

Letters from our readers

6 March 2010

On "Military occupation of earthquake-ravaged region expands in Chile"

For four days, no help has reached Talcahuano or other places heavily affected by the earthquake. The army is present in this sector, armed and maintaining "order", which in fact means guarding supermarkets and other stores. But there is no water, no supplies. How is that possible, that a country can move 10,000 soldiers but can't help with the most necessary goods? Footage of TV channels show the miserable situation, people crying, stating that they haven't eaten in days and noting that they haven't been approached either by government nor local administration.

Supermarkets are open, but does this really help, when there is no cash, no system for credit cards? People have to pay for supplies in this extraordinary disaster.

Politicians now start to take advantage from the earthquake in finding or searching for the responsible...or showing in a ridiculous way support for the suffering population. Hillary Clinton brings 25(!) satellite telephones with her; her visit is widely covered by the compromised media. Michelle Bachelet as Sebastian Pinera are shown thankfully with Clinton, smiling, in sharp contradiction to the real needs of the people in the south. In the media, they start to minimize the effect of the earthquake, saying we are just a step away from starting all over again...

The arrival of 5,000 soldiers only to Concepción means a big pressure on the people there. We see pictures of soldiers pointing their rifles on people lying on their backs on the ground in the middle of destroyed streets. And Michelle Bachelet says in an announcement, that the government will maintain or re-establish order in the affected region by all means. The looting of not only supplies but valuable goods (like tvs, computers, etc) has to be seen in the circumstances that these people have lost literally everything, and do not expect a lot of help.

So says a father and his son who were asked by a reporter in the streets of Concepción, why they are stealing: "in order to survive, we have to survive." The earthquake took place at the last Saturday of February, so people are additionally short with cash money; ATM machines are not working, and in the one after another re-opening supermarkets they will have to pay in cash.

The earthquake makes the social polarisation of the country very obvious. Normality is re-established in the wealthy sectors of Santiago, but the poorer parts, where the damage is huge, are far away from normality: there is no water, electricity is not yet working again, hospitals are closed.

Kathy

3 March 2010

On "Obama applauds firing of Rhode Island teachers"

The reactionary policies of the American trade union leadership must result in accelerating the decline of trade union membership in the USA. The ability of the trade union officials to act decisively on the side of capitalism in disputes between capital and labour will decline proportionately—or possibly exponentially after some critical point in the number of members is passed.

Chris

Ireland

2 March 2010

On "The Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care study: Shoddy science in support of health care cuts"

Stunning! I have a few additional observations. Did anyone consider quality of life for this end of life period they report on? For the patients that are dying—how did they feel while this terrible process is taking place? Did the nurse always come when called? Were physical therapy or other modalities always available to ease the pain and anguish? What is the correlation of money spent on that crucially important but often ignored aspect? Is it even on their radar?

It is really a relief that some doctors are brave and insist on consideration of the main problem—poverty.

The health care iteration of reform sounds just like the Bush-Obama school reform—they ignore the terrible cost of poverty and demonize the teachers. So what do we have here as Obama's policy? Cradle to grave, take more from the poor to give to the rich.

And it is literally cradle to grave. Let's consider the time in between childhood, school days and death, that is work life. Here is another big area related to costs. Often wages of support staff in a small town are lower than in a big city. Pay tends to be relatively lower in small towns where housing costs are much lower. So maybe this has something to do with lower costs for health care showing up in reports. Now will it be demands for pay and benefit cuts for everyone who works in the medical field? Of course! This is what "reform" is dictating for workers in the field of education.

Debra W

2 March 2010

I applaud the author for this article, and the clear, concise exposé of the rampant anti-science that is tied to the reactionary bourgeoisie.

Health care cuts are designed solely to maximize profit at the expense of the lives of human beings. This article has brought that callousness into a new light. Bravo!

Bryan S
3 March 2010

On "Abuse of immigrant workers in South Korea"

This is an excellent article and highlights a serious problem in Asia, especially amongst the poorer countries. My time in South Korea allowed me to see and hear about some really shocking working conditions. I spent time with both the legal and illegal Mongolian workers and saw much of their horrid living conditions, many times with up to nine people sharing a tiny two-bedroom apartment. I talked to a dry cleaning worker who was offered a higher salary if he was willing to work 16 hours a day, sometimes more, 7 days a week with one day off every two weeks. Ambitious workers will attempt such work with the hope of making high wages, but most, including the man I talked to, are forced to give up after the first week due to physical exhaustion. In that case they would lose their salaries.

Workers on the south coast working on the vast ship building and fish industries would routinely work 14 hour days with only one or two days off a month, frequently living 4 or 5 people in a shipping container in which the heat would become unbearable in the summer months. The safety record on those shipbuilding sites was reported to be really low, with frequent accidents or deaths, especially amongst the immigrant workers who were given the more dangerous jobs.

Yet while the situation for immigrant workers is appalling, the situation for local workers is not much better. Workers frequently work 10 to 12 hour days with only two days off per month, and on top of that are forced into social outings with co-workers and bosses that include heavy drinking and last well into the morning.

The connection between work and education is the most disturbing. It is a common perspective that unskilled work is not "real" as both a social manifestation and due to the fact that even full time hours are considered "part-time" with no benefits. This forces the students to believe that only a college education from a top school will result in livable wages. Yet these top schools are so competitive that a student will study full time and attend normally three to five extra study schools. All told a student, starting at the elementary level, will study for as much as 10 to 15 hours a day. It is a daily occurrence to see middle or high school students coming home on a study bus from a private institute at 12 am, especially around test times. This is true because the general education system has a class-wide, school-wide and national ranking system that pits a student against every other student in the country to obtain these coveted spots in the top schools. Yet with uneven distribution of quality education, this creates an untenable situation, with students from smaller cities outside the capital who must study at this level with very little if any chance of success. It is no surprise then that the rate of suicide is the second highest in the world after Japan. Such is the rate of frequent occurrence that I was told to watch where I park to avoid students jumping out of the upper story apartment windows.

This massive pressure created by the ultra competitive education

system causes the working class to spend a large amount of their earnings on the private study schools. An average worker's salary is 2 million Korean Won per month, yet the private education of a single student normally costs 500,000 Won per month.

The case of South Korea is highly instructive to countries like America as they move to greater competitive, merit-based educational systems. I think the situation might be worth investigating further.

Oliver C
Hohhot, China
27 February 2010

On "Obama's health care agenda and the case for a socialist alternative"

I know of many cases of people in the US who need treatment for the very distressing condition, OCD, but can't afford it. It's unbelievable that an advanced society is prepared to let these people hang out to dry. At least in the UK, with a socialized system, help is available, although you have to wait months for it.

Phil
UK
27 February 2010

On "US Postal Service moves to cut 50,000 jobs"

Why is no one asking how an entity that supposedly lost billions in 2009, signs a \$1.2 billion contract with Northrop Grumman for the new flat sorting machines? These new machines haven't worked properly in 2 years, and currently run at ~50 percent of contract specifications.

H
3 March 2010

On "US telecommunications giant Verizon plans more layoffs"

I am one of the 14,000 people Verizon is laying off after 27.9 dedicated years of service. I will be left with no medical insurance. At 46 I have to start over.

Lisa S
California, USA
3 March 2010



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