

The New York Times and the specter of socialism

By Niles Niemuth
8 August 2018

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After decades of systematically ignoring any opposition to capitalism, the media has suddenly recognized the broad-based support for socialist ideas in the United States.

The *New York Times* published a comment by Democratic Party pundit Michael Tomasky this week offering “friendly advice” to the capitalist elite to address the problem.

Under the headline, “What are capitalists thinking?,” Tomasky writes: “I’ve been fretting lately about the state of mind of America’s capitalists. All these socialists coming out of the woodwork must have them in quite a lather. So I write today with some friendly advice for the capitalist class about said socialists. You want fewer socialists? Easy. Stop creating them.”

Tomasky cites the fact that young people today are burdened with student debt and will be the first modern generation that cannot expect better living standards than their parents; that the rich have only gotten richer, and the response of the government has been to slash their taxes; that while young people saw their parents lose their homes and jobs in the 2008 financial crisis, they saw the bankers who crashed the economy receiving golden parachutes worth tens of millions of dollars; and that since 2008, they have seen corporations pile up record profits and pump billions into stock buybacks instead of raising workers’ wages or guaranteeing decent health and retirement benefits.

The column acknowledges what it is increasingly impossible to ignore: while there is not yet a mass socialist political movement in the US, there is a broad-based and growing sense among workers and

youth that the capitalist system is inherently unjust, with polls showing widespread support for socialism. The ruling class is terrified of the consequences.

Tomasky’s proposal to save capitalism from the specter of socialism, however, is a political pipe dream. He urges capitalists to look to the “Trente Glorieuses” from 1945 to 1975 as an example when “everything largely worked in Western economies” and “socialism’s appeal in America waned.” This suggestion ignores certain basic historical and political facts.

First, every advance made by the working class in an earlier period came not from the benevolence of the ruling class based on the suggestions of the Tomaskys of the day, but rather the fierce and bloody struggles by workers in the US and internationally. There were massive social upheavals in the United States, including the great sit-down strikes in Michigan in the 1930s, which were led by socialist-minded workers. The class battles in the US and in other countries were inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Second, American capitalism has undergone immense transformations since the period of FDR’s “New Deal” and LBJ’s “War on Poverty.” As Trotsky, the co-leader of the Russian Revolution with Lenin, and the great opponent of Stalinism, put it in the 1930s: “America’s wealth permits Roosevelt his experiments.”

The situation today is vastly different. The last half century has seen a protracted decline in the global economic position of American capitalism. There is enormous wealth possessed by the capitalist oligarchy, but it is a wealth based on parasitism, speculation, fraud and, above all, the ruthless lowering of the living standards of the broad mass of the population.

The unimaginable sums of money accumulated by

the top .01 percent, and, more broadly, the affluence of the top 5 or 10 percent, are based on the inflation of share values on the stock markets. But these financial markets are a house of cards erected on the foundation of the forcible suppression and lowering of wages, the destruction of social programs, and the immiseration of the vast majority of the population.

Contrary to Tomasky's hopes, there is no reform faction of the ruling class. After all, Obama—the candidate of “hope” and “change,” who came to office promising a transformation of American politics—succeeded in engineering the greatest transfer of wealth from the working class to the rich in American history. The policies of his administration paved the way for the election of Trump, the naked personification of the corporate oligarchy.

The response of the ruling class to growing class struggle and social unrest is not reform, but repression. The Trump administration is erecting modern-day concentration camps to hold immigrants that will be used against all opposition. Meanwhile, the Democrats, speaking on behalf of the military-intelligence agencies, are demanding ever greater measures to censor the Internet, openly targeting left-wing views.

In noting the growth of socialism in the US, Tomasky cites the rise of figures like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Democratic Socialist of America (DSA) member who won a Democratic primary for Congress in New York City last month. However, the “socialism” of the DSA is a fraud. The DSA promotes the same fictions of Tomasky, that the interests of workers can be secured without a frontal attack on the domination and wealth of the corporate and financial elite. It advances the lie that workers can win their rights through the instrument of the Democratic Party—a right-wing, pro-capitalist party.

The disgust that millions of workers and young people are feeling will take new and much more radical forms.

Genuine socialism is revolutionary; the rights of the working class will be won not through an appeal to the morality of the modern-day robber barons, but through a direct assault on the very foundations of the capitalist system.

Socialism means a vast redistribution of wealth and the seizure of the trillions hoarded by the capitalist class to put an end to unemployment, social inequality,

poverty, hunger, homelessness, illiteracy and other social ills. It means the transformation of the giant banks and corporations into publicly-controlled utilities, run on the basis of social need, not private profit.

Socialism means an end to the assault on immigrants through the mobilization of workers of all nationalities, races and genders on the basis of their common class interests. And it means an end to war and the gargantuan sums expended by the capitalist ruling elites to subjugate and conquer the world.

I am running for Congress in Michigan's 12th district as a member of the Socialist Equality Party to help spearhead the fight for an independent movement of workers and young people that takes direct aim at the capitalist system. I urge you to join the Socialist Equality Party and join this fight.

To get involved in the campaign, visit niles2018.com.

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