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USA

Two Victories: One for Women, One for Workers

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The last week has seen two victories for America's underdogs. In the national elections on November 7, Ohio voters, led by a resurgent women's movement, voted to enshrine the right to abortion in the state constitution. And in Virginia, where Republicans were advocating new restrictions on abortion, the Democrats won control of both houses of the state legislature. Finally in Kentucky, Democratic governor Andy Beshear was reelected governor running against a Republican advocate of the state's virtually complete ban on abortions. These victories for women's right to control their own bodies in these swing states, also suggest that even though many voters have little enthusiasm for President Joe Biden, the abortion issue might help him to defeat Trump in next year's presidential election.

In other November elections at the local level, in non-partisan school board elections, liberal or moderate candidates defeated the rightwing Moms for Liberty and the 1776 Project. Those far-right groups have spent the last couple of years in sometimes violent disruptions of school board meetings to demand an end to teaching or textbooks dealing with race and gender issues. The results suggest that the right-wingers only succeeded in mobilizing voters who are tired of the right's culture wars, conservative politics and strategy of creating chaos in community institutions.

The Actors Union Wins

The actors' union, SAG-AFTRA, ended its 148-day strike, the longest in the union's history, on November 9. Union president Fran Drescher, former star of "The Nanny," 160,000 actors struck against both the historic Hollywood Corporations, such as Warner Brothers and Paramount, and the new online streaming companies, such as Amazon, Apple, and Netflix, paralyzed the industry also idling as many as two million other workers, from make-up artists to set builders.

In her angry speech that launched the strike, Drescher said, "they plead poverty, that they're losing money left and right while giving hundreds of millions of dollars to their CEOs." While Drescher's career made her very wealthy, many actors live hand-to-mouth as they move from one production to another.

In the end, the actors won a three-year contract that improves wages and conditions as well as protecting members from threats from new streaming services and artificial intelligence technology.

Regarding AI, the corporations must now have an actors' signed consent to use their digital replica for specific purposes. Workers will be compensated not only with residuals but also for future viewing of streaming shows. Actors won a 7% general wage increase in the first year, 4% in the second, and 3.5% after that. Background actors won 11% for the first year and the same increase as others in the next two. Actors who dance or sing will receive additional pay. Intimacy coordinators for scenes involving nudity or simulate sex will be mandated, and hair and make-up artists must properly serve the ethnicity of the actors.

The victory of the actors' contract and women's triumph over abortion access demonstrate a revival of both the labor and social movements. These victories together with the recent United Auto Workers strike and their new contract, the strikes of nurses and teachers, and new life in the Amazon organizing campaign represent a resurgence of social struggle and move the politics to the left a little. And over the last month we have a new movement in solidarity with Palestine that has mobilized tens of thousands in cities across the country.

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And, at the same time, we seem to be headed to a rematch between former president Donald Trump, facing several criminal indictments, and president Biden, who has alienated some young progressive voters. We also have the screwball wildcard candidates like crystal-age Marianne Williamson and conspiracy monger Robert F. Kennedy Jr. And now Joe Manchin, an extremely conservative Democrat from West Virginia, is toying with the idea of running for president as the candidate of the No Labels movement. Left-of-center candidates like Jill Stein in the Green Party and the independent Cornel West remain marginal. We on the left don't seem to be able to create the political alternative that we need and desire. So, we have, as usual, this troubling disjunction between the movement and electoral politics to overcome.

12 November 2023

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