Letters from our readers

21 April 2009

On "*Torture memos reveal brutality of US imperialism*"

Torture does not affect me as I don't have any plans to visit foreign countries anytime soon. However, if I were a serviceman once more or the parent of a youngster who might be considering a career in the military or even in the Peace Corps, then I might be re-evaluating the world situation at this time.

This horrific violation of the Geneva Convention and the blatant cover-up by the Obama folks virtually guarantee that prisoners will now be tortured. Not only that, but people who cover up for torturers are very likely not to risk political favor by lobbying for your release when covering up your abduction is so much more expedient. I do not want people such as Panetta or Obama watching my back and certainly wouldn't want my family sitting fatherless in the economic climate they have created and maintain. Think twice before getting on that plane, folks. Think twice.

PK
18 April 2009

On "Obama exonerates CIA torturers"

For president Obama to exonerate these CIA torturers is unforgivable. That makes him complicit in the use of torture. The excuse he gave for it is not very good. The Nazis during the Second World War used the same excuse. When the CIA gets away with these crimes they will do it again and it makes the American people look bad. Obama should do the right thing and have these people arrested.

Stan S
Canada
17 April 2009

On "The criminalisation of political dissent in Britain"

In addition to the monitoring of e-mails and phone-calls, the British government is proposing (though I suspect it is already happening) to monitor website forums like Facebook etc. More disturbingly, it is planning to set up a "security force" to protect the public against a "terrorist" attack at a cost of £3.5 billion per annum. I believe that this is being done not to protect the public, but to control the public if/when disorder breaks out!

Barry W
United Kingdom
18 April 2009

On "Michigan: 16-year-old dies after police Taser shooting"

The recent death of the 16 -year-old Robert Mitchell in Michigan due to a Taser weapon is as tragic as it is disturbing and is more evidence that these weapons are extremely unsafe. While some may argue that the numbers of deaths are "small" compared to the number of times the Tasers are used and the result is not fatal, a look at the development of the Taser may reveal why such a weapon with such fatal side effects has made it to market.

As this device can influence human physiology and thus human health, it is a wonder that this weapon has not undergone the same scientific and regulatory assessment as a drug. Granted, in recent times we have seen limitations of regulatory authorities such as the FDA in dealing with drug safety due to corporate "for profit"€? influence—a recent example being deaths resulting from the drug Vioxx. However, regulatory agencies for pharmaceuticals do require valid efficacy and safety studies in large numbers of people before it can go to market. Once on the market, rigorous post marketing surveillance is required to gather further safety data.

Thus, in the beginning it would have been appropriate to see this weapon undergo similar assessment. This has clearly not happened. Now post market safety studies, independent or otherwise, are being revisited in a haphazard fashion as one can observe in the medical literature. There is also evidence of the manufacturer

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of this weapon (TASER International) influencing "independent" studies. Such behavior by the company suggests they are aware of the weapons' lethal side effects, and these safety limitations are a hurdle to its profit motives.

If the most rigorous scientific methods are to be employed in the assessment of pharmaceuticals, the same should be for all methods that can influence human health and well being, including this weapon. It should be noted that drugs that have resulted in fewer deaths through initial clinical observation have caused regulatory authorities to enforce more rigorous post market surveillance studies. This has led some drugs to be given a "black box warning" and has limited their prescription to not include certain "high risk"€? patient groups. Further evidence could lead to a drug being withdrawn from the market.

As Tasers are employed in high stress situations where enforcement officers who are not medically trained have limited time to employ rational and critical thought, these weapons should be removed from the market until otherwise proven safe. This is unlikely to occur rapidly or even at all in a system where the profit of TASER International is seen as paramount to human need, riding roughshod over the lives of people like Robert Mitchell.

Kind regards,
John B
Australia
17 April 2009

On "Socialism and American public opinion"

This article on my birthday, no less. It *is* a cause to be happy for. It's also nice to know that 33 percent of my generation prefer socialism. Drinks all around!

Bryan S
17 April 2009

On "Media promotes right-wing 'tea parties'"

Thank you for identifying the sources behind these orchestrated far-right tax rallies. In stating, "The primary aim of the rallies was to confuse mounting public anger," your use of the word "confuse" is most apt, for the very people who deserve a truly socialist alternative are being hijacked into the dens of the Republican far-right wing by purposeful misuse of language and conceptual sophistry. This is no different a phenomena than in 1980 when the so-named Reagan Democrats built a working-class coalition championing the very policies that after thirty years have served to undermine and destroy them. The political strategies used then are used now, but have been buttressed by corporate ownership of all mass media.

A concerted effort needs doing to set straight the concept of socialism from that defined by the nemesis of the working people: the ultra-right. But this becomes daunting when mass consciousness has been usurped by corporate media and language itself is distorted to where antonyms become synonyms.

It was without irony, I maintain, that on Wednesday, the day of the rallies, was leaked the Homeland Security Assessment, "Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment" (dated 7 April 2009). It is worth reading, especially in light of April 15's "Tea Parties" on that same day, and also because it originated from DHS. While rallies encourage social acceptance of protest forms and positions, these lead individuals to activities that otherwise would be restrained. The DHS "assesses that lone wolves and small terrorist cells embracing violent rightwing extremist ideology are the most dangerous terrorism threat in the United States."

I insist that the greatest danger ahead is fascism, which has its roots in far- and ultra-right alliances, tying together the powerful oligarchy, the unbridled military, and the Religious Right. As Sinclair Lewis said, "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying the cross."€? We are skirting closer to this periphery every day.

Michael B
Maine, USA
17 April 2009

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