

Letters from our readers

18 March 2004

Below we post a selection of recent letters to the World Socialist Web Site.

On "Spain: Aznar routed as a result of mass anti-war sentiment"

Chris Marsden's analysis of the Spanish election is a particularly accurate one, but it is also interesting to note the New Labour reaction to the electoral landslide. They are portraying the vote as a cowardly capitulation to terrorism which threatens western democracies as a whole. The UK government colluded with the Aznar regime at the UN to table a resolution blaming ETA, thus trying to influence the Spanish election result. Now the New Labour government is suggesting that terrorism has triumphed because the Spanish people reacted against their deceitful government. Doubtless the US will put political and economic pressure on the new Spanish government to maintain its military presence in Iraq. While it is right to question the motives of the PSOE, it is important to see the Spanish vote against the Popular Party as an important step which shows that people do not necessarily stand behind imperialist policies when they too suffer violent attack.

JL

16 March 2004

On "Blair: Scrap international law vs. aggressive war"

I too listened to Blair's speech and, following the *Guardian's* advice, I listened carefully and thoughtfully and was horrified. While Blair has a command of English that does not burden George W., his political, social and economic ideology is unreal, however elegant the words he employs. He reminds me of Jerry Falwell fighting against sin. Milosevic is off the screen and Saddam is fast joining him. And the United States hopes that Osama will soon occupy the same non-view. Keep up the good work; we need someone to report on events.

On "The rise and fall of Martha Stewart"

Hello,

Thank you for the article about Martha Stewart's debacle.

I have never been a big fan of Stewart's, but I have felt all along that the prosecution of her was a witch-hunt, and a smoke screen over the real thieves in high places. If she goes to jail, Stewart will be doing time for Ken Lay, Bernard Ebbers, Wendy Gramm, and so many more.

It makes me sicker even than the fact that the primary returns in our city showed 0 votes for Kucinich, even though I and many other people that I know voted for him.

Farewell to democracy, farewell to justice. Might as well

dump them both at the same time.

MC

12 March 2004

David Walsh:

Outstanding article on Martha Stewart. This type of cultural/psychological analysis—sensitive, shrewd, undogmatic, grounded in economic and social circumstances—is extremely interesting and much needed on the left. I suspect it has the potential to appeal to a much larger audience than usual, and thus encourage people, who otherwise would not pay any attention, to realize the superiority of a socialist perspective over the blandness, mediocrity, or rubbish that prevails today.

RR

12 March 2004

Dear David:

What can I say? A brilliant article on Martha. As I was reading it, I was thinking of Bob Dylan's song: "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands."

TS

12 March 2004

Dear Editor,

An Associated Press article, which appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on October 26, 2003, reported that the medical facility at Fort Stewart was overloaded and the medical personnel were struggling to care "for the more than 20,000 active duty and reserve troops who recently returned from Iraq." 20,000 at this one base!

There are two other bases, Fort Bragg in N.C. and Fort Lewis in Washington, that are also overloaded. Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. and The National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland have similar overload problems. One in nine of the seriously ill and wounded die. None of these soldiers are ever included in the death toll.

BT

11 March 2004

On "Passage of California austerity measures shows dead end of two-party system"

Dear Andrea,

This morning, local news reported that West Contra Costa County is eliminating all athletic programs from its high schools, closing the libraries, and laying off something like 10 percent of its employees, including psychologists, speech therapists, teachers, principals, counselors and custodians. The school board approved the cuts 5-1, the only holdout being the

student representative Peter Chau who, according to an article in the *Contra Costa Times*, said, "I refuse to vote of any of these reductions of this list.... I can't support something that will destroy the education of my peers."

Last week, county voters failed to pass Measure J, a parcel tax which was expected to raise \$7.5 million annually over five years, and was targeted to maintain school programs, such as small classes, textbook purchases and recruitment of aides and counselors.

Just more fiscal disaster for California. Welcome to the third world.

CZ

San Francisco

9 March 2004

On "US auto union calls off parts strike, accepts multi-tier contract"

I work for the DaimlerChrysler plant here in Huntsville, Alabama. We were recently told we were sold to Siemens. After I read your article, I felt compelled to write and tell you of the situation here. We have lived with rumors of a sale for almost two years now. Morale is low, and the stress level is at an all-time high. Our local and international unions have kept a "hush" policy through all this, keeping us in the dark. In fact, these days it is a rare sight to even see a union official on the shop floor. They are keeping a low profile.

Daimler, Siemens and the UAW have painted a rosy picture of how they are looking out for the workers, when in fact it is a grim and dismal one. They are offering VTEP money (Voluntary Termination of Employment). For the amount of years that most of us have dedicated to the company, this amount is an insult and not nearly as much as the other plants up north were offered. They say Siemens wants to keep all the experienced workers. Well, if you're young enough to gain retirement with another company and don't mind an \$8-an-hour pay cut, that might be appealing. Yes, it is true there is an eight-year "Mirrored Contract" for the employees that choose to stay with Siemens, but after that they will be on their own at the mercy of a company that has already told us they are sending our instrument cluster line to Mexico. Does this sound like job security?

They say they are offering "Enhanced Retirements." The lump sum "bonus," as they so choose to call it, is in fact an up-front loan from the employees' own money. If they choose to accept it, their monthly benefit amount will be reduced. They are also offering people who are 55 years of age or older early-outs. This will mean a big cut in the retirement benefit they would have received if they were able to accrue 30 years of service with Daimler. Most of them feel this is their only option because they are frightened they may not be able to perform the jobs at another plant. What kind of "enhancement" is this? Who really benefits from this? Daimler does. Less retirement money paid out in the long run.

They say we can continue our employment with Chrysler at

another plant, which can be one almost anywhere in the United States and not necessarily of our choosing. But what they don't tell you is we are being denied pertinent information needed in order to make a good decision on where to transfer, which by the way may take several years according to our local union. Is it fair to keep people in limbo for such a length of time? They are bragging about the increased moving allowance they are offering us. What price do you put on turning peoples' lives upside down? People who have their roots firmly planted.

People will have to upset their entire families and move them to unfamiliar surroundings. People who have elderly parents to care for will have to find someone to look after them while they make their transition into another plant. People who have spouses that cannot change employment may have to live separately for several years. What is the going rate for tearing families apart? Well, Daimler and the UAW seem to have the answer, and guess what? They will be able to add this to the long list of reasons not to give the employees a profit-sharing check again next year.

On February 21, we were given an option package at a meeting held at the civic center here in Huntsville. We have only until March 22 to make a life-changing decision. We cannot get any cooperation from our union. This plant is not being treated like the other plants up north. The majority of workers here are 50 or older. We have dedicated most of our lives to this company. Why is our union treating us like orphans? The UAW has strayed from its original purpose of "protecting the workers" to "protecting their pocketbook." We are nothing but numbers in their computer, pawns in the corporate and union chess game. For us it is now "checkmate."

Signed,

My Union Sold Me Out

5 March 2004

On "US: Weirton Steel cancels health care for 10,000 retirees"

I tell people all the time capitalism sucks! 10,000 old people lose health care while CEOs make hundreds of thousands of dollars off the sweat of working people. We need to call for boycotts, random wildcat strikes, and protests. But most of all, we must send the Imperial President back to Texas!

PM

13 March 2004



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