

Happy 40th Anniversary!

by Taro O'Sullivan



When I agreed to write a piece for the SP USA's May Day/40th Anniversary issue, I really gave it some thought. I thought about the history of modern socialism, tracing it's beginning to 18th century France, but, no. That wouldn't do. How about the earliest examples of Socialism in ancient Egypt, Japan, China and in Europe? That won't do either. Besides, ordinary people could care less about dates, names or some insignificant moment in the history of socialism. It isn't about that. It isn't now and it never has been. So what then? Let me give it a try.

Socialism has always been a notion that someone moved forward when something was inherently unfair. Sure, some of these incidents were more about some "boojie" white male coming to the front of the line and finding no reward he so felt entitled to. But, at other times, it was because a group of people, often the majority, lived a life that was fundamentally unjust where her/his labor and other assets were exploited by the ruling or elite class.

As we celebrate (if you can call it that) our 40th Anniver-

sary, I am reminded that we really haven't accomplished enough as a movement. How can I say such a thing? Easy. Consider this: no matter how we cut it, we in the United States have never really suffered. Not really. Look around the world. We are 5 percent of the world, yet we consume more than 60 percent of the global output. We feed our capitalist engine with the fuel derived from global human suffering and exploitation. We, as a society, a nation and community help to create the economic conditions around the world. Not individually of course, but we are part of this machine. So no matter what, we can't claim any victories large or small. We're too satisfied, too fat and too happy to revolt. It is part of the grand design by the ruling capitalist regime to keep the masses just happy and fat enough to keep us from completely revolting.

As a society, we are at an interesting place in time. Every constituency group is unhappy. Things seem to be getting worse for everyone. The very reason that we haven't been able to mount any serious actions in the United States was because we were all too well off. But now, things are changing. We are at a place where people

are dissatisfied and often living in fear of or hopelessness about our future. This is an incredible opportunity to make change. So how do we do that?

One of the first steps we take must be to become inclusive. What do I mean? Bear with me, and please, don't take anything personally or become too sensitive. Inclusive means that we have to reflect the people we want to organize. We have to be the people who want a revolution. The most marginalized members of our society must join our cause and fight. We cannot come from our boogie life and expect people to join the cause just because we want them to. We can't pretend to know what it is like to be truly marginalized. Let me explain a little more on this point. I know people in this movement who are White, often male and have had some access to things that the marginalized population does not. They attend college and often have wonderful opportunities ahead of them. So many people I've met in this movement are, for whatever reason, not able to work or are low-wage earners. They are often primary consumers of what our less than ideal government has to offer.

At this point, what kind of credibility does this individual have in this fight? Very little. Why? Because the very system that they are criticizing and opposing is their means of support. But for the system, they would be homeless and even worse. It can't just be a movement for people who didn't get theirs. It has to include absolutely successful people who, in spite of their success, prefer a just and moral system of government. We need to include more people of color and other systemically marginalized people as leaders in this movement as well. I am not creating a hierarchy of members of society by some arbitrary and artificial standards here. I am merely saying that most white people have so much more opportunities than non-whites in the United States. That is an empirical fact. Men are far better off than women in this world. That too, is an empirical fact. People of color and women of color in particular, have very little access to equality, equity or power. If we are really interested in changing that, we have to include others that are missing from the table to join us.

It isn't that White people cannot be part of the marginalized class. Far from it. What I am saying is that we need to bring the real enemy into the picture. The real enemy is, of course, class. But, the ruling elites have made the class struggle synonymous with race and gender. We

have to change that so that the battle front is around class, not race or gender. In order to do this, we have to become inclusive and fight the battle on the race and gender front as well as the class front. We cannot take this fight to the next level as long as our meetings are white and male or white and female. We need to recruit the people who are truly marginalized. How do we do this? We listen. We observe. We become respectful.

Most of us in the movement cannot understand what it is really like to be truly marginalized. I've met so many people over the years that are members of this or that socialist or communist organizations, and in the end they were people who could have it all. All the things I could never have. Why are they in this struggle? It is difficult to understand why one would struggle when one doesn't have to. There is no point to struggle if one doesn't have to. That very notion is boogie.

I learned over the years that I needed White people more than anything else to join the struggle to end race based bias and discrimination. Why? In part because they are the ones in power at the moment and they are the ones who control how the game is played. Just like the Women's movement needs men to join it, we all need each other in order to bring about real change. We are all part of humanity. Equality must be for every human being or it has no value.

Socialism is one way to that goal. It is a viable and worthy mechanism. Yet, try to convince someone of that if they have always been stopped by police just because they look a particular way? We have to connect to the people who are not part of the movement at this time but are part of the war that is going on. That is where the battle will be fought and we can't fight it without inclusion. It isn't our fight otherwise. Look at where the battle is being fought and then find a way to bring those folks into the socialist struggle. Expand your own world and the world will expand before your own eyes.

There are no shortcuts and it is not going to be easy. But I, for one, don't want to see so little change in the next 40 years if I live to be that old. That is how we can celebrate our 40th anniversary.

TARO is a union organizer, writer and member of the Los Angeles Local.