

Letters from our readers

16 June 2009

On “Prominent academic offers modest proposal for reorganizing universities”

This is an exemplary article and one that should sound a warning note in terms of the growth of the market philosophy. In Britain, New Labour (many of whose followers benefited from state sponsored grants to go to university) abolished the grant system and introduced student loans. This in effect has excluded many needy working class students from entering higher education without having to worry about huge debts in the future. The era of Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* is returning with a vengeance.

In the USA, the corporate monster is now attempting to squeeze out all vestiges of independent thought and resistance to the lure of the market, and this is another example. The connection with postmodernism is well made. Certain younger academics subscribe to this vile tendency, eagerly rush on to committees where they can be recruited into higher administration, neglect the values of the past, and take no part in reforming the university and arguing for free higher education for all who are able and want to participate. At the same time, debt-ridden students are really hurting, while individual states reduce their student loan and higher education budgets.

These are very grave times and the citation by Trotsky and the warning signs noted in this article ought to be recognized by all.

Congratulations again to WSWs for such an exemplary article. The system does need reform, but not by outside oligarchs, nor by the latest version of Herman Melville’s “The Confidence Man” now resident in the White House.

Tony W
9 June 2009

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I have been a wage slave academic gerbil—both as a graduate student and then as an adjunct. This situation is disgusting and—to use a Veblenesque locution—invidious. That less than 30 percent of professors in the humanities are tenured or on a tenure track is a staggering statistic. Without tenure, there can be no academic freedom, and that’s why the business interests—who run academe—can’t stand it. They do not want to hear any contrary opinions in their co-optation of student minds and their quest to implant (Frederick) Taylorist notions—and all

the distortions of thought and language that go with them—in the heads of their charges. Complete quiescence and conformity is their goal—the acceptance of the status quo. Show up on time, sit down and shut up. This is the Prussian model of education, which of course dovetails exactly with the requirements of a factory-made Taylorist world. In this sense, the humanities present a real threat, as they seek to teach students how to think—again Veblen: that “idle curiosity” he talks about as precursor to intellectual advancement.

Can Professor Mark Taylor be serious? Perhaps he is, but one can only hope he has some notion of the high risibility, absurdity and hypocrisy of his position as a doyen of the postmodernists. The irony is staggering—for him to talk of “useless” subjects. Inscrutability is the first requirement of the postmodernists—their goal is to obfuscate, not illuminate—as Taylor’s penned gobbledegook clearly demonstrates.

To paraphrase Diderot: “Man will never be free until the last king is hung with the entrails of the last priest.” This applies to the likes of Taylor’s professor class as well—until his ilk is marginalized, there will be no solution. He is an apologist for the corporatist class, which has ruined education, along with everything else.

One can easily and readily understand why they would be against that “expanding-your-mind bullshit.”

Rob M
Alabama, USA
10 June 2009

On “Slain doctor’s family announces closure of Kansas clinic”

The Homeland Security report cited by Kate Randall is revealing. One section, for example, called “Lone Wolves and Small Terrorist Cells,” acknowledges that “lone wolves and small terrorist cells embracing violent right-wing extremist ideology are the most dangerous domestic terrorism threat in the United States. Information from law enforcement and nongovernmental organizations indicates lone wolves and small terrorist cells have shown intent—and, in some cases, the capability—to commit violent acts.”

The report makes clear that these “lone wolves” are not, as prominent right-wing organizations would have us believe, simply fluke lunatics. Indeed, the report classifies these extremists “the most significant domestic terrorist threat.” They may operate with a “low profile and autonomy,” but the DHS notes that “recent state and municipal law enforcement

reporting has warned of the dangers of right-wing extremists embracing the tactics of 'leaderless resistance' and of lone wolves carrying out acts of violence."

In other words, the government intelligence and police forces are well aware that terrorists such as Scott Roeder are not simply psychopaths acting in isolation from those who are responsible for disseminating extremist ideology, including the Freeman and Operation Rescue. Yet far from acting on this knowledge to protect us from these elements, the Obama administration has sought to use their activities as pretext for still more attacks on democratic rights of ordinary people, including the attempt to clamp down on our speech, association and information rights on the internet.

Naomi G

11 June 2009

On "The crisis of British Labour"

I recently attended a SEP public meeting in Manchester on the world crisis of capitalism. The three main speakers outlined the nature of the crisis and the impact that this would have on the international working class. About 100 meters away in the square was a demonstration taking place against the British National Party (BNP). If they all had just walked 100 meters to the SEP meeting, they would have learned more about the crisis within British politics, and why these nationalist reactionary forces worm their way into the lives of working class people.

The SEP's politics is based on internationalism and the interests of the entire working class, not just the colour of one's skin. The paramount question is this international unity of the working class. It was saddening to here that the BNP had gained around 16 percent of the vote in my hometown Barnsley. However, from reading the WSWS and attending the meetings of the SEP, it is clear to me that the only reason for this is the inability of the British Labour government, which serves the interest of the business world and the financial elite. While thousands of workers endure financial hardship, the loss of jobs thousands a week, and the loss of their homes, they see the greedy politicians stuffing their own pockets with people's money. And this is not just extended to the Labour Party but all parties that reside in the camp of parliamentary democracy.

Malcolm B

Barnsley, UK

11 June 2009

On "The future of art in an age of crisis"

I'm surprised that this piece makes absolutely no reference to surrealism and its close links with Trotsky. Surrealism as a movement is still alive today and has never actually died out. However, it does pave the way forward for revolutionary thought on artistic methods and concepts.

Other than that, it was very interesting. Thank you kindly for writing it. It's definitely food for thought!

Andy P

Australia

13 June 2009

On "Letters from our readers"

Regarding the letter on health care and the quote from Trotsky, I don't think it is humiliating to believe in life after death. I don't think belief in an afterlife should be incongruent to the kindest intentions expressed through socialism. Well, that's what I think anyway.

JB

New Zealand

13 June 2009

On "Right-wing rampage by Obama administration"

If you've followed politics long enough, you've seen that by the 1980s, the two major parties merged. Any debate/competition exists strictly on the level of candidates—two guys out to get the most votes for a very good-paying job with incredible perks. The ideology of both parties is essentially the same, and the candidate of either party would make essentially the same decisions given any scenario. Campaigns are ads, and the object is to make the ad(s) that appeal to the most people. Once in office, it's down to business as usual.

People don't like it. When they are stirred up enough, by golly, they can send out a barrage of very angry emails, capitalized words and multiple exclamation points included! So, we continue our downhill slide, knowing that America is pretty much in the process of closing up shop, and feeling a bit guilty that we don't regret it.

We'll leave soft-right politics for hard-right politics after the Obama administration, resurrecting the damaging Reagan era.

D Fabian

Wisconsin, USA

13 June 2009



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