacks his name recognition and personal stature. Even more than Nader, McKinney retains her ties to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

The Socialist Alternative

Those searching for a radical alternative to the two-party system will fail to find it in either Nader or McKinney. The unending war in Iraq and the deteriorating economy have radicalized a segment of the working class, especially those under thirty. Socialists need to reach out to those interested in joining the movement, and the electoral arena can be an effective way to do this.

In 2008, the Socialist Party has nominated Brian Moore, a peace activist from Florida, as its presidential candidate, and Stewart Alexander, an African-American community activist from California, as its vice-presidential candidate. Both are committed socialists who will advance a clear, radical alternative to liberal reformism.

The United States sits at the center of the sole remaining global empire. Not surprisingly, a large section of the working class identifies with the imperial power. This makes it difficult to gain a hearing for a socialist vision. Nevertheless, the 2008 election provides a good opportunity for the Socialist Party to reach beyond its usual core of supporters and to build on its recent growth. It is an opportunity that we do not intend to miss.

www.votesocialist2008.org

Built From the Ground Up

Todd Vachon, Socialist Congressional Candidate

My name is Todd Vachon and I am running as the Socialist Party candidate for congress in Connecticut, District 2.

I am not a politician and I am not a lawyer I am a union carpenter, a public school teacher, a father of two and a concerned citizen who loves democracy and believes in self-governance. I unfortunately see plutocracy and corporate governance today in our beautiful country.

The one political party, with its right-wing and its far-right-wing, is the party of big-business. Both the Democrats and the Republicans are bought and paid for by the same wealth. Unfortunately, the corporately owned media is content to have us think that they are dynamic opposites.

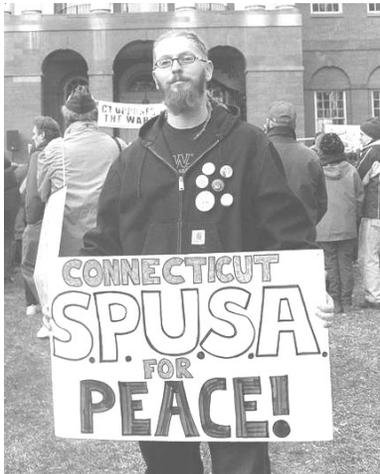
As a member of the working class majority, I am tired of going to the polls year after year and having to select the “lesser of two evils.” We all know damn well that this party is no friend of labor except when it comes time to get some votes and foot soldiers.

The Democrats, as well as the Republicans, represent the interests of big-business capitalism. Most Americans are not capitalists. Most cannot afford a lobbyist. The only inherent goal of capitalism as a system is the accumulation of capital and the never-ending pursuit of profit at everyone and everything else’s expense.

Nowhere does it say “guarantee meaningful work and a quality life for all.” Nowhere does it say “preserve the environment, produce in a sustainable way and conserve resources.” Nope. It just says “Make more profit. Get that money.” Profit, profit, profit!

So, let’s take a second to review where this quest for profit has landed us in 2008:

- The U.S. is still illegally occupying Iraq in year number 5 – a war built on lies and manipulated intelligence. \$3 Trillion spent and 40% of the money sent to Afghanistan has come back to the U.S. in the form of corporate profit.
- 47 million Americans still live without health insurance, 20 million more are underinsured and millions more are breaking the bank just to keep their families insured.



- Property taxes... sky high. Homeowners are losing their homes at levels unseen since the great depression, many due to price-gouging “balloon mortgages and outstanding medical bills.
- Good Paying Manufacturing jobs? Outsourced and replaced by low paying, part-time and temporary service sector jobs, due in part to bi-partisan, pro-business trade deals like NAFTA.
- Our children and public school teachers are being hung out to dry to accommodate the desires of the for-profit education industry and it’s incredibly flawed No Child Left Behind policy.
- Our prison industrial complex holds more people, more than 2 million per-capita than any other nation in the world; disproportionately people of color, mostly poor, mostly black.
- The U.S. ranks 139th out of 171 democracies for voter turnout. Roughly 50% of eligible voters don’t even bother to vote. When asked why, they say that it doesn’t matter- I guess a whole lot of people do understand that we haven’t really got much of a democracy at all.

These are the times of “jobless recoveries” and “market-based solutions”, terms which both share the same distinct odor of “Reagonomics” and “Trickle Down” economics. As members of the working class, which constitutes 80% of America, the only thing that trickles down to us is instructions and orders from way up the hierarchical ladder of corporate organization.

Class is not about income, it is about power. There may be a formula to calculate a particular income bracket that constitutes the so-called “middle-class,” but the truth of it is this: The boss determines what we do during our 8 hours, which is the majority of our waking time on work days. The boss determines how much to sell the fruits of our labors to other workers for. The boss determines how much we get paid, unless we organize and demand more, and the boss decides when he doesn’t need us anymore because we are hurting profits. Whether we go to work in an office wearing a shirt and tie working at a computer or we go to a construction site wearing a hard hat and swinging a hammer, the vast majority of us are working class- we do not own the means of production.

Our primary source of wealth, as working-class Americans, is home ownership. However, most homeowners are really debtors. The banks own our homes and likely our cars as well. Even ignoring this fact our collective percentage of the national wealth is merely 16%! That’s right, the bottom 80% of Americans share just 16% of America’s wealth. The top 1% owns 33% of the wealth and the next 19% own 51%, giving the top Fifth of society control over 84% of all wealth. This is exactly the intent of a market-based economy. So, not only do the capitalists enjoy empowering work and the access to information to make well-informed decisions, but they also get paid 500% more than the average worker.

Grassroots Politics. Direct Action. These are the only ways that we have ever accomplished anything as a class. We can’t count on fundraising politicians to hand out National Health Insurance and Living wages. They only throw us a bone when we make the alternative worse. The driving force behind change and progress has always been class struggle, and this still holds true today. This is why I am running for congress as the Socialist candidate, to get out and speak to people and help raise class awareness.

A Modest Proposal for Electing the President

Edwin Laing

As socialists we always seek non-reformist reforms that don't just improve things but that can pre-figure, and be used in, a socialist society with socialist values and production for use. This proposal could democratize now and, as our movement builds, even be a method for electing a socialist president.

In the present system, voters have the illusion of potency once every four years, even though they are manipulated by clever media treatment that trades policy discussion for entertainment value. The system requires enormous money sums to campaign and so limits the electable field to those who bend to wealth and power.

What to do? Could we trade our quadrennial gesture of mythic efficacy for a process that builds voter awareness and that would give us an actually qualified Chief Executive whose views reflected voter majority policy?

As it is now, the presidential Electoral College is an anachronism and can lead to peculiar results. A modest

Built From the Ground Up - continued

No candidate from either of the capitalist parties will acknowledge the systemic nature of the problems I have outlined above. They will do little to slow the current destructive pattern: the wholesale privatization of every remaining public entity- modern day primitive accumulation.

The Democratic Party, as Edwin Laing said, is "where social movements go to die" and the Republican Party is where CEO's go for tax breaks.

It's high time to provide an alternative at the polls. The Socialist Party runs electoral campaigns to activate that 50% of voters, mostly low income, to stand up with a real alternative to the same old wage-slave-driving parties.

I strongly agree with the statement that "capitalism cannot be reformed", but am faced with the dichotomy of a socialist candidate. As a socialist running for office within a capitalist system my policy objectives may seem reformist or social democratic at best: real universal health care, graduated income taxation, socialized energy and expanded public transportation.

Such simple taxation and funding of social programs does not equate to socialism, but fighting together for such reforms can help to generate the necessary class solidarity to bring about a truly participatory economy. A sustainable form of production for human use and not for profit that replaces hierarchy with equality, cut-throat competition with solidarity, free-trade with fair trade. A complete democracy that extends from the political sphere of electing representatives to the economic sphere of making decisions about production, distribution and consumption. A society where every human being has food, housing, healthcare and employment. Where full civil rights and liberties are guaranteed to all, where every individual is able to fulfill his or her full potential. As Eugene Debs said nearly 100 years ago: "The Earth is for all people, this is the demand."

Check out the Todd Vachon for Congress website at www.votevachon.com

proposal for Constitutional amendment to retain but change it to give an informed public more control:

Electors would first be elected by the voters in every state based on their publicly demonstrated and debated policy views, through a publicly funded informational process— similar to the later Presidential one— followed by local voting, the only nationwide election by the general voters themselves.

The amendment brings a kind of proportional representation to the contest and reflects minority views as well by giving each Elector one independent vote in the College no matter how other Electors from that state vote (no "Unit Rule"). (This sidesteps political party control of the process.) If "voters" were redefined to include all adult residents, not just citizens, as exists elsewhere, Electors and candidates would represent a still broader range.

After their election, Electors would meet and review the record, experience, knowledge, values and character of candidates who present themselves, independent of party control, and have extensive, widely broadcast hearings (see below) and reports distributed to the public.

Then in open session Electors choose the President by roll call votes.

Important issues perceived as not broadly popular would very likely be brought forth by some Electors because of the broad range of Electors selected on their policy histories by voters of all stripes.

Appearing as a heroic charismatic figure is irrelevant to the real needs and qualities above and of far less impact on Electors chosen for demonstrated concern for policy issues.

Pleasing big campaign contributors cannot happen because there won't be any. Zip. Under the reform the shortened presidential campaigns will be entirely publicly funded. Equal broadcast time will be free and not purchasable. (Mexico has just enacted such a system by constitutional amendment.)

Present law already "requires" that airwaves broadcasters operate "in the public interest, convenience and necessity" because the public "owns" the airwaves. This will finally become real and enforceable under the terms of the new law so that local voters at last will receive ample information and every view of policy questions and candidate selection— over the air, on the internet and in writing.

Finally, note that this Modest Proposal, a non-reformist reform: 1.— radically sidesteps the dominant influence of big political parties, leaving every party free to propose candidates but removing big party control of candidate selection and, especially, their big money role. (The Electors, not dependent on party power and money, might even recruit candidates.) Other elections are, sadly, not affected. 2.— crucially, is left-right policy neutral (and religion neutral) in structure (by popular election of Electors) so that it could receive public support across the political board, except that it 3. — drastically reduces— but certainly does not remove— the influence of big economic power (if only in presidential selection).

Hmmm. Maybe the Constitutional amendment could be broader and get beyond capitalism! Another day.

Anatomy of a Successful Antiwar Movement

Matthew Andrews

This summer there will be a National Assembly to End the Iraq War and Occupation in Cleveland, Ohio. At first glance, 2008 seems like an unlikely year to jump start a sluggish antiwar movement. With the elections this fall, the political pressure is to line up behind the Democratic Party. Some believe we should not embarrass the Democrats on issues they do not have answers for in an election year. They reason that we should operate within the boundaries of ruling class politics in order to win near-term victories. Within the antiwar movement, a debate is already brewing about whether we should be organizing for massive bi-coastal demonstrations against the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan before the elections this fall.

The failure of massive, yet last-minute, protests to prevent the ground invasion of Iraq led to the unnecessary demoralization of the movement in 2003. Criticism of the war's bipartisan support was suppressed in 2004 to give a free pass to John Kerry's presidential campaign. Now, more than a year after the 2006 electoral victories of the Democratic Party in the House and Senate, they have failed to make any progress in an anti-war direction. Once again, the Democrats are lining up to support \$178 billion in extra-budgetary funding for the war.

The Socialist Party USA candidates, especially Brian Moore and Stewart Alexander, are in a position to provide direction through this wave of disillusionment. Those who put the parochial interests of the Democratic Party before the antiwar movement by opposing pre-election mass actions should be challenged on their commitment to an immediate withdrawal of troops.

There are essentially three major political lessons that are critical for building a successful antiwar movement. The first is that the movement must be unified. The strongest unity will come from a decision making structure that nurtures grassroots democratic participation. If the directors and staff of incorporated nonprofit organizations are allowed to dominate the process, the movement will be compromised by narrow institutional interests. It is healthy for our movement to encompass many political differences, but if our differences are never debated at the grassroots level, the necessary collaboration and trust will not develop, and unity for action will diminish or never be reached. We will remain weak.

Second, simply mobilizing large numbers of people in the street is not enough. In addition, our movement must begin to orient towards taking actions that disrupt the economic interests of the war-makers. On May 1st, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down all 29 ports on the West Coast of the United States for eight hours to demand an end to the U.S. war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. This was the first time ever that an American union

has struck against a U.S. war. Dock workers accepted considerable personal risk by walking off the job in defiance of both their employers and labor law arbitrators. They created a real economic cost and the specter of greater costs to come.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country in Burlington, Vermont, ten activists locked themselves together inside the lobby of the weapons manufacturer, General Dynamics. They demanded a halt to weapons manufacturing as well as breaking the chains of corporate welfare and lobbying money that keeps the US government addicted to war. These actions must be expanded to target local elected representatives, mainstream newspapers, and universities. If we want to hold Congress, the President, and the big war profiteers accountable, we must first build

our strength by forcing smaller, local institutions and individuals to cut their relationships with the military industrial complex and take a stand against war and occupation.

The antiwar movement must also have clear political content. Our demands must speak honestly to the complex challenges the world faces, and prepare people for the struggle that real change requires. The war in Iraq is not an isolated policy. It was not a mistake, but rather the centerpiece for a broader imperialist project that existed well before the Bush Administration ever came to power. This imperialist project employs a broad range of tools - martial, political, and economic - to protect US corporate interests around the world. It is not reasonable to assume that we can end the occupation of Iraq - or prevent future invasions in Iran or Latin America - without confronting the entire imperialist agenda. While particular protest actions may have targeted demands, our movement must include a variety of forces to challenge the war from every angle.

Many of the organizers for the National Assembly this summer understand the anatomy of a successful antiwar movement. The open invitation to the assembly calls for the united and politically independent mobilization of antiwar forces. Conference organizers are making a concerted effort to involve all major antiwar groups. There are already over four hundred endorsers from around the country. There will be workshops and speakers, but the most exciting session will be when we convene to vote on actions. The process will be as democratic and transparent as possible. Every attendee will get a single vote. Debates about how to build an effective antiwar movement will be played out with real consequences. If several hundred activists participate, and can come out with a unifying agenda, we may set a bold new course for our movement. I hope to see you there.

<http://natassembly.org>



New Yorkers Protest Proposed Healthcare Privatization

William Wharton

On Friday May 30th, the Coalition Against Privatization held its second street demonstration against the proposed conversion (privatization) of GHI/HIP to for-profit status. This privatization would remove an important non-profit healthcare carrier thereby exposing 4 million people in NY State to a for-profit health insurer. Non-profit status places a cap on administrative spending at 15% of the overall budget, provides oversight on premium increases and restricts access to funding from financial markets, thereby insuring that the overall goal of the company is the provision of healthcare and not the accumulation of profits.

The application for conversion sailed through Albany in April of 2007 and met little resistance until January 2008. Democrats, Republicans and, until recently, most of the leaders of municipal trade unions supported the privatization. They hope to profit from the estimated \$3 – \$5 billion dollars in assets, which will be liquidated if the conversion is approved. Plan subscribers, including 1.2 million municipal workers and their dependents (retirees included), would be thrown into a for-profit system which has left more than 46 million people without health insurance and 20 million under-insured.

In January 2008, 300 people, many retirees on fixed incomes, testified at a hearing held by the Superintendent of Insurance. The vast majority spoke against the proposed conversion with



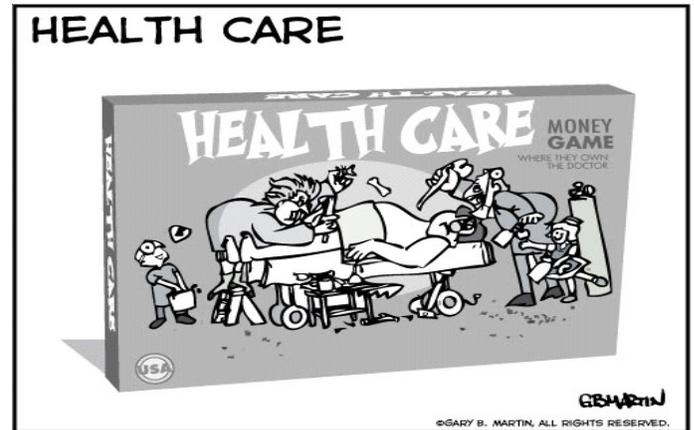
many demanding single-payer national health insurance. Since then, CAP has been formed and has organized street demonstrations on May 9th and May 30th. In addition, CAP supporters flooded the phone lines of the Superintendent of

Insurance on May 12th in a planned call-in action.

The May 30th demonstration targeted the office of GHI in midtown Manhattan. Protesters then moved to the office of Governor David Paterson. Along the way, the march received support from passers-by in the form of conversations, pumped fists and words of encouragement. The employees at GHI, who face possible termination or transfer if the conversion is approved, were also receptive to our message. Chants included: "Eric Dinallo—Just Say No!", "David Paterson—Tell Him No!" and "People over Profits—Healthcare is a Right!"

Speakers included representatives from the UFT rank and file caucus, Independent Community of Educators, TWU Local 100 rank-and-file activists, UFT retirees, D.C. 37 retirees, the Socialist Party USA, Healthcare – NOW and Socialist Action. The speakers highlighted the need to break through the silence

on this issue by taking the word directly to rank-and-file workers who have largely been kept in the dark by political and trade



union representatives. It was also noted that one unelected administrator, Superintendent Eric Dinallo, now controls the fate of 4 million people. Finally, many speakers combined their opposition to the privatization with renewed calls for building the movement for single-payer national health insurance.

The march began with a surprise announcement that Randi Weingarten, the head of the Municipal Labor Council and the President of the UFT, had penned a letter to Superintendent Dinallo expressing concern about possible increases in premium rates and denial of access to care should the conversion be approved. She stated that the municipal unions were in the process of reviewing their support of the proposed conversion. This is an important victory for CAP since we have consistently argued that premium rates and access would be jeopardized by a for-profit carrier. (As The Socialist went to print, the MLC had still not reversed its support of the proposed privatization). Activists in ICE have also attempted to bring this message to the floor of the UFT Delegate Assembly (DA) for the past three months and have had many positive conversations with DA representatives.

Going forward, CAP is participating in the June 19th national demonstrations in support of single-payer national healthcare. Demonstrations will be organized in 18 cities throughout the U.S. The New York City demonstration will unite CAP with Healthcare NOW! and Private Health Insurance Must Go! We will demand the passage of H.R. 676 and speak out against the proposed privatization of GHI/HIP. We have initiated a process aimed at uniting diverse sets of healthcare rights groups in order to fight against the privatization and build momentum in support of national health insurance.

Please consider participating in our growing movement to stop the privatization of GHI/HIP and secure healthcare as a basic human right!

www.myspace.com/saveourhealthcare

The Change to Digital Television: Who Wins, Who Loses

Steve Rossignol

If you want to continue watching TV after February 17, 2009, grab the rabbit ears! The Federal Government will require a change in television broadcasting systems from an analog to a digital transmission signal. It is estimated that nearly 70 million television sets may be at risk of losing their signals if consumers do not make the transition to digital broadcasting.

Under the provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, passed by Congress in 2005, full-power television broadcasting television stations will be required to turn off their analog channels on the D-Day of February 17, 2009, and broadcast solely in digital form.

Long before the idea of digital television became a reality, several large industry groups began agitating for a medium which would allow them to take advantage of the newer electronic and computer technology that was becoming available. More bang for the buck, so to speak.

There will only be three ways to continue receiving television. The first is to have a television which is equipped to receive the digital signal. If your old and battered TV is not equipped with DTV, then you will be "SOL." The winners for this first scenario are obviously the new digital television manufacturers, and the prices of the new DTVs are not exactly cheap.

Cable and dish systems are already digitally broadcast. If you do not have cable, and do not have DTV set, then you will have to get that service. The winners: Time Warner, Direct TV, Dish Network, and other cable systems. They will be soaking up the profits. It is already estimated that 1.4 million households will make the change to a paying television service. Ka-ching!

You can also install an analog to digital signal converter box on your existing TV. Coupons of \$40 (limit of two per household), are being made available by the Feds to consumers towards the purchase of the converters, which retail for about \$49.99 up to \$70. The government-subsidized winners here are obviously the manufacturers of the digital signal converters.

The losers in this whole deal are obviously the poor. One can only begin to surmise what the long-range effect of no television in households might be. Maybe kids will actually do their homework. Or, perhaps people living in the same house might actually talk with one another.

The Federal Government began auctioning the old analog wavelengths in late January of this year. The top bidders were placed by the communications industry giants. Already there have been complaints that the bidding process was not competitive.

One thing is obvious; this is another example of the Federal government selling-off the public infrastructure to private interests at the expense of the American people.

So, while we can be sure that Big Brother will continue the sell-off to the highest bidder, we cannot guarantee that you will be able to continue watching Big Brother.



May Day in Boston

Statement by SP Boston Chair Christopher Persampieri at the Boston May Day Celebration



I am honored to be here today to speak at such a historic holiday that sadly goes overlooked by many American workers who don't see that the struggle for a fair day's wage goes beyond borders.

I see how the working class is suffering. We suffer because we can no longer make ends meet. They (and we all know who "they" are) cut our pay and benefits then tell us that it's not them; it's the undocumented workers who are responsible for their hardships.

Their goal is to keep us distracted from the truth. The truth is that we have more in common with our immigrant brothers and sisters than our "American" corporate masters.

In case you don't know who the Walton family is; they are the owners of Wal-Mart whose combined personal wealth is worth over 100 BILLION dollars. Somehow in our capitalist system we have allowed one person to acquire twenty billion dollars, while the average worker at their company is being paid at the federal poverty wage. At that rate, it would take one WalMart associate over 192,000 years to achieve the personal wealth of one Walton who acquired it off the backs of its non-union workers.

I read yesterday in an AP article that Americans are now selling off their family heirlooms to make ends meet. Americans now have to choose between passing down its heritage or not being evicted.

How did this happen? It wasn't always like this, just ask your grandparents. Why were wages good enough that only one person had to work? Why do you think the 50s were considered the good old days? Before I continue please keep in mind this time wasn't the "good old days" for some Americans due to the color of their skin. But for the rest it was a good time because they could buy a home, raise a family, and still have money left over for the extras on forty hours a week. How was that possible for people who did not have college degrees? It was possible because over 50% of the work force was unionized and because there was a collective spirit of unity after the World War II when we defeated fascism.

Sadly, today only 9% of the workforce is unionized and Americans lack a spirit of unity.

But there is one good thing I see here today; all of us here have that spirit of unity and we didn't need a war to have it. We

refuse to believe Fox News's propaganda and their message of intolerance to our brothers and sisters who struggle for the same goals as we do, regardless of where they were born.

My grandparents immigrated to this country from Ireland and Italy because this was a nation that said; "Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free". When they came to this country they were able to prosper because of their unions and during the Depression my grand-father worked for the WPA, a government program thanks to the New Deal.

The power to change things right never came because we politely asked management for a better wage. It is because we organized and demanded to be treated like human beings, not just simple machines. And if our demands were met with deaf ears, we elected to have a strike to show management how important we were to them. Then what did they do? Well, if you know about American labor history, they imprisoned us, they shot at us and on this day 122 years ago they murdered us in Chicago. They had the National Guard set fire to strikers' tents where 14 of our mothers and children burned to death while hiding in Ludlow, Colorado in 1914. They died because they demanded an eight hour work day and a safe work place.

We stand to lose ALL of their sacrifices paid in blood, if we don't continue their fight for a fair day's wage. We need to stop this fighting over undocumented workers and unite ALL the workers against the unelected few in power.

I know a lot of people hear the word "comrade" and get anxious. But calling someone a comrade means we share a common cause. We all have a common cause; we all want to be able to feed our families, to teach our children, to be able to see a doctor even if you don't have two cents to your name and most importantly to be able to achieve the American Dream.

We can't wait on the failed two-party system to fix they problem they created. The struggle won't be fixed over night, the struggle will be continuous. The wealthy are going to continue to slander, scare and lie about our movement of peace, solidarity and fairness. To all of you brave, hard working people here with me today; you are my comrades and we the Socialist Party will always stand beside you and as long as I draw breath I will never forget the dream that my grandparents called America.

New York, NY SP-USA NYC Local

The Socialist Party of New York City participated in a mobilization organized primarily by the Chinese Staff Workers Association as part of the Break the Chains Coalition. The main



demand was for an end to employer sanctions laws (Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986) which are used by the Immigration police and the bosses as a pretext for enforcing workplace discipline through

raids. More than 1,000 people took part in this rally with speeches translated into Chinese, English and Spanish.

We the marched up to Union Square (14th street), past our national office where War Resisters League Staff prepared a banner with the inscription "No War

We arrived at Union Square and joined several other feeder marches. Most immigrant rights groups participated as well as all sectors of the left. Many people spoke excitedly about the shut down of the ports on the West Coast. One highlight was meeting up again with Victor Toro. In the late 60s and 70s Victor was a militant in the MIR in Chile and a leader of shanty-town communities around Santiago. After the government of Salvador Allende was overthrown, Victor was jailed and then forced into exile. He is currently fighting deportation charges.

Our statement on Victor's case: www.spnyc.org/main/node/574

We ended the night with a showing of the documentary "Wobblies." We had about 20 people turn up at the movie and, even after a long day of marching, the conversation was quite lively. We hope that everyone enjoyed a happy May Day and that the struggle to re-build a socialist movement makes major advances in the coming year!

International News

Solidarity with the workers, campesinos and indigenous communities of Bolivia

Statement by the SPUSA International Committee



The Socialist Party USA expresses its solidarity with the workers, campesinos and indigenous communities of Bolivia who are struggling to create a new vibrant socialist project in their country. The possibilities of achieving such a goal were greatly accelerated by the election in 2005 of the government of

Evo Morales, representative of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party. Now, two years into Morales' first term, the MAS government faces serious challenges from the right delivered in

the form of a movement for "autonomy" coming from a bastion of the old oligarchy in Santa Cruz.

The historical legacy and theoretical traditions of socialism make it difficult to publicly declare opposition to a genuine movement for autonomy expressed by a nationally-oppressed group. We re-affirm the notion that oppressed groups, minority or majority, have, when facing oppression by a state apparatus be it capitalist or ostensibly communist, the right to self-determination. For example, claims by Aymara communities in the north of Bolivia prior to the election of the MAS government were clearly just demands for the liberation of a majority grouping from the shackles of a political economy directed by a thin layer of capitalist elite taking direction from the IMF/World Bank. The above definition has little to do with the current crisis in Santa Cruz.

The claims by the property-owning elites in Santa Cruz, commonly referred to as Cruceños, have nothing to do with the right to self-determination or even the desire for autonomy. They are, instead, part of a concerted nation-wide effort to re-articulate a right-wing movement in the country capable of re-taking state-power. The Cruceños are at the epicenter of this attempt since they have managed to maintain key elements of power from the pre-MAS era — access to property, access to local state-power and access to external funding from US sources.

However, it would be a serious mistake to see Santa Cruz as the last bastion of right-wing power in Bolivia. Aspects of a resurgent right-wing project are appearing all over the country. Because of the manner in which it was dispersed in 2003, this new conservative trend is forced to wear different colors in different regions. In some cases, such as the Santa Cruz-based Union Juvenil Cruceñista and its counterparts in other cities, the right acts in an openly violent quasi-fascistic manner. In other circumstances, they march in urban areas under the cover of the Feminine Civic Committee to defend the “family-basket” against supposedly inflationary MAS policies. In the case of La Paz a pro-business elite works through the nominally social-democratic party dubbed Podemos (Social Democratic Power) which is led by loser of the 2005 presidential elections Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga. Taken together, these forces represent a coherent attempt to re-organize the right in Bolivia.

The MAS is a party built organically from the social and workers’ movements which developed in Bolivia at the turn of the 21st

century. As such, it contains within it wings with nationalist, indigenous and leftist agendas. The Morales regime has attempted to balance these forces while building a progressive electoral bloc. The government has carried out reforms including the hydrocarbons nationalization (essentially an increase in the tax-rate paid by multi-nationals to the state) and a literacy program. The MAS is now faced with the tasks of deepening the revolution by addressing demands from working class and indigenous communities for re-organizing the state to recognize the organs of popular power, for a substantive land reform and for a more aggressive campaign of nationalizations. Such developments would mark a positive move from the development of a “normal” or “Andean-Amazonian” capitalism towards a democratic socialist project.

There is much for socialists in America to learn from the Bolivian Revolution. The mobilizations of the early 21st century, the construction of popular organs of political decision-making and the ability to dispose of successive right-wing governments demonstrates the capacity of the working class and peasantry to transform political reality. Confronting the elites based in Santa Cruz, a region which produces 60% of Bolivia’s yearly GDP, is a crucial step to neutralize the resurgent right-wing thereby securing the future of the Bolivian Revolution. The Socialist Party USA supports efforts to extend the democratic-socialist project to address the historical inequities which have defined class relations in Bolivia.



Die Linke, A Big Step Forward

Jonas Sjöstedt

It is easy to underestimate the importance of Germany for Europe’s political and economic development. The lack of a modern and strong German socialist left-wing has, for many years, been a problem for the left throughout Europe. This has finally changed with the creation of the new left party, Die Linke.

Die Linke is clearly a socialist party built on a Marxist foundation. But it is also a party that allows many currents and fractions. The breakthrough and mass support of this new party has changed the political landscape in Germany with the social-democrats desperately moving left to try not to lose too many votes. In the process, the whole political debate in the country is finally turning away from the simplistic anti-worker neoliberal agenda. Such a shift has the potential to lead to the formation of new progressive majorities both on the national and state levels in Germany. A new direction for German politics will, in turn, positively impact upon the direction of the debate in the whole European Union. However, the success of the new party is not confined to the electoral arena. Die Linke is also a driving force in the mass street protests against cuts in the social welfare systems all over Germany.

The so called Left: The new face of reformism in Germany

Michael Rieger

Germany’s Left Party would seem to be a success. And, indeed, this may be true in terms of winning votes and seats in the federal parliaments and in the dimension of media coverage. Still, when we ask for the success as far as real and fundamental political changes can be expected, the picture looks pretty different.

There are several problems, uncertainties and ambivalent moments about The Left. To begin with, the name itself is delusive. It suggests that The Left is a project that unites all or, at least, many of the left currents in Germany. Yet this is far from reality. The Left is a merger of two groups that have met in their common reformist approach.

First, there was the Party of Democratic Socialism, formerly well known as the SED or Party of Socialist Unity, the communist state party of the German Democratic Republic that collapsed in 1989/90. From these less than attractive roots, the PDS has

A Big Step Forward continued

Of course, the new German Left also faces challenges and problems. One is whether to enter coalitions, often as the smaller party, in state governments that often have very limited economic resources. Or, as in the case of Berlin, should they enter a local government which is highly indebted. Certainly some mistakes are made as a result of bad compromises. This is a strategic problem that Die Linke shares with all serious left-wing forces in Europe, be it the Dutch Socialist party, the Swedish Left Party or the Italian communists. Often though, the alternative to taking power and forming majorities with other parties is to allow a political vacuum through which right-wing formations can assume state-power. Such decisions are neither ideal, nor easy choices.

These questions are almost entirely unfamiliar to the American left-wing. But, if we as socialists in America refuse to extend solidarity to fellow socialists who are willing to form progressive majorities in Europe, we would be left cooperating with marginal sectarian groups. Such formations maintain ideologically pure politics in exchange for no political influence and very little popular support. I think that we have to understand that the conditions for socialist parties in Europe, due to the historical strength of the left and proportional election systems, is fundamentally different from those in the US.

I have been active in the Swedish left for 30 years, I have cooperated on European level with other left wing parties for more than 10 years and I have been a member of the Socialist Party USA for some two years. I am surprised that our party does not have more cooperation, exchange and solidarity with major left wing forces in Europe. We have a lot to gain and learn from such cooperation. I think that two broad guidelines should inform our international relations with the European left. Our ideal partners should be a) socialists (not Social-Democrats) b) democratic (not Stalinists). There are many left-wing parties that we could have contacts with, the German Die Linke, the successful Dutch Socialist Party and why not my own Swedish Left Party. Why haven't such relationships already been built?

The so called Left continued

quickly transformed itself into another social democratic party, so quickly that most of the party members might not have noticed themselves. The withdrawal from discredited Leninist party principles turned out to be a cheap sell out of everything related to Marxism and socialism, a process that was initiated by the same personnel that represents The Left Party today.

The second grouping that came together to found the Left Party was the WASG, best translated as the Electoral Alternative for Social Fairness, a group founded by frustrated social democrats and unionists from West Germany. Their leading figure is the former chairman of the Social Democrats, SPD, Oskar Lafontaine, most popular for his Napoleonic, egocentric flair mixed with populist speeches. The WASG was the direct and intuitive result of the collapse of the Social Democratic Party as a progressive force, and so thousands of frustrated members were ready to try again, instead of falling into apathy and political abstinence.

Neither the first nor the second organization represented a socialist or emancipating aim. Their focus was to re-establish the traditional social democratic ideology and politics given that the original social democrats, the SPD, had surrendered to the

neoliberal agenda under its former leader, Gerhard Schröder. While Schröder has left the German scene and moved on to a lucrative position with *Gazprom*, his former rival and counterpart Lafontaine proceeded to launch a new social democratic party. Whatever the conservative or liberal media may suggest, these organizations merging into one was meant to, once more, cure the worst excesses of radical market ideology. Not less, but for sure, not more.

One aspect of this process can not be underestimated: As the credibility of the Social Democratic Party eroded more and more, the Eastern German based PDS saw its chance to finally "arrive" in the West - and the result was The Left Party. None of the anti-capitalist and socialist tendencies of the German left spectrum have been integrated into this new party project, although some Trotskyist groups sedulously try to influence the party's direction.

The Left has already established a dubious practice. Although the party opposes the neoliberal agenda on the national scale (in the national parliament, the *Bundestag*), it compliantly executes the neoliberal agenda as part of the state (regional) government in Berlin. Generally opposing privatization and social cuts in the media, the party shows no restraint in privatizing and implementing cuts in social services once in power.

The third problem about The Left is also very telling. To win more support and votes in the Western federal states, the party here and there collaborated with the DKP, the German Communist Party. Some members of the DKP were elected under the label of The Left (on the federal and district levels). But then, after the elections in Niedersachsen, Hessen and Hamburg were over and won, The Left Party did not lose much time in joining the anticommunist rotten media campaign targeting every form of left or socialist approach. Rapidly, The Left Party's leadership produced statements of irreconcilability between The Left and the DKP, denying the basis for future relations. This left many of left-wing voters shaking their heads. At least, this episode will clear the air.

The best that can be said about The Left Party is that it is already been successful in throwing the SPD - still governing the country together with the Christian Democrats in trouble. The old social democrats hardly know how to deal with the new social democrats, especially in the state of Hesse right now, but also in general, in the near future. The Left definitely pressures the old SPD from a more progressive corner of the ring, thus making the SPD look helplessly opportunistic.

But this function also marks the red line that cannot be crossed. While it successfully channels dissatisfaction and protest against the system into reformist demands, The Left Party objectively thwarts the growing of anti-capitalist and socialist politics. This works in favour of all the party officials who wish to remain secure in their income and seats. Judging by its history, personnel and recent history, it would be naïve to expect more from The so called Left.

PS: Meanwhile, in contrast to this process, a number of various currents of the German anti-capitalist left came together in a loose association, and began to form a new platform called Socialist Cooperation. The project wants to bring together independent socialists with the DKP, Trotskyists and other organizations to build bridges and explore common ground. Of course, this is a work still in process. You can visit us at www.sozialistische-kooperation.de

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