

Letters from our readers

9 June 2009

On “Origins and consequences of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre”

The Western focus on the Tiananmen massacre as the death of a democracy movement is absurd. Millions of people were in the streets in June of '89 and not very many of them knew what Western-style democracy was, and an even smaller number were calling for anything close to Western-style democracy.

The focus on Beijing, and students in Beijing, is short-sighted. The majority of protests were outside Beijing, led mostly, as John Chan points out, by urban workers, who were experiencing social chaos as China transitioned to a market economy. The services that had been previously guaranteed—healthcare, education, food, jobs—were now becoming more and more difficult to secure.

The process that led to the events of June of '89 didn't stop that summer. It continued. It intensified. We are constantly bombarded with the message that workers in today's China are increasingly wealthy—but the average Chinese worker is in a state of complete uncertainty and constant financial danger. The gap between the rich and the poor in China has widened quickly since 1989.

The students were, in effect, bought off with the opportunity to live a comfortable life and travel abroad, while the Chinese worker, especially the Chinese urban worker, was viciously crushed.

Great piece of writing by John Chan, and I would echo his call for international workers to join with their Chinese brothers and sisters in forging a global socialist movement.

Dylan K
4 June 2009

I have been very impressed in your articles by your astute analysis of events along a historical trajectory, but never more so than after reading your account of the 1989 events in Tiananmen Square. I applaud especially the way you put the event in the context of the series of Stalinist abominations against which the Chinese working class joined intellectuals and students in a massive rebellion, narrowly averted by the massacre similar to the slaughter of workers, intellectuals and students in Budapest in 1956.

When I was young, I was washing dishes in Montreal with a Polish gentleman with aristocratic manners who had quite a story to tell. It seems that he had gone to China in the twenties and by the time Mao's "country bumpkins," as he called them, marched into Shanghai, he was a major industrialist. To his surprise, he was treated with great honor by the new bureaucracy consisting of army officers assigned for lack of trustworthy alternatives to managing industrial complexes. In this gentleman's account, the new Communist officials would kowtow to him deeply in a way his own staff found beneath their dignity.

These officials ensured that the factory complex remained with the former owner who was treated, as he said, like a general and workers like soldiers. All would have been well had not the distribution system broken down under bureaucratic mismanagement and the currency turned to pixie dust. In the end, he trained a replacement, left the country and assumed his new role among the lumpen proletariat that washed dishes (and drank a great deal, as I remember). Still, every month he received a statement of the profits his factory made, which went into his bank account held in China. He was still in the Bloc of Four Classes. Some socialism.

AL
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
4 June 2009

On “Sri Lanka: Tamil detainees kept in appalling conditions”

Thank you very much for highlighting the dire conditions the internally displaced persons (IDPs) face. They are fenced up by barbed wires without free access to human rights workers and independent journalists. It's reported that there are 299,000 IDPs and 50,000 are missing. You and the WSWS always stood for the common masses who are the real victims in the chauvinist crusade of "war on terror."

Sithamparam S
UK
2 June 2009

On “What's good for GM...”

I would like to comment on your article about General Motors, the UAW, bankruptcy and blackmail. After a nearly

23-year career at GM, my factory was closed in Janesville, Wisconsin. Last week, we voted on some new additions to our 2007 contract. We actually went on strike over that contract in 2007. I am proud to say I voted “no” last Wednesday. As a matter of fact, I have only voted “yes” on a contract one time, back in 1987, and that was because I had only worked there for a little over a year and didn’t know much about our union.

I have a simple question that nobody seems able to answer. After bankruptcy and restructuring and buy-outs and new market analysis and the final placement of the workforce it needs to proclaim itself reborn and fit to start anew, is anybody at GM going to run this corporation any differently?

I have no faith that they will, thus making everything they say they have accomplished, or think they have, done all for nothing.

They barely made any money building Cavaliers. What makes them think they can make any money at all making a small car?

Mike M
Wisconsin, USA
3 June 2009

On “Danger of major swine flu outbreak continues”

I would very much appreciate your continued attention on the spread of H1N1.

You wrote in this article, “As of May 10, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had confirmed 4,379 cases of swine flu and 49 deaths.”

As of 06:00 GMT, 1 June 2009, 62 countries have officially reported 17,410 cases of influenza A(H1N1) infection, including 115 deaths.

Clearly, this virus has high morbidity although low mortality—all of which could change tomorrow. The CDC has stated that the real number of cases is probably 20 times higher. This has all the ingredients of a global health, economic, and sociological crisis, compounded by politically motivated decisions.

For several weeks, I have been a regular visitor to Flu Tracker (flutracker.rhizalabs.com), which utilizes international volunteers to keep track of the number of cases via news reports and/or health department announcements. Technodemocracy at work is another story in itself.

Vivian P
North Carolina, USA
2 June 2009

On “US: Growing impact of the health care crisis on women”

This was a great article. There’s just one thing to add: Because of the assassinations of doctors who do abortions

and the vulnerability to attack of hospitals, very few medical schools are teaching doctors how to do abortions, and very few doctors are doing them. The violence affects doctors’ ability to get life and malpractice insurance. This directly impacts the number of abortions being performed during the third trimester. That is, women who request services in their first trimester may not be able to have the procedure performed until their third trimester because of the long waiting lists at the one hospital in their region that does abortions. So, many women who are having abortions later in their pregnancies are not doing so by choice.

Maureen M
3 June 2009

On “The future of art in an age of crisis”

Thank you for your article, which I enjoyed reading. The University of Minnesota Press has recently published *The Frankfurt School in Exile* by Thomas Wheatland (2009), tracing the influence of the emigres on postwar intellectual life in the US. Your readers might appreciate a review.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy is a good source to quote; however, we also want to steer students toward resources on library shelves such as the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998). There is an extensive article on the Frankfurt School in volume 3, “Frankfurt School” pages 730-737; and in volume 2, the article on “Critical theory” discusses the Frankfurt School in depth, on pages 722-728. (Some libraries may offer limited online access for their campus.)

It is important for university students to learn to use these scholarly resources, and understand that the Internet has *not* replaced libraries.

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1 June 2009



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