

Capitalist elections and socialist revolution

written by Sam Marcy

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SLL photo: Andre Powell

On Oct. 28, 1980, Marxist thinker and fighter Sam Marcy wrote about a presidential debate between incumbent Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican Ronald Reagan.

An excerpt appears below.

This was at the beginning of what Marcy called “the historic reversal which the ruling class is trying to impose upon the working class by embarking on the road to reversing basic and fundamental concessions which the working class and oppressed have won in decades of struggle.” The war of the rich against the rights of the workers and oppressed has continued unabated for 40 years, with the presidency of Donald Trump marking its all-time low (so far).

On this [the “historic reversal”], both candidates are in full agreement. Their method differs slightly, but their objective is the same. Individual elements in the ruling class may have their preferences for either Reagan’s or Carter’s method. But what binds the ruling class together in approving both candidates is that Carter and Reagan share a common objective — reversing the previous era of rising expectations among the masses — and are both bent on solving the incurable economic crisis of the ruling class at home by expanding its adventurous role abroad.

A hundred years ago, Frederick Engels, the co-worker of Marx, writing in the still relatively progressive stage of capitalism, wrote that participation of the workers in bourgeois elections is an “index of the maturity of the working class” and of the progress it is making in educating itself for the day when it seizes power. Engels’ impeccably correct statement of his time cannot be wholly regarded as applicable in the circumstances of the imperialist epoch as it has evolved in the U.S. today.

The working class, as an independent class, which was what Engels was writing about, is totally excluded from the bourgeois political process. No avenue whatsoever has been left open for truly independent working-class participation in the U.S. as it has in the European arena and in Engels’ time. On the contrary, the manipulation of the electoral process by the bourgeoisie and the strangulation of virtually all independent forms of initiative and political participation is an index of

the deterioration of the ruling-class political system.

Engels' analysis is, of course, applicable as it concerns the importance of the effort to break through the bourgeois political process by every conceivable method and utilize the bourgeois election, no matter how restrictive or narrow the opportunity may be, so long as it is not an effort to legitimize bourgeois, imperialist parliamentarism, but to undermine its political system in a revolutionary way by exposing it to the masses and educating them in the process.

Because so many working-class organizations in the post-Lenin era have once again fallen prey to the illusion that they can change the system by parliamentary means, as in Europe as well as here, it is all the more necessary not to abandon the political arena to bourgeois parties or their lackeys.

On the contrary, it is imperative for the working-class vanguard party to unceasingly and energetically pursue the electoral arena as part and parcel of its overall activities in the class struggle, to promote class consciousness among the working class and the oppressed masses, and to prepare for the task of the revolutionary abolition of the rotting system of monopoly capitalism.

