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**We Can't Say We Weren't Warned About the Global Economic Meltdown  
Solidarity America  
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The warnings started to become more specific and in some detail decades ago: If we continued on the same course and used the same economic model, we were going to face certain economic disaster.

You didn't have to be a rocket scientist or even an economist to see that disaster was on the horizon.

Rank-and-file workers were watching the demise of American industry for many years. They could read the labels on packages coming from around the world and those packages and crates contained parts and whole assembled units that were made by American companies in other countries where the workers were paid a small fraction of a U.S. worker's wages - never mind the benefits or pensions, since there would be none.

As far back as 1980, when Ronald Reagan outlined his programs as part of his preparation for his run for the presidency, groups of workers - most of them union members and activists - met to discuss the effects of a Reagan presidency on America and its workers.

Reagan laid it out for them in detail and they discussed it in detail. Where will we be ten years from now? Twenty years from now? What they discussed at the time has come to pass. All of the things they predicted would happen - having almost become cliché - have come to pass by 2009.

We would have the disappearance of well-paying jobs, wages would fall, jobs that were

left would be less safe and healthy, communities would become poorer, free universal public education would be threatened, there would be a health care crisis, the environment would continue to be degraded, and there would be political turmoil, at home and around the world. These were just a few of the predictions.

Unfortunately, when America's union officialdom warned about what would happen if a right-wing agenda were pursued by Reagan and whatever administrations came after him, the warnings were not heeded, not even by their own members.

Virtually every union in America - with the exceptions of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization and the Teamsters, the only unions that endorsed Reagan - used their internal publications and budding video capabilities to warn, chapter and verse, about the disaster to come if Reagan's program were to become American policy, domestic and foreign.

The result? Forty-six percent of union members voted for Reagan and they repeated that same enthusiasm when he ran for reelection.

Why workers would vote for a man who embodied policies that would effect the demise of their way of life is curious, but not a mystery. They, like Americans in general, believed the propaganda of the preceding generations put out by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable, the National Association of Manufacturers and similar instruments of Corporate America: unions are bad, corporations are good. Leave the decision-making to the latter.

The response of the unions was the usual. They accepted the world that was delivered to them by the elections and did their best to address the bread-and-butter issues that mattered to their members more than the wider context of their lives. It was back to wages, hours, and working conditions and whatever could be achieved at the bargaining table, which was less and less, as years went by.

The exhaustion of America's working class - and here we refer to anyone who works for wages and is only a half-dozen paychecks away from financial difficulty - was accompanied by the continued draining of the American economy of all functions that made America the economic and innovation powerhouse that it once was.

This impulse of those who are in control of the U.S. economy continues to this day and, in fact, it appears that what is happening to "rescue" the economy in 2009 is to ensure the continuation of the system - and, often, the very people - who have been in charge of the economy for the past several decades. What different outcome should we expect from the same personnel within the same economic structure and philosophies?

We as a nation have had plenty of warning about the results of our wild foray into the world to seek and maximize profits for the few, who existed among the relatively small number of corporations that grew in size, power, and wealth over the past 30 years.

Certainly, no one was going to listen to rank-and-file union members and they weren't going to listen to other groups of progressive thinkers - including students - and people willing to do the hard work. They didn't listen then and they don't now. The people should have been able to expect that some leadership would come from their elected representatives in both the state legislatures and the Congress. Little has come from

either place.

Both political parties seemed to have adopted the philosophies of the most narrow-visioned segments of society. The mantra became "maximum profits at any cost," with just a few bones thrown to the upholding of human rights and the restoration of environmental quality.

If this is a government of the people, by the people and for the people, what has happened to the people? Simply, they have been cut out of the process and, in the scheme of things, if the people are not the center of the process, the genius of the political system that the founders created can not possibly come to fruition.

There doesn't seem to be any institution in America in which the wisdom that is inherent in the body politic - the people - is welcome in their forums.

We have a lot of talk about the "grass roots" and we encourage a lot of activity at the "grass roots," but little of that activity rises to the level of decision-making in our institutions - government, corporations, the military, academia, our "free press," the unions. As long as all of that ferment stays at the "grass roots," we can welcome it, we can celebrate it, and we can encourage more of it. Just leave the decision-making to the elites, whoever they are at a given moment.

The point is that we were warned 30 years ago about what is happening today to America's and the world's economy and we didn't act to change things. There are those who are accurately predicting what today's decisions will bring us in 10 or 20 years. Do we know who they are? Do we know what they're saying?


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**The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog**

**BlackCommentator.com** Columnist, John Funciello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and land developers. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Funciello.

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