

Letters on the recent shootings in the US

8 March 2000

Dear Editors:

It seems familiar, does it not? A spate of media-inflated murders—which is not to deny their horror, but let us not believe that these are grotesque and isolated incidents—and the cry for increased gun control, increased anti-hate surveillance goes up yet again. The public sorrow is intensified briefly, especially since a small child is now dead and 13 more children will die each day under similar circumstances. Yet there is no real outrage. The young man who owned the gun will be roundly vilified and not entirely without warrant, for he does bear some responsibility. But then, so do I and so do all of us who blithely live our lives in an attempt to convince ourselves that such people as this and Ronald Taylor are somehow distinct and isolated rogues rather than symptoms of the insidious diseases of brutality, inhumanity and greed that rip our society into pieces daily.

It is not illogical, therefore, to juxtapose these events with the execution of yet another Texan as well as the acquittal of the officers in the murder of Amadou Diallo. The state and those who finance the state have granted themselves the power to determine what sorts of people are deserving of life. Mitigating circumstances such as long term abuse or mental incapacity while they certainly add to the atrocious nature of these executions are not really the issue. Nor can one deny that many of the people on death row did indeed commit heinous crimes. It is, moreover, the utter cheapness in which the lives of both killer and victim are held, the idea that a life can in any way be "paid for" and the pervasive atmosphere of retribution and solution by violent means that is so terrifying. And such terror coupled with the hopelessness and struggle for meager survival we all labor under can only breed more desperation and violence.

Before we can answer the question "how can this be stopped", we must first be willing to examine "why is this happening" and then we must force ourselves to

look at this system which denies even the most basic dignity and means to so many and threatens the rest with all forms of material and personal extinction if we do not fall properly in line. We live as dispensable objects, isolated and without voice. As such, it is perhaps safer to retreat, but it is also impossible. This must become a time of protest, of outrage. Only then do I see any hope.

Sincerely,

MS

2 March 2000

Editor,

First, let me thank you for providing a very interesting site. I can find a thorough, non-dogmatic alternative for "hard news" that is often missing on leftist sites. Also, your inclusion of cultural criticism is very much appreciated. I especially admire your insistence that Marx et al. were not anti-culture nor were they proponents of one-dimensional realism. Marx's love of Baudelaire (in spite of B's espoused apoliticism) is testament to the idea that only in rich and nuanced works can the best "social art" be found.

But to the point. I want to let you know about some of the local reaction to the shooting at the elementary school in Flint. I live in Ann Arbor, Michigan and found myself listening to Detroit talk radio yesterday afternoon [2 March]. The topic of debate was whether this shooting was "shocking" and what should be done with (more often, to) the young shooter. To my utter disgust, the majority of callers were convinced that the death penalty was the only wise and compassionate option. Many lamented that society has come to this point, but despite their hesitation and reservation, they felt it was the last alternative, mandated by the utter devaluation of the crime.

The whole show took on a middle ages tone (I hate to be so rude to the middle ages) in their insistence that this child was born naturally and irredeemably evil. While one of the DJs feebly attempted to play devil's

advocate, all he could muster was that the death penalty seemed "too cold." He readily admitted that he felt criminals were by and large a rotten lot who, driven by inherent evil, suck the blood out of the moral(istic) majority. Many callers (and one of the DJs) held fast to the premise that "we've heard too much whining and excuses blaming society for our actions; this time the boy has to take responsibility for his own actions." It seems in our "hyper prosperous" USA of the early 2000s, "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" ideology is advocated now even for six-year-olds.

In solidarity,

MW

2 March 2000



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