

Letters from our readers

23 December 2008

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

On "US Federal Reserve cuts interest rates to near zero"

The dollar tanked, gold soared higher as did the yen and the euro on yesterday's Fed announcement. At the same time that the political and business elite are attempting to drive down the wages of auto workers, they are also destroying the value of the dollars those workers earn. These guys are experts at class warfare. They know how to attack the working class from every angle.

Brian M
Florida, USA
17 December 2008

On "Obama names more cabinet secretaries—A continued march to the right"

Very good exposé of the new appointees and, quite importantly, of Obama's right-wing orientation. In particular, I'd like to add that Salazar is one of those 14 senators (Lieberman was also one of them, as well as the staunch anti-communist and, at one point, KKK member, Byrd, another Democrat) who agreed to exclude a filibuster in exchange of the avoidance of the "nuclear option." This deal secured the appointment of Sam Alito as well as the confirmation of several ultra-right judges. The WSWS has covered that period (May 2005 in particular) masterfully.

Marc Wells
18 December 2008

On "First images taken of extrasolar planets"

I wanted to let you know how your science reporting has helped considerably in developing my understanding of Marxism in general, and some of Lenin's writings in particular.

For example, Lenin writes, "the vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia." To me, at first, this statement appeared elitist. But seen in the context of other scientific endeavors, it is an accurate reflection of social reality.

This statement becomes self-evident when we consider that rarely do we see working people setting up complicated apparatus on their patios or in their backyards for the detection of faraway planets. In other words, there is no working class version of the Hubble, Keck or Gemini Telescopes. Instead, the capital and labor

involved in these works is organized around universities and through other bourgeois institutions.

So, to paraphrase Lenin, the knowledge of planets in other solar systems comes down to us in the same way as that of modern socialism: From the minds of the bourgeois intelligentsia, who in turn communicate this to the more intellectually developed proletarians. And, as Lenin concluded, "thus socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletariat class struggle from without, and not something that arose within it spontaneously."

Science also intimately informed the development of Lenin's political strategy. To paraphrase Lenin, the central task of a Revolutionary party is to saturate the workers' movement with science: the scientific method in general, and Marxism in particular. In other words, the main political task, then, as now, is to breathe life into science, to give it a material base in the worker's mind. On this basis, a rational, scientific social order can be brought into the world.

Lenin summarized: "In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organization. Disunited by the rule of anarchic competition in the bourgeois world, ground down by forced labor for capital, constantly thrust back to the 'lower depths' of utter destitution, savagery, and degeneration, the proletariat can, and inevitably will, become an invincible force only through its ideological unification on the principles of Marxism being reinforced by the material unity of organization, which welds millions of toilers into an army of the working class."

The political importance of a scientific outlook helps explain why the bourgeoisie and their agents work so hard to instill unscientific and irrational beliefs into working class minds. As the foundation of the revolutionary political strategy, the bourgeoisie vigorously assaults the material dialectic and the scientific heritage of classical Marxism. Intellectuals such as Lukacs, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, fight to replace science with the irrational, the religious, and the subjective.

Like any good astrophysicist, Lenin took steps to protect the foundations and integrity of his domain of scientific study. Lenin devoted an entire year to writing *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Here, Lenin noted how, "...historical materialism was a great achievement in scientific thinking," and how "the chaos and arbitrariness that had previously reigned in views on history and politics were replaced by a strikingly integral and harmonious

scientific theory...." So, if Lenin had been an astrophysicist, he would have been engaged in the equivalent of debating zealots convinced that the sun orbited the earth.

In fact, it is probably not an accident that, colloquially, Marxism and science exist as separate categories. And instead of being seen as synonymous, classical Marxism has been slandered and considered a refuge for lunatics and the likes. So, it is great to see WSWs work to reunite the two, in part by regularly running articles of general scientific interest alongside its Marxist analysis of current events.

In this light, I think that any revolutionary work should encourage curiosity and strive to bring the light of science into people's lives, no matter how humble their circumstances. Even Trotsky brought the scientific approach into the more mundane parts of everyday life. As Natalia Sedova Trotsky wrote in "How It Happened," "Lev Davidovich, too, wanted to help with the housework and began washing dishes. But our friends protested: 'He should rest after dinner. We can manage ourselves.' Besides, my son Leva told me: 'Papa insists on using a scientific method of dish-washing, and this eats up too much of our time.' In the end, L.D. had to retire from this occupation."

In conclusion, thank you again for your many articles and your collective work in bringing clarity to this complex area of study.

Dan P
17 December 2008

On "Studs Terkel, American writer and documentarian, dead at 96"

I thought your tribute to Studs Terkel was moving and that you were very astute in explaining how Terkel's interviews brought out the shining inner core of perfectly ordinary American people coping with hard times descending upon them unexpectedly, so much like our own times.

Studs Terkel was a type still to be found in my youth talking politics and stuff in Union Square and nearby Village booze and talk joints, a leftist culture in the broad populist sense that you mention as a limitation. Would that these characters were still with us today, though, to prepare the young for the evil times to come by their examples of resilience, affirmation of life and fellow-feeling for human beings in crisis.

May I use this opportunity to call to your readers' attention another great writer you mentioned in passing, James T. Farrell, whose *Studs Lonigan* trilogy does in fiction what Studs Terkel's books do in the documentary form, that is, allow those who are not given a voice in society to speak dramatically, soulfully and from a specific address within the human community.

Studs Lonigan growing up during a time of great capitalist crisis when the gap between the rich and the poor were widening and the young had no future before them displays a rage that we witness

today in Greece. The grubbiness of life, lack of hope and constant police surveillance will seem quite familiar. But most important, somehow you are drawn into the day-to-day life of characters, their hopes, delusions and adventures, above all their constant struggle to maintain their self-respect against social forces designed to take it forcefully from them.

I first came across James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* in the paperback novels with garish covers common in the fifties. I brought the novel for prurient reasons but became enchanted by a style that was a decisive influence on Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal and a host of other post-war writers. Growing up in Jewish Montreal, the Irish Catholic world of Studs Lonigan would not be of interest, save that it is James T. Farrell's art to bring to life and evoke empathy (in "Even Hitler Had Days Like This") even for a young Nazi attempting without success to peddle a clerical-fascist newspaper during the Depression. One character in Studs Lonigan, a type to be found in Iraq and Afghanistan, was so anxious for the false glory of military life that he, an Irish catholic, joined the German army. By the time America is at war, the parents receive a letter announcing his death and glorifying their son's role in defending the Fatherland and serving the Kaiser.

Studs Terkel and James T. Farrell need to be added to library shelves to arm us for the times to come, to show the path we should and should not take when hard times come.

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17 December 2008



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