

IN THESE TIMES

Editorial



Public workers: pride and prejudice

The Postal Service labor dispute will be settled by negotiation, with binding arbitration if necessary, thereby averting a general strike (though perhaps not wildcats). The specific issues in the conflict—wages chasing after inflation, speed-up, layoffs, safety, benefits (see David Moberg's story, p. 3)—are common to most labor disputes.

But behind the specific grievances lie two broader issues, the neglect of which tightens the vicious circle of unjust treatment of public workers and the deterioration of public services it provokes.

The two issues are whether public employment is less important or less worthy than private employment, and whether public workers are second class citizens.

The tendency in a capitalist society like ours is to glorify private and demean public employment. The invidious distinction has nothing to do with the facts of modern life, but is a matter of social prejudice tending to sustain the supremacy of business over the society as a whole. But in modern industrialized society, where labor has shifted massively from goods production to services, and where public services are increasingly essential to social well-being, such a prejudice is irrational.

About 80 percent of the American labor force is currently employed in services. One out of five service workers are publicly employed (80 percent of these by state and local government). Public services—from delivering the mail to education, health care, sanitation, mass transit, recreation, and physical protection—are as essential to modern society as any in the private sector, and more so than many private sector pursuits. Is education less noble than advertising? Is delivering the mail—and facilitating an informed citi-

zenry—less essential than delivering a Big Mac?

Public workers' inefficiency, apathy, and antipathy to the people they serve are a big factor in the deterioration of public services. But they go hand in hand with the demoralization that comes from the incessant demeaning of public employment by business propaganda and pro-capitalist politicians.

Pride in their work by public employees, and public respect for it, are the condition for better performance of that work. But that is impossible without public recognition of the essential role of public services in modern society and of the inherently greater dignity of serving

people without pursuing private profit.

A view of public employment free of capitalist prejudice would also accentuate the obvious: Close to 20 percent of a nation's workers cannot be consigned to second class status without resorting to a new version of involuntary servitude and undermining democratic citizenship.

Denying public employees the right to genuine unions and collective bargaining, including the right to strike, only insures their subjection to irresponsible treatment by "management," i.e., government officials. It all but guarantees worker demoralization, protracted labor disputes and frequent disruptions of public services.

Good wages and working conditions

are no less the right of public than of private employees. Neither are attainable without the strike weapon to keep management honest—and without the public commitment to make the social investment that the essential role of public services warrants.

The right of public workers to strike is as valid for a socialist as for a capitalist society: Under socialism, after all, most workers will be in the public sector.

The rights of public employees, and the importance and dignity of public services, are central issues in countering corporate power and in forging principles suited to a socialist democracy. ■

D.C. voting rights long overdue

The House of Representatives (last March) and the Senate (Aug. 22) passed and sent to the states for ratification a constitutional amendment to give the people of the District of Columbia voting rights they are now denied.

In 1970, Congress gave the district a non-voting delegate to the House, but left it subject to taxation without representation. (District residents paid \$1.4 billion in federal taxes in fiscal 1977, more than paid by residents of 11 states.)

The 23rd Amendment allowed district residents to vote for president, but limited their representation in the electoral college to that of the least populous state—though the district's population of 700,000 exceeds that of seven other states—South Dakota, North Dakota, Nevada, Delaware, Vermont, Alaska and Wyoming.

In 1973, Congress granted the district home rule, the right to elect its own city council and mayor and increased powers

of self-governance.

The proposed constitutional amendment would repeal the 23rd Amendment and treat the district as a state for purposes of representation in the House, Senate and electoral college, and for participation in presidential elections and ratification of constitutional amendments.

The Constitution originally provided for representation in Congress and the electoral college exclusively by states. The district is not a state; hence the necessity for the amendment. It is a good solution, long overdue.

As about 75 percent of the district's population is black, it is expected that its two Senators and its representation in the House will be black. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA), the amendment's main sponsor in the Senate, warned against opponents' exploitation of the "four toos"—"fear that senators from the District... may be too liberal, too urban, too black

or too Democratic." But conservative Republicans, including Howard Baker (Tenn.), Barry Goldwater (Ariz.), Robert Dole (Kan.) and Strom Thurmond (S.C.), joined in voting for the amendment, aware as they were of the importance of the black vote nationally and within the states. The racist palaver directed against home rule by such politicians as these but five years ago was left to denizens of the far right and constitutional literalism.

Now every effort should be made to achieve ratification by the required 38 states—in far less than the seven years allowed. Justice to the people of the district demands quick ratification. Beyond that, the minuscule presence of blacks, women, and working people in Congress has made it far from the true representative of the people that it ought to be in a democracy. The proposed amendment is a small—though important—step in the right direction. ■

Letters

A beginning?

I APPLAUD THE GROWING EVIDENCE of intelligence in the editorial policy of *IN THESE TIMES*.

Ignoring the predictable howls of our atheist comrades, you have broken out of your long silence on the subject with an excellent set of articles on "The Left Hand of God."

I assume this follows from your recognition that any poll we take will show that the great majority of Americans are "religious" people, however we may define that term, and that any suspicion that socialism retains the aggressive atheism of the Marxist tradition will doom us to a depressing series of continuing defeats.

I assume it also follows from your recognition that there is a reservoir of revolutionary power within the Judeo-Christian tradition, starting with the Hebrew prophets, continuing with Jesus' warning that those who refuse to feed the hungry and clothe the naked will go straight to hell, and right on up to the present and the rapid growth of socialist sympathies among religious Americans.

The second indication of your intelligence is your editorial, backed up by Jack Clark's column, highlighting that we cannot permit socialism to be confused with dictatorship or anything else at all except a decent regard for democratic process and human rights.

Who knows, at this rate you may begin to show us how to build a political base among American workers that will actually win elections.

—John Cort
Editor, *Religious Socialism*
Nehant, Mass.

Christian witness

THANK YOU FOR THE SPECIAL feature on Christian witness (*ITT*, Aug. 2). As a Christian for over 20 years I have been concerned with the false dichotomy between spiritual and social liberation—a view promoted as much by the left as by the right-wing influences in the church. While I was familiar with most of the issues and individuals covered in your feature from articles in *Sojourners* and *Radix*, I was pleased to see a recognition of the radical and subversive nature of the gospel presented in *IN THESE TIMES*.

—Jay Baggett
Goleta, Calif.

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Money!

IN ROHNERT PARK, WHERE I live, busing school children has been discontinued as a result of Proposition 13. Among the many other hazards, children, many of them tiny tots, must cross Highway 101, and shortly it will be dark or semi-dark when children go to school. Parents are up in arms! Two hundred of them have already signed a petition stating, "No buses, No children!"

Think of it, here we are, the most developed land in the entire world, faced with this symptomatic problem and no answer in sight. Is this symptomatic problem necessary? We would all, I feel sure, like to see this problem resolved without the sacrifices that are currently looming. So what is lacking for a solution? The buses are available and the people to operate them are available. Only money is lacking.

What about a design of social operation in which there is no money? "Technocracy" with its Technological Social Design is such an operation. The design blueprints a social operation without any type of money; also without businessmen, merchants, industrialists, bankers, lawyers, politicians, etc. In this "Technocracy's" design, production and distribution are based on an "energy-cost-account-system," not on money!

To understand a viable solution to this and all of our problems at large, citizens should take it upon themselves to check out the concepts of "Technocracy" and determine their validity.

—John Taube
Rohnert Park, Calif.

Detroit socialists

THANKS FOR JOHN JUDIS' coverage of socialist politics in Michigan (*ITT*, Aug. 16). Many socialists in Detroit felt that the Ferency and Baker campaigns were important steps forward.

Since I live in the district where Baker ran, I want to comment on that campaign. The election showed:

- that an attractive and committed socialist or communist can be elected without hiding his or her politics;
- that the UAW, Democratic Party, and Mayor Young cannot guarantee victory over a well-managed campaign; Baker beat their candidates after seeking their endorsements;
- that the Black Slate is not very powerful after all. I shared Judis' impression that it was, during the campaign and on election day. They had lots of money and people. But they did not deliver votes. They endorsed at least six favorites; only one won. And they badly compromised themselves by selling their U.S. Senate endorsement to newspaper heir/millionaire Phil Power over liberals like Carl Levin.

Regarding accountability. No one will be more accountable than an overt socialist. Everyone will be gunning for him or her. Moreover, the strong coalition Baker's campaign developed requires performance for continued support. Black Slate's Barbara Martin, of all people, should not raise this issue: two years ago she endorsed an incumbent who for years had been accountable to no one except banking interests and the old Democratic Party power structure.

Participating in the election process has helped to move Baker and CLP to a more down-to-earth socialist politics. I'm not alone in hoping that serious commitment to the electoral arena will help to overcome the bitter split in the Detroit left of the early '70s.

—Charles Rooney
Detroit, Mich.

In spite of or because?

KAREN MOSHEWITZ (*ITT*, AUG. 23) describes herself as a "socialist atheist feminist." She then proceeds to demonstrate her right to such a description by launching a series of extreme

charges against Christians, particularly Catholic Christians, and against religious people in general. The charges are made with vehemence. Doubtless she feels deeply about them. However, Moshewitz fails to substantiate her charges. Either she is ignorant of the facts or fails to interpret them correctly.

Take her charge that "Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez were leaders and in the forefront of progressive movements not because of their religion but in spite of it." The facts are:

Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez based their lives and their work on the command of Christ, "Love one another as I have loved you," and "This is the second commandment, that you love your neighbor as yourself."

Both men were supported in their efforts by thousands of co-religionists and church officials, many of whom, including priests and nuns, were jailed because of this support. Religion is totalitarian only in the sense that it continues to repeat the words of Christ, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength."

Opinions differ, as they must always differ, regarding ways in which one can best manifest this love of God and of neighbor, but surely even an atheist must acknowledge that unless we all strive to keep these two commandments nothing else we strive to achieve in life will be of any avail for the welfare of the human race. My best wishes to Moshewitz in her efforts to "love her neighbor as herself."

—Agnes Ducey
Chicago

Great idea, but...

THE LETTERS COLUMN RECENTLY makes it plain that your recent special section on religion (*ITT*, Aug. 2) touches a sore spot with many left readers.

In my own view, the idea of such a section was extremely valuable, although in execution it suffered from too much preaching and not enough journalism. My own experience working politically in the South over the last dozen years has driven in repeatedly how much religious institutions pervade the community life of working people down here.

Whether for progressive or reactionary ends—Martin Luther King or Anita Bryant—one cannot escape the church, which is one of the first institutions to which people look for space to deal with the problems affecting them. It would have been impossible to imagine the civil rights movement of the '60s without the free space and moral fervor associated with the black church.

Like many on the left, I myself became a radical out of Christian—in my case Catholic—social activism, shedding my religion somewhere along the way. I would not want to try to go back to the church. But one of the problems we have created has been to cut ourselves off from progressives working within the church.

I hope you will have regular coverage within *ITT* of progressive movements in the religious community. It would be another step to making *ITT* a newspaper that is valuable to more than the already-convinced socialists.

—Bob McMahon
Chapel Hill, N.C.

Kucinich and racism

ITT GENERALLY PROVIDES THE analysis and ideological depth lacking in the daily press and weekly magazine reportage of events. The story on the Kucinich recall election (Aug. 23), however, failed in the one area a critical socialist journal must be strongest. While Dan Marshall noted Kucinich's problems with Cleveland's black constituency, he did not discuss reports carried in the national press (e.g., *Los Angeles Times* and *Time* magazine) that Kucinich's supporters had distributed pictures of black city council president George Forbes in white neighborhoods, saying that he would be the next mayor if Kucinich was recalled.

Before awarding the mantle of "Unique progressive politician" to Kucinich, Marshall should have investigated this aspect of the campaign and reported Kucinich's response to this racist appeal by some of his supporters. *ITT* owes its readers full reportage of candidates and politicians' strengths and shortcomings and a thorough scrutiny of their electoral organizations and campaign tactics.

—Larry S. Cepclair
Los Angeles

When does history begin, II?

IN MY LETTER TO *ITT* (JULY 12) I stated, "How far back can one go to correct the mistakes of history without creating new injustices that are more monstrous than those we have inherited?"

Now Samuel Michelson (*ITT*, Aug. 9) argues that the Romans dispersed the Jews from the ancient state of Israel in 70 A.D., but this did not extinguish the claim of the Jews to their ancient homeland. I presume that Michelson feels that the 60 years of turmoil in the Middle East and the modern diaspora of the Palestinians is justified to correct a mistake of history some 1900 years ago.

But why stop at 70 A.D.? A mistake of history occurred some 1400 to 1200 years B.C. (3400 years ago). According to the Book of Joshua, the Jews annihilated the Canaanites and the Hittites and the other peoples of Palestine in order to establish ancient Israel. "They utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, sheep and oxen, and asses, with the edge of the sword." Is it possible that the Canaanites were the progenitors of the modern Palestinian and that this mistake of history must be corrected?

One should seek justice, but an obstinate demand that all of the mistakes of history be corrected serves neither the cause of justice nor the interests of the U.S. And it does not promote world peace.

—D.B. Lawrence
Weaverville N.C.

Traven's "Rosa Blanca"

THE RECENT REVIEWS OF BOOKS about—however tangentially—B. Traven struck me as less critical than they should have been. In this reader's opinion, Judy Stone's book is more of a "treatment" of a book than a book itself; it's a hodge-podge of material she gathered in interviews and research, with some (pirated?) excerpts from Traven's own work at the end.

Raskin's novel, while playing off "Kenny Love" and his friends against the Traven myth, never proved that Love was anything more than a fugitive—or are all fugitives revolutionaries? In this respect, for all of its tough-guy posturing, it is a sentimental rendering of "underground" life today.

But the reference to Gabriel Figueroa's relatively unknown feature-length film based on Traven's *Rosa Blanca*, rather than quibbles with the reviewers, prompts me to write. The Mexican government did suppress the film when it was completed. But pressure from Traven's widow on the office of the President (then Echeverria) got the picture released in Mexico. It is now available for distribution in this country. Figueroa is, in fact, extremely interested in having a North American premiere, and has authorized me to put in contact with him any distributors who care to explore the matter further. (Write to me c/o *ITT*.)

—Alan Chouse
Knoxville, Tenn.

Editor's note: Please keep letters under 250 words. Otherwise we must make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, please type and double-space letter, or at least write clearly and with wide margins. Letters must be signed, with a return address. We will withhold your name or use a pseudonym if you wish, but we will not print unsigned letters or those without addresses.