

A reader requests articles on science and the struggle against mysticism

The WSWs Editorial Board
30 April 1998

Dear Friends,

Let me compliment you on the magnificent work you are doing in providing a worldwide forum for the Marxist alternative. I think you are doing such a fine job that I am loathe to criticize, but what the hell, here goes anyway.

I do enjoy the many fine contributions you post on the question of culture. Please keep it up. I do however think you have a responsibility to keep your readers up to date on important developments in somewhat less “fuzzy” subjects, such as math and science. Enough of the God-damned *Titanic*. Well, perhaps not enough, but a bit more rounded idea of what is also important.

A few years ago one of the greatest intellectual contributions of the current century was achieved with the publication of the solution to Fermat’s Last Theorem. The final proof was an effort that can only be comprehended as the culmination of centuries of international development of thought in a wide variety of fields. I am afraid I am very far removed from such things these days, but perhaps I can find time to try to do a bit on this of a very rudimentary and popular nature.

Meanwhile, if memory serves, when the fledgling Bolshevik revolution was surrounded by enemies intent on strangling it to death, Lenin and Trotsky discussed the necessity of starting a movement for the defense and popularization of atheism. This of course had nothing to do with the crude church-burning and eventual church-embracing methods later developed by Stalin and his epigones [what a wonderful word, which I learned from reading Trotsky.]

Rather they wished to combat superstition, ignorance and backwardness with the highest conquests of scientific knowledge. Can one even imagine a single world leader today who could even comprehend such

an idea? Yet here were leaders beset on every side, discussing their responsibility to enlighten. How grand!

What got me on this hobby horse? The shroud of Turin, that’s what. Turn on your TV, X Files, one show after another expounding superstition, anti-science and mysticism. Psychic Hotlines, would you believe?

Now the shroud is back and the world’s longest lived institution devoted to shrouding everything in obscurantism is certainly not averse to making a buck on the hopeless backwardness of its many believers. Who needs science? Thousands know that this is the shroud of Jesus. Who are we to say no? Soon the good folks who developed the art of putting people on trial for their ideas, who convicted Galileo and have always defended everything backward in the world, will be back in the business of selling relics and indulgences.

I do think the Marxists have the responsibility to combat these pernicious ideas with the ideas of science. These are not things to be ignored because there appear to be other more pressing matters.

By the way I would heartily recommend the late Carl Sagan’s last book [the title escapes me], which was devoted entirely to debunking and combating the illusions and ignorance spread everywhere by the anti-science forces. It may interest you to know that Sagan, whenever he visited the Soviet Union, used to bring along copies of Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* to help arm his Soviet colleagues with their own history. Kind of puts the man in a new light doesn’t it?

At any rate he spent his last years, ill and fighting against the ideas of alien abduction, pseudo-science, untested cures, etc. I am sure the new shroud gobbledygook would have sent him through the roof.

Please understand. I am not a person with a big science background. Many years ago I studied

mathematics, hence my great enthusiasm for the Fermat proof. I find myself gritting my poor teeth and cursing when I see all this shroud crap. Even the so-called radio stations for the intelligentsia, i.e., the ones you pay for, present all this as though there are honest people on both sides of the question.

Enough! I know your resources are limited, but I think you have a big responsibility to arm people on questions such as this. I would certainly appreciate it.

JG

23 April 1998

Dear JG,

We appreciate your letter and share your concerns. We recognize our responsibility to promote scientific knowledge in opposition to the many forms of religious backwardness and superstition which are encouraged by the big business media, the church and every other institution of bourgeois rule. This is a big task and requires the input of those who have specialized knowledge, but we are certain we can and will develop this aspect of our commentary in the coming weeks and months. Needless to say, we welcome contributions from those who have a scientific background and/or interest, and see the promotion of science as part of the great struggle to raise the cultural level of society as a whole, and liberate the masses of people from all forms of material and spiritual oppression.

For the present, we would like to direct your attention to the editorial published by the *International Workers Bulletin* on April 7, 1997, on the suicides by members of the Heaven's Gate cult in San Diego, as well as the obituary of Carl Sagan which was published in the January 13, 1997 issue of the *IWB*, and quoted from his book, *The Demon-Haunted World*, to which you refer.

Regards,

The WSWS Editorial Board

29 April 1998



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact