Letters from our readers

13 November 2008

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

*On "*A damning admission on the Georgian war*"*

Here in Winnipeg we have access to both the BBC and CNN. The reporting on Georgia's attack on South Ossetia was so totally different on the two news channels that one wondered if they were reporting on the same conflict. The Israelis who were also in Georgia withdrew a week before the conflict obviously aware of the intended attack and fearful of Russia's attitude towards Israel.

William H
Winnipeg, Canada
9 November 2008

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I want to thank the WSWS for this article and the earlier one, "BBC describes evidence of Georgian war crimes in South Ossetia," which have summarized what I heard and read early on in the Georgia-Russia conflict. On the first day of the war I heard on National Public Radio (NPR) that Georgia not Russia had started the war by attacking the capital of South Ossetia, and that many civilians had been killed by the Georgian army. However, in about two days the story had changed and it was now the Russians who were the aggressors. Even friends of mine who are well educated and "liberal" in their viewpoints were repeating the same thing: Russia was the aggressor. They knew nothing about the USA's involvement with the Georgian government or the fact that US military advisers were there training the Georgian army.

Gary W
Minnesota, USA
10 November 2008

*On "*Reflections on class and race in America*"*

I found your article to be very enlightening. I have two observations to add.

The first is that we as a people need to understand racial conflict in economic terms. The root of white hatred toward African Americans, the vestiges of which this election theoretically buried, is the slaveholder era of American history. Africans were brought to this country as economic tools and were, from the start, considered less than fully human. This view was embedded in the United States Constitution, where slaves were counted as three fifths of a person and were not allowed to vote or to declare their freedom.

This legacy permitted certain segments of society to treat African Americans with disdain and abuse, with little threat of arrest; in fact, much of the abuse was committed by those in authority.

This treatment was encouraged by the power elite, who used the media and other methods to perpetuate the stereotype that blacks belonged "in their place," which was to be quiescent and meek. Blacks who broke through this stereotype, such as Eldridge Cleaver and Malcolm X, did so at considerable risk.

Thus, the power elite accomplished two critical goals. First, they kept their costs of production as low as possible by paying lower wages to blacks than to whites, and by using blacks for the most menial of jobs, and by continuing to discourage the pursuit of higher education by blacks, and by denying blacks access to the white-collar, professional world. Second, this division along racial lines caused working people to become fragmented, and thus less powerful. I concur with your analysis that the current economic system has the potential to reveal the true nature of this division: to preoccupy the working class with trivial issues which prevent us from forming an effective counter-force to capitalist rule.

My second observation is that we are in need of a transformation at a basic level of consciousness: a transformation from viewing ourselves as consumers to viewing ourselves as producers.

As consumers, we promote and encourage capitalist greed, and we further allow ourselves to become distracted from reality. We may enjoy buying inexpensive clothes at Wal-Mart or Target, but do we ever ask ourselves under what conditions these garments were made? Were the workers fairly treated and compensated? Do those workers have access to basic social services? Are they, in effect, wage slaves?

The economic crisis now unfolding will have predictable consequences for working Americans. Many will lose their

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jobs, while many others will be forced to accept drastic cuts in their wages, which will severely alter their lifestyles and perhaps throw them into debt from which they cannot recover and which will ultimately cost them any vestige of security.

Meanwhile, state and local governments will run short of the cash with which to stimulate the economy and to provide basic social services.

The key question is this: will this chain of events lead to a reawakening of class consciousness, or will it devolve into fraternal war?

We need leadership and perspective at a time such as this, and I look to the WSWS to provide that leadership and perspective.

Thank you.

Walt B

Pennsylvania, USA

8 November 2008

On "Guardian journalist on Obama's election: An ‘armed insurrection' averted"

This is another perceptive article, especially in drawing parallels with Blair's 1997 election and how soon his supporters were disappointed. Also, when I left my office briefly on the evening of November 4 following McCain's concession speech, I heard the celebrations of students nearby. Later, I read in the student newspaper that local police had maced people celebrating on the streets of Carbondale and had dispersed many, including innocent bystanders (shades of Chicago, 1968). On Sunday, the local newspaper came out on the side of McCain, despite the fact that the bulk of the population here vote Democrat. During 2004, it supported Bush for a second term. Although Obama's victory is historical for its ethnic associations, as we all know here, gender and race issues are not enough on their own in a period of struggle. We shall see what will now occur, but WSWS already knows the score.

Tony W

10 November 2008

On "One week since the election of Obama"

Like Barry Grey, I've been struck by the propensity of so many observers to view Obama's win largely if not entirely through the prism of race. I've also been bothered by the self-congratulatory aspects of the euphoria, whereby Obama's personal narrative is offered as evidence that the US is still the land of opportunity, a country where there are no limits to how far one can get based on personal initiative and ambition. Such sentiments conveniently mask the huge structural obstacles faced by many Americans that have arisen from the growing economic inequality, with the result that upward mobility has greatly decreased in past decades. As the *Christian Science Monitor* reported a while back, "for most of the poor, the United States is no longer the land of opportunity. Economic research in the past decade has found that upward mobility has faded; most of the children of rich parents stay rich and the children of the poor remain poor" (January 27, 2003).

That Barack Obama was elected president doesn't prove this otherwise, despite what various patriotically inclined observers may think, hence his ascendancy will no doubt be used to bolster certain reactionary developments, such as the abolishment of what little remains of affirmative action in the US.

Colin B

The Netherlands

11 November 2008

On "Renewed war in Congo as conflict over minerals spirals"

I am a Belgian freelance journalist, born in Congo and trying to come to grips with the situation. Reading the mainstream press is, not unexpectedly, quite frustrating. As usual, the US seem to be shifting their support according to their economic interests. Kagame was supported by the US, but apparently relations have cooled. Kabila, president of mineral-rich Congo, enjoyed their support as well, but now seems to be betraying them by selling out to China. Nkunda, whose exact relationship with Kagame seems far from clear, has stated that he wants the China contract reviewed. Has he now become the golden doodle of the US and its European troopers? Even though US-controlled Human Rights Watch persistently singles him out as the number one war criminal? I am most probably wrong, but I have this strange feeling that Laurent Nkunda is nobody's poodle and might possibly become a new Patrice Lumumba. If he manages to hang on to life that long.

Michael P

Belgium

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