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USA

Where Are We on Thanksgiving Day in America?

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Thanksgiving Day in America is a moment for national reflection since it raises the question: What do we have to be thankful for? The question is more poignant after the COVID pandemic that has taken more than 780,000 lives and an economic crisis that saw a 32.4% decline in the GDP and unemployment officially at almost 15 percent (though probably higher). While some were thankful others found that inflation had reached a 31-year high, with consumer prices up by 6% in October. Food prices had risen by 14% by Thanksgiving, and food pantries saw a 30% increase in need, while millions of homeowners and renters face the possibility of eviction.

Just as we were about to sit down to Thanksgiving dinner, a jury in Georgia found guilty of murder the three white men who had chased down and killed the black jogger Ahmaud Arbury, and most Americans breathed a sigh of relief and gave thanks that for once justice had been done in a case of the murder of a black man.

Then too, after nearly two years of failed policies, resistance from conspiracy theorists and from rightwing organizations, almost 75 percent of Americans who are eligible have been vaccinated. In part, because of that, the economy has picked up. The GDP grew at over 2% and unemployment fell to its lowest level since 1968, though three million have still not returned to work. The improvement in the economy led to the Great Resignation as workers by the million quit their old jobs in search of better ones and we have seen an uptick in strikes and more efforts at unionization. We have for the first time in decades a socialist organization of 90,000 members—the Democratic Socialists of America—and we have a few people in Congress who call themselves socialists. So there's something to be thankful for.

After the turkey, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie, however, we also begin to reflect on the larger context and national politics.

The Republican Party over the last year continued to move to the right, becoming in effect a far-right party that includes violent extremists. Many Republicans believe the last election was stolen and a third believe that violence will be necessary to change the direction of the country. Republicans, among them Q-Anon supporters, Christian Evangelicals, and armed militias, are going to school board meetings to protest vaccination, masks, and the teaching of black history.

The Democrats meanwhile are frustrated. The U.S. Congress passed President Joseph Biden's infrastructure bill with a budget of \$1.2 trillion, but the Democrats have so far been unable to pass the Build Back Better Bill that would deal with climate issues and help working families. Two conservative Democrats, Senators Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema, have forced the Democrats to throw out proposals, cut the bill's budget, and to drop the idea of taxing the rich to pay for it. Democratic Progressives and the few socialists have been largely dragged along by the moderate party majority. Meanwhile, Biden's approval ratings have fallen to 44%, while 45 percent disapprove, and 11% remain undecided, suggesting the party could lose the mid-terms and end any chance for more progressive legislation in the last two years of Biden's term.

Ironically, in a country known for its historic anti-Communist crusades and staunch opposition to even social democracy, to overcome the COVID pandemic and the economic crisis, the U.S. government has for the last year and a half provided vast amounts of money to businesses, states, and individuals. Today some 41% of all Americans now have a positive attitude toward socialism, while 68% approve of labor unions, the highest approval rating since 1965.

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So as friends and family got their coats and went out into the cold and blustery November evening, I give thanks that there's a chance that in the coming year we can begin to build a mass working class movement and an independent working-class political party.

PS:

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