

Letters from our readers

26 April 2008

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

On “Western Pennsylvania workers speak on struggling economy”

Thank you! Thank you. This is the only place I have seen interviews with small-town Pennsylvanians. It is as if it is difficult for the mainstream media, with all their resources, to find and talk to people.

To the people in the small towns: Many of us in the big towns and even the biggest of cities are having the same kinds of problems, for the same reasons. The jobs have gone, the wages have fallen, and the prices for food, fuel, health care, and education have risen and are still going up.

The false division between small town and big city is one that is fostered in yet another attempt to keep the workers of the world divided into isolated groups, and to make it harder to organize. As soon as we realize that we are in the same sinking boat, unite, and fight for our rights, the better off we'll be.

So, I say to you, we are also bitter. We are sick of our schools and roads and all the other infrastructure being neglected. We are tired of working harder and getting less. We are angry about jobs disappearing and CEOs making big money by sending those jobs into places where people have no say about what the conditions in which they labor are. We are enraged at the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which suck away money and leave corpses and damaged people. We are sick of lies. We are tired of millionaires pretending to be Of The People, and we are ready to build the party of the working class.

CMS

Portland, Oregon, USA 22 April 2008

This was an excellent article. Being from the Sharon area, I can attest to everything claimed in the article. The typical topography of an average American town is not as peachy-keen as the corporate media portrays. The living conditions faced by thousands of workers are grim and desolate. Working class neighborhoods, especially in parts of Sharon and Farrell, are often eye-soars filled with rotting houses, abandoned commercial sites, and forlorn buildings infested with vermin. Many of the people I know suffer from depression because they are unable to deal with the surrounding conditions. Many in the area revert to drugs, violence, and crime.

A 1970s Sharon Steel Corporation employee brochure once stated, “Steel is the very backbone of America’s way of life.” When one takes a look at the situation occurring in the rust belt and Appalachian regions of the United States today, the bitter hypocrisy of this statement becomes glaringly obvious. The “backbone of America’s way of life” [steel and coal] has been

feverishly fractured in order to appease the insatiable appetite for profits of a parasitic clique of CEOs.

Let's not sidestep the issue: Who is responsible for what happened in Sharon, PA? “Good businessmen” like Dr. Jim Winner, who rules Sharon like an oligarch from atop his office in The Winner, “the off-price fashion store.” He is the second-largest property owner in downtown Sharon, and is known locally and internationally for owning hotels, restaurants, clothing stores, a charter aircraft company, the rights to The Club (the vehicle anti-theft device), and of course Winner Steel and Westinghouse. When Dr. Winner was younger, he owned a chemical factory in Cleveland, Ohio and invested heavily in anti-shoplifting systems. Dr. Winner once claimed during times of prosperity that his family should be held responsible for “the area’s future.” Well, the future came, and we’re putting blame where it’s due.

There has been a shift from steel production and heavy industry to the service sector. Those responsible for the loss of jobs claim that it is a “zero sum” game. In other words, jobs relocated in other countries are said to be canceled out by new service sector jobs. But why has corporate downsizing and restructuring had such a disastrous impact upon the living standards of thousands of workers? The implications of globalization under capitalist property relations have been expressed in the degradation of communities all over the rust belt. Globalization greatly increases productivity and creates the means by which living standards could be raised, but this simply cannot happen under capitalism because property relations act as fetters. The true potential of the greatly expanded productive forces is not realized, and cannot be without collective ownership of the means of production by the working class. Workers need to unite across borders, and we need a revolution.

For the mainstream media to pretend the old steel and manufacturing towns haven’t been hit hard by deindustrialization is insulting, and quite frankly ignorant. A prime example has taken place in exactly where the article discusses. In the early 1970s Shenango Valley’s total population was an approximately 84,000; today the population is 61,300. What this statistic represents is a direct correlation between population and job prospects.

We should keep in mind what Engels said in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England in 1844*: “The condition of the working-class is the real basis and point of departure of all social movements of the present because it is the highest and most unconcealed pinnacle of the social misery existing in our day.... A knowledge of proletarian conditions is absolutely necessary to be able to provide solid ground for socialist theories, on the one hand, and for judgments about their right to exist, on the other; and to put an end to all sentimental dreams and fancies pro and con.” I

hope the SEP makes a direct intervention in similar towns and cities by holding well-advertised meetings and classes, and handing out leaflets in working class neighborhoods, etc.

PG

23 April 2008

On “The pope’s US visit: Media, White House, Congress embrace spokesman for religious obscurantism”

There is something contained in this piece that I must share with you. Sometime ago, there was a local child molesting case that made the news, and editorial comments were mostly of the lynch mob variety, with one person wanting to go so far as to have a public execution. I responded by making the point that, when this happens where a prominent leader of the largest church in the nation is involved, the settlement then involves a huge dollar payout instead of a criminal trial. I was called many disgusting names and received threatening phone calls after my letter was published in the local newspaper, and members of my family have pleaded with me to keep such opinions to myself, so as not to make it difficult for them. I guess the point I am making here is that the news and analysis section of your web site, which I consider my most reliable source of information, has been a vote of confidence of sorts for me. Thank you.

NV

Sioux Falls, South Dakota, USA 22 April 2008

This was really a Basil Fawlty papal tour: there had to be no mention of the imperialist war in Iraq and Afghanistan, nor the US war on its own working class, nor the crass injustices flowing from it. Equally, there should not have been any anxiety amongst the elites that the pope would give vent to a principled critique of the capitalist system, nor the abject poverty and inequality that is its logical outcome. This pope has a track record of supporting the demonisation of Muslims, as his diatribe in Regensburg demonstrates, a support for the “war on terror,” and the intellectual and religious cover for the “humanitarian intervention.” Denouncing pedophilia amongst American clergy was a mirror image of the “bad apple mantra” used by Washington as a means to cover up and limit political fallout.

However, to put the blame on pedophilia on the celibacy of the priests is simplistic and really misses the point. Child sexual abuse occurs amongst other religions, where there is no celibacy, and, of course, amongst social professions, such as teachers, social workers, law and medical practitioners, etc. The key, I think, is a drive to dominate, especially the most vulnerable, by individuals who either have been repressed in their childhood, or are themselves insecure. In the event, without doubt, Benedict XVI must have known about the widespread abuses and the impunity the perpetrators enjoyed, both in his present role, and that of the “pope’s rottweiler.”

If the above brings back images of the military’s reaction to the revelations of Abu Ghraib or Haditha, it’s no accident. Since the Fourth Century, when the Catholic Church became the state religion for the Roman Empire, the Church began to identify itself with the ruling class. In the Middle Ages the bishops became rulers themselves, with their own armies, taxation, etc. Over the ages the Church developed in similar fashion to the prevailing state system. The Church’s structure and its theoretical and

intellectual development mimicked that of the prevailing social system, from feudalism through to capitalism, including an important role as an apologist for capitalism and imperialism. Nowadays, the Church thinks and acts as a multinational enterprise, and as an intellectual prop for capitalism, ruthlessly stifling all attempts at reform, such as the “liberation theology” movement in Latin America.

MS

Queanbeyan, Australia

22 April 2008

On “UAW calls off rally, prepares sellout of American Axle strike”

Thank you for the insightful article. Once again we can thank the implosion of unions in this country to the only president to have made movies with a chimp ... Reagan. Additionally, with his practice of voodoo economics he set in motion the defiance of the law of nature relating to wages/productivity. This is specifically why there has been an erosion of the middle class and a generation of Americans culturally addicted to credit. When wages *do not* follow productivity upwards (productivity has risen uninterrupted for 15 years) workers and families suffer the fall out. *However*, corporate profits, CEO salaries and stock performance are out of sight.

JE

Miami, Florida, USA

23 April 2008

On “Israel escalates offensive against Palestinians with Egypt’s assistance”

To me, WSWS is by far the most honest and accurate web site, but it mystifies me why you often continue to use only Zionist-sanctioned phrases such as “targeted assassinations” and “security wall.” In any other part of the world—Germany, for example—a 20-foot concrete structure separating two peoples is called a wall. So why does WSWS pander to the Israel Lobby by calling it a “security wall”? (Land Grab Wall, maybe.)

As for “targeted assassinations,” an assassination *is* picking your target. That’s why there’s the word. So “targeted assassination” is an obvious redundancy. Also, seeing how virtually all of Israel’s “targeted assassinations” kill numerous bystanders, it is inaccurate.

CW

Saugerties, New York, USA

23 April 2008



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