

Letters from our readers

17 December 2002

Dear Editor:

Not since the 1920s has the class of owners been able to openly call for wage cuts in order to restore prosperity (as mentioned in your report of the current New York City transit workers dispute). The machinations over many decades of business and their friends on the right have at last put them where they want to be—in the driving seat without any restraint on speed or road use—and they are heading for the edge of a cliff with all the visionary ardor of blind delusion.

It is an elementary fact that the poorer people are, the more of their income they spend. This spending turns the wheels of commerce and creates jobs and profits. By contrast, as rich people get richer, the less they need to spend and the excess goes into investments or luxuries that may have none of the beneficial effects of poorer people's spending.

Making the rich richer and the poor poorer thus is a completely unsustainable approach to economic management for growth—yet it has been the outcome (and presumably therefore the objective) of US and UK government policy for the last quarter century. Yet this erosion of incomes and living standards for the majority of the population has rarely been admitted and perceptions in this area can be misled by factors such as rising property prices, which make those who own their homes feel richer despite the fact that any capital gain they have accrued is merely the result of market-specific inflation and has to remain within the market if they are to continue as property owners.

Economic and political conditions today, in the essential area of what the ruling class believe to be feasible and advisable actions, show a fatal similarity with the period that incubated the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the UK a so-called Labour government is playing hardball with firefighters in a cynically managed “exhibition contest” that seems designed to ensure no other public sector workers will dare to claim wages that would restore some of the ground they have lost in recent decades. The reality of wage cuts is already with us in many forms and we are rapidly approaching a situation where open calls for them will be heard in the name of economic stabilization and probity. Your own news columns give ample testimony of such developments in the US.

With deflation already an established fact in Japan and much of the rest of the Far East (Hong Kong has had falling real prices for the last four years, for example) the dangers of global depression, possibly on a scale greater than what was

experienced in the 1930s, could not be more acute. Yet at just this moment we have an amnesiac and economically illiterate set of monkeys with a fanatical commitment to deflationary policies pulling on the levers of the world's major economies. The slump is not a prediction: it is, unfortunately, a racing certainty.

What pulled the world out of the last one was eventually the Second World War. However, despite the Bush regime's obvious desire to ignite WWII in the Middle East, the impact of that conflict on oil and energy prices is unlikely to deliver any kind of boost to the world economy. Frankly, while the preconditions for the crash are reproducing themselves with uncanny fidelity, the engine of recovery cannot be discerned. We have no route map beyond the edge of the cliff, and it is rushing up to meet us at ever greater speed.

Our hope, long term, must be that the awfulness of what is about to unleash itself will have such a strong demonstration effect that the beliefs and powers responsible will forever after find themselves confined to a Pandora's box of historical curiosities. But for that to occur, we all have a long, hard road to travel.

I'd like to thank you for the invaluable service your web site performs. I stumbled across it a week ago while researching the French film director Bertrand Tavernier and have been compulsively absorbing your daily updates ever since. I know of no UK media that attempt to cover the stories you do with the same depth of insight—for example we have not heard a whisper of the Bush administration's foreknowledge that the North Korean Scuds were destined for Yemen—and I am grateful for the range and depth of your reporting, as well as your Arts coverage.

With best wishes,

PV

London, England.

14 December 2002

Thanks for printing so many articles about these [New York transit] workers. I am a spouse who has written daily to the *New York Times* and the *Daily News* about why no one is asking Peter Kalikow and the Board of Trustees to account for the fiscal mismanagement at the transit authority. I have accused the MTA of being the NYC version of Enron and have even suggested the *Daily News* was being silent on this subject, making me question if they are deliberately hiding a scandal at the MTA like the Boston Archdiocese.

Yesterday, I said their constantly railing against the union, praise for Henry Kissinger to be chairman of the 9/11 commission, and their total silence on Trent Lott convinced me the Republicans owned more than one paper in this town.

[New York Governor] Pataki adds insult to injury today by saying, "The workers, if they strike, are disloyal to the citizens." This from the stealth governor who has received over \$150,000 in campaign donations from slime bucket Kalikow, who couldn't even publish and earn a profit when he owned the decrepit *New York Post*.

I had a letter published in the *Journal News* in Westchester County this week suggesting Governor Pataki and his cabal should live in those adult homes for the mentally ill if they believe they are so beneficial to the mentally ill. I used the case with the NYC landlord who was forced to live in the squalor he subjected his tenants to. Obviously, this editor wasn't afraid my letter would hurt some feelings. It really makes me think the NYC editors are all in on the scam....

F

New Rochelle NY

The article, "Israel: Ethnic cleansing is now official government policy" by Jean Shaoul, 3 December 2002, is an absolutely wonderful overview. More importantly it provides valuable insight into Israeli government policies and motivation. Your article has given voice to the often intangible aspects of this gruesome conflict, in a way that is tremendously important for the world. Sadly, there are no leaders willing to stand up and do the same.

Thank you for publishing this "opposing" view to Middle East, Israeli politics. It is my sincere hope that articles such as this will impact Western media content and enable people to understand the deeper politics of the region. But then, given the fact that major news sources are owned by those corporations who have a real interest in turning a blind eye, it seems unlikely that there will be much in mainstream reporting that attempts this, at least for the present.

I look forward to reading more articles authored by you. You've done a fabulous job and I applaud you for your efforts. Keep up the great work.

Regards,

LB

15 December 2002

The Bush family has found the mother load for accumulating personal wealth by converting the US Treasury into a personal bank account. A foreign policy directed by the wealthy elite to control the world resources of oil, natural gas and precious metals, and pipeline routes for world distribution. The colonization of the earth's resources under the control of the US arsenal of atomic and military power. All these abuses and thievery at the expense of the vast population being driven into poverty and servitude.

Sincerely,

JH

14 December 2002

Dear Editor,

I wanted to thank you for the review of *Standing in the Shadow of Motown*. I haven't really seen you review much in relation to R&B music, or any kind of popular music in general, although there was the great article on Steve Earle and other articles related to jazz, blues and classical music.

Thanks again,

RA

4 December 2002

I enjoyed your very insightful and well-referenced review of this film [*Standing in the Shadow of Motown*]. While I have not yet seen this film, from your description and analysis it does sound, as you say, to be a "lightweight piece." Not coincidentally, today's more probing musicians and musical historians, while acknowledging the brilliance of the entire Motown cadre, generally regard the label's catalog itself as formulaic and "lightweight." (I prefer the less polished output of Memphis's Stax label.)

Berry Gordy is usually blamed for allowing his narrow vision to hinder the potential of gifted session players like James Jamerson and genius songwriters like Smokey Robinson and Marvin Gaye. There are, of course, the famous anecdotes concerning Marvin's explosive clashes with Gordy, which cleared the way for the artist's most profound work. At the same time, an examination of the complex artistic and economic processes involved in producing recorded music for the masses under capitalism begs one to acknowledge the central importance of Gordy. Whatever he may or may not have wanted, the songs and the sound of Motown still reverberate (as you suggest) with the celebratory and revolutionary spirit of the times.

At its worst, Motown turned out catchy and memorable tunes by highly talented performers. More rarely, its artists were able to turn out epic works, like "What's Going On" and some of Stevie Wonder's more brilliant records. Either way, the world of music was never again the same. It's a pity that a better film could not be made of it.

Best regards,

AR

30 November 2002



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