

# Letters from our readers

25 February 2010

On “*Software engineer crashes plane into IRS office*”

You write: “The US is a country where individual acts of violence are a frequent occurrence. Hardly a week goes by without a school or workplace shooting, or an incident involving the killing of a spouse. It is not uncommon for individuals to snap.”

This is an arresting paragraph, and one to which a lot of people are going to take exception. The truth of it deserves a hard look, however.

Why is it “not uncommon for individuals to snap”?

One of the major themes in American life is the story of the plucky entrepreneur or explorer who “pulled himself up by the bootstraps” or “struck out alone to find fortune.” It’s played out in films, books, and general conversation almost every day. The implication is this: If you can’t make it, it’s because you are not trying hard enough—this land of opportunity provides everything you need, so to fail, well, that’s your own doing.

It’s very alienating, and if one is already unstable, this last push—financial failure—can be fatal. Never mind, we are told so often, the broader events and conditions at play.

Don’t ask for help, or you’ll be a drag on society. This totally backward mantra has been taken up by both right and ostensible left, both of which use phrases like “personal responsibility” to wallpaper over the fact that the choices we make and the frontiers we can explore are seriously curtailed, and not limitless as the myths declare.

The sad and violent situations such as this man’s are

an indication of a very ill society—one which rejects both the truth of the conditions, and which is actively ripping apart what shreds of the social safety net remain to catch the hard working yet still, “inexplicably” falling.

Christie MS  
Oregon, USA  
20 February 2010

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Stack’s letter is still available on Information Clearing House as of this morning, at least. I have made a copy of it, just in case it disappears completely. It is a hard and bitter letter. This man was truly desperate. How many more suicide/homicides must there be before the people wake up? A society cannot be healthy when millions of its citizens are being driven out of their minds through injustice and deprivation. Although personal acts like that of Stack in themselves will not bring about real change, the pileup of the dead must surely make clear to working people that this cannot continue and that there is an alternative: socialism.

Carolyn  
California, USA  
20 February 2010

On “*Obama unveils health plan ahead of bipartisan summit*”

I’m guessing that Obama’s not serious about this. This is an election year, and I see this as a cynical bid to win back the “progressives” in the Democratic Party, who are upset about Obama’s expanding the war in Afghanistan and giving Wall Street bankers the keys to the US Treasury.

If one reads “progressive” blogs/web sites, one finds they think that Scott Brown won in Massachusetts, not

because “Tea Party” types have had enough big gov’t, but because a lot of disheartened Democrats stayed home on Election Day. So the Democratic party will cynically talk up health care, and there will be the usual gay marriage referenda in key states. People will get worked up again. “Progressives” tend to be an endlessly gullible bunch.

Lloyd G  
South Dakota, USA  
23 February 2010

*On “US airstrike kills Afghan civilians”*

Gates, on the latest atrocity in Afghanistan: “The thing to remember is that we’re at war...I’m not defending it at all. I’m just saying that these kinds of things, in many respects, are inherent in a war. It’s what makes war so ugly.” Mullen: “War is bloody and uneven...It’s messy and ugly and incredibly wasteful, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t worth the cost.”

In an effort to better understand the Austin plane attack, I found myself this morning re-reading a statement by the *World Socialist Web Site* on the Oklahoma City bombing. How similar are the remorseless justifications of the US military and political leaders with those of bomber Timothy McViegh: “To these people in Oklahoma who have lost a loved one, I’m sorry but it happens every day. You’re not the first mother to lose a kid, or the first grandparent to lose a grandson or a granddaughter. It happens every day, somewhere in the world. I’m not going to go into that courtroom, curl into a fetal ball, and cry just because the victims want me to do that.”

This similarity is a stark warning of the character of the forces now heading the US government.

EG  
23 February 2010

*On “The Last Station: Not a film about Tolstoy”*

Thank you for the fine review and the exhortation to “Read Tolstoy!” I couldn’t agree more. I thought you might have mentioned that Aleksandr Voronsky, in his book of essays *Art as the Cognition of Life* (recently reviewed by David Walsh) shared some extraordinary insights into Tolstoy’s writing, including *War and Peace*—especially on Tolstoy’s ability to convey human

experience with such simplicity and depth. By all means, read Voronsky, after reading Tolstoy.

And a correction, if I may; you said: “*War and Peace*...spreads the panorama of the Napoleonic invasion of Russia, the occupation and burning of Moscow and finally the Battle of Borodino and the French retreat, not as a mere setting for the lives of his characters, but as a subject of the novel itself.” The Battle of Borodino was a pyrrhic victory that forced the Russian army to retreat, “allowing Napoleon to occupy Moscow and await a Russian surrender that would never come.”

Recall Tolstoy’s “billiard ball” analogy in reference to Napoleon’s forces and the “momentum” that allowed him to reach Moscow. First Borodino, then Moscow.

Randy R  
Arizona, USA  
23 February 2010

*On “San Francisco transit workers reject concessions contract”*

Recall that Gavin Newsom is a long time friend of billionaire Gordon Getty, and Newsom’s dad was Getty’s tax attorney and school friend.

Jeff  
23 February 2010



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