Letters from our readers

7 June 2005

The following is a selection of recent letters to the World Socialist Web Site.

On "Review of Robert Service's Stalin. A Biography"

Robert Service has discovered an enthusiasm for Stalin. And why not? Service's scribblings are built upon the shaky foundations of the Stalinist lie that an unbroken communist heritage was passed from Lenin to Stalin. His hatred of Trotsky is thus understandable—Trotsky's life and works continue to stand as a clear and eloquent refutation of the lies of Stalinism, and by implication, of the crude falsifications of Service and his ilk.

EG

2 June 2006

Thanks for the review, which was to the usual high standards of the WSWS. I just wanted to draw your attention to what I believe is a common confusion of the terms psychotic and psychopath that appears in the opening paragraphs of part two of your review. The distinction is important since many of those in the former category unjustly suffer the stigma of the associations of the latter one.

Psychosis is a broad category of mental illnesses introduced into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM; published by the American Psychiatric Association) in which, unlike neurotic conditions, there is a loss of contact with reality. This may involve hallucinations, delusions, and disordered thinking. While there appears to be a small but significant association between the diagnosis of schizophrenia (one of the psychoses) and the likelihood of committing a violent offence (for a review, see Walsh and Buchanan, 2002, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 180, 490-95), violence against the sufferer is more common, often self-inflicted (the suicide rate amongst schizophrenics is about 10 percent, 10 times that for the general population). The small increase in violence against others may be related to fear of attack or harm induced by delusional thoughts (e.g., paranoia). The propensity to be violent forms no part of the diagnostic criteria for psychosis.

The psychopath, nowadays labeled as having "anti-social personality disorder" (the personality disorders being a third diagnostic category), has a condition characterised by the lack of regard for the feelings of others, impulsive behaviour, and the absence of remorse for acts that have harmed others. Therefore, Service is correct (accidentally?) when he asserts that Stalin may not have been psychotic, but at the same time was a "pockmarked little psychopath" (which is how I prefer to think of him).

RB

United Kingdom

3 June 2005

On "Watergate in historical perspective: Why does today's criminal White House face no similar challenge?"

You ask why there is no serious opposition to the Bush administration. Almost immediately after the 9/11 attacks, the Bushies have effectively terrorized any potential opposition from forming. Recall the anthrax attacks—using US military stock—against media and Democrat Party leaders. With the Dan Rather and *Newsweek* set-ups, the media is going to be even less inclined to do its job—and dissenting government officials are going to be less inclined to become whistle-blowers, knowing that they will have to go public and risk everything.

LG

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

3 June 2005

Thank you for your consistently well-thought, referenced, and well-stated commentary. Your commentary is a helpful tool when I attempt to express my own feelings and ideas about the situation in the US. I have promised myself not to participate in Democratic fundraising or volunteering due to the Democratic Party's lack of leadership in investigating and prosecuting voter fraud and media control. The Greens and Libertarians lead the way in Ohio and New Mexico. What's the use of sending Democrats money when the Republicans have an electronic fix and control the major media? I feel advocating for run-off voting is a good response to the current situation.

NH

Apple Valley, Minnesota

3 June 2005

On "As $1 billion is earmarked for stadium: New York City teachers mark two years without a contract"

This was a wonderfully well-written article! It reminded me of Samuel Bowles and his book *The Schooling of Capitalistic America*. It was the teachers who saved the City of New York from bankruptcy in 1974. Now the political elite are waiting in the wings to default on the teachers' pensions, outsource all education to private interests, and exploit everything that moves.

EB

Honolulu, Hawaii

2 June 2005

It beats me how officials in city government do these things. One of the worst run cities in the US—San Diego, California, where I live—spent half this amount on a new stadium. Schools have leaky roofs, homeless people live on our streets, sewers are in terrible repair, street lights can't be replaced, the pension system is broken. That's only a starter.

During the referendum, our one and only newspaper, the *San Diego Union Tribune*, editorialized that stadium opponents ought to be run out of town. They are not crazy, these public boondoggle people. They are simply working for the interests of the privileged

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few.

RD
San Diego, California
2 June 2005

On "Bethlehem Steel to terminate health and insurance benefits for 95,000 retirees"

My friend is 67 yrs old, what is going to happen to his pension? He has worked in the steel mills for 42 years. He is retired. Why can't the people that handle all of the retirees' money do it the right way? Are they going to pull another Enron? What is this country coming to? Why can't we take care of our aging Americans?

AO
2 June 2005

On "Court approves termination of United Airlines pension plans"

United Airlines union workers are losing billions and the company is gaining billions in the court ruling, but what about management? Is management going to forgo any of its lucrative salaries, bonuses, incentives, etc.?

WY
5 June 2005

On "Bill Cosby blames parents for US society's ills"

I agree and disagree with Mr. Cosby's speech. Primarily, he was speaking about poor working people and some poor people who receive assistance from the government and who have failed to emphasize to their children just how important acquisition of an education is to improving the economic quality of one's life. Mr. Cosby, you are wrong when you criticize poor or working class poor black people, or the illiterate people who do not know how to change their current lifestyle or their philosophy without help from their pastor, without the support of their family members and without the help of therapy.

These ills of the poor black families or non-educated working class black families will never change if we middle class or educated blacks do not provide our sistas and brothas with tools that will help them out of the fog of hopelessness. If we as educated blacks do not stop crime in our poor black neighborhoods, end those war zones, then we can't and will not see a change for a larger portion of our poor brothers and sisters. How dare Mr. Cosby speak about the creative way we as blacks name our children? Does he wish that we destroy all of the instinctive African creativity that we were given just because we live in a land which ridicules our African creativity? I for one will not ignore or forget where part of my ancestors came from. I am proud of my African, Native American and European ancestry, and I celebrate all of it.

Mr. Cosby stated some truths when he said some poor people do not execute tough love or intelligence when they buy $100 shoes for their kids when they should be educating their kids on not getting wrapped up in the capitalistic-consumer prostitution system that brainwashes some people into buying things that they do not need. But, Mr. Cosby, poor, or non-college educated, or uneducated people cannot think like you when they are living in a war zone of drive-by shootings, when they are feeling hopeless because they can't find a job this week because they do not have a high school education, or when they realize that they can't help their child with that algebra problem, can't help their child create a science project or complete research at home without a computer.

School was tough for some of these poor black parents, some of these parents have the same learning disabilities that their children are suffering from, but they were not helped when they were in school. They were not sent to resource classes, especially since resource classes did not exist for the parents, who are now age 40 or older. There are younger parents under 40 years of age, who were not placed in resource classes since they grew up in racially or economically discriminated school districts that hired inadequate teachers who were not empathetic to the needs of people with learning disabilities, so these black youngsters did not get the learning resources that they needed. This black child heard at home and in the school that he or she was lazy, stupid and dumb. This is what our poor black children are faced with even today.

Mr. Cosby, you need to help fix this problem. This is not the fault of the black child who experienced this; this is the fault of our society, Mr. Cosby. Mr. Cosby, you are wrong when you say that black poor people do not want the same things that middle class whites or blacks want. I, as a poor working class mom, want the same basic things that you have. I work, go to school and I help my child with her homework, I practice tough love and I protect my child as much as I can from the racial and economic discrimination that exist in our nation. I want my child to get the best education that she can; I want my family to live in a safe, nurturing community and home environment. I want my community to support affordable housing, affordable health care, and support a public transportation system that provides a great way to get to work, to go shopping, to go to school and to get home.

LZ
Livermore, California
5 June 2005

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