

# Socialists Need to Be Where the Struggle Is

Sunday 19 July 2009, by [MOODY Kim](#) (Date first published: 23 March 2009).

**Socialism's all the rage. "We Are All Socialists Now," *Newsweek* declares. As the right wing tells it, we're already living in the USSA. But what do self-identified socialists (and their progressive friends) have to say about the global economic crisis? In the March 23 issue, we published Barbara Ehrenreich and Bill Fletcher Jr.'s "Rising to the Occasion" [1] as the opening essay in a forum on "Reimagining Socialism." TheNation.com will feature new replies to their essay over the coming weeks, fostering what we hope will be a spirited dialogue.**

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There is little doubt that the deepening crisis of global capitalism is the real thing—the perfect storm of a crisis of accumulation, the collapse of finance and the contraction of world trade. It seems unlikely that all the "stimulus" and "bailout" packages currently on offer can pull things back from the edge. As a global system, however, capitalism will only end when the world's working class puts it to sleep, and that—the revolution—is not around the corner.

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So how do we, the socialists, get to the point where the revolution seems more than a distant dream?

Barbara Ehrenreich and Bill Fletcher Jr. are right that we have no plan. We have some ideas but not much of a plan of how to run a post-capitalist society democratically. But the real failure is that we don't even have a plan about how to get that idea back into circulation. We do have some things going for us. First is a shift in public opinion about things like unions and big business. Polls show that unions are more popular than they were a decade ago, and that since about 2005 the distrust of big business and finance has risen significantly. This shift began before the financial crisis and helped lay the basis for the election of Barack Obama. It is an opening for more gains.

Solidarity, a basic premise of socialism, as Ehrenreich and Fletcher argue, is likely to appeal in crisis conditions. But solidarity is something that must be experienced in collective struggle. Socialism will gain credibility to the extent that socialists are directly involved, as leaders and learners, in the actual existing struggles of the day. Our history tells us that when socialists have been among the leaders and organizers of class and social struggle, their numbers have grown and their ideas have gained support.

The two periods of mass socialist advance in the United States were the years leading up to World War I and the 1930s, periods of intense class struggle. The failures of those socialist movements are well known, but the spread of socialist ideas on the crest of mass class conflict provides some important lessons. The 1960s also saw a rise of socialist ideas, some worse than others, as socialists led a broad range of struggles. Remember, by 1967 Martin Luther King Jr. had come to regard

himself as a socialist.

Socialism, in the Marxist view, is the rule of the working class, whether its members work along an assembly line or in front of a computer screen, and not the rule of the party or state. As Marx argued, this class makes itself “fit to rule” through its struggles and organizations.

There is, of course, no shortage of socialist organizations, only a shortage of socialist organization. The task for the moment is to deprioritize the individual organizations in favor of deeper cooperative involvement in the struggles of working and unemployed people as they become “fit” for power. While the fight for real issues such as universal free healthcare or the EFCA is important, hot-housing “campaigns” in an effort at “party building” is the wrong road to take. There will be enough motion based on the pressures and misery produced by the crisis to provide the opportunity to listen, learn and even lead. From this motion, solidarity can emerge and socialism can have a basis in experience that will allow us, as the socialists of old put it, to educate, agitate, organize.

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## **P.S.**

\* From The Nation:

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090406/moody>

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## **Footnotes**

[1] <http://www.thenation.com/doc/200903...>