

Patriotism and the Stockholm Syndrome

by John Reimann



In the world of human psychology, sometimes a victim bonds with his or her abuser. It's called the Stockholm syndrome, and Wikipedia describes it as '*a form of **traumatic bonding**, which does not necessarily require a hostage scenario, but which describes "strong emotional ties that develop between two persons where one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other."*' Once the victim is released from the clutches of the abuser, the psychological bonds are usually broken.



This author has seen something similar in workers in relation to their boss. A group of us union carpenters were picketing a non-union job. We could see how poorly the carpenters were paid by the run-down condition of their cars. One carpenter was sent out to watch us. We got to talking and he started bragging about the new Lear Jet the owner of his company had. He, the carpenter, could barely afford an old junker, but he associated with his boss who was getting rich off of him. The Stockholm syndrome in class relations.

Patriotism

In the world of mass psychology - which is politics - there is a similar phenomenon. In a country whose capitalist class dominates the world scene, millions of workers will tend to see that domination as a sign of their own power. That is what lies behind the historic patriotism that has been so prevalent in the United States.

And that is exactly what is starting to break down for a simple reason: US capitalism is fast losing its world dominance. The US invasions of Afghanistan and then of Iraq were widely supported by Americans. They thought that "we will get in there, kick some ass, and then come home the champions." As those wars ground on, that confidence started to collapse and with it the association with the abusers - the US capitalist class - weakened.

Obama Forced to Retreat

Yesterday, September 10, President Obama gave a speech in which he justified his proposal to bomb Syria. It was a well put together speech -- logical and reasonable-sounding. He made a convincing case, if one believes what he claims and trusts his intentions. He concluded by playing on the mass version of the Stockholm syndrome. He said:

"My fellow Americans, of nearly seven decades, the United States has been the anchor of global security. This has meant doing more than forging international agreements -- it has meant enforcing them. The burdens of leadership are often heavy, but the world is a better place because we have borne them.... That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional. With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth."



The president is entrusted with the job of balancing between the demands of the different layers of the capitalist class and then communicating their strategy and goals to the public in order to establish a popular base. This ability is eroding.

But that is exactly his problem and the problem of US capitalism. That belief is rapidly waning. Millions don't believe in the power of US capitalism anymore for a simple reason: Its power to control events is waning. Obama's inability to convince people of the wisdom of bombing Syria is not only a symptom of this; his inability to do so represents the weakness of US capitalism. He and the capitalist class he represents stand further exposed. This will accelerate the collapse of the mass Stockholm syndrome that has held the great majority of the US population in thrall for so many

generations.

Exactly what will result is impossible to predict. But this may be a signal moment in US politics, one which will significantly weaken the power of Corporate America to control the consciousness of millions of Americans.