

Letters from our readers

16 March 2010

On "THAW, United Way: No help for utility shutoffs"

This is an excellent piece of investigative reporting. I have always understood that programs such as THAW were essentially fraudulent. Nancy Hanover spells this out in great detail. The purpose of organizations like THAW is essentially to benefit the utilities themselves. She makes it clear that the state and utility companies place impossible demands before those needing assistance. The pitiful amounts being allocated say volumes about the skewed priorities under the profit system.

SJ
Michigan, USA
8 March 2010

Good reporting. You might also look into the fact that DTE has raised electric rates for homeowners by 20 percent in the last 18 months, since obtaining permission from the Legislature to remonopolize our electric system. The legislature has tied the hands of the MPSC, forcing it to allow DTE to raise rates constantly, and to push more of the rate hikes on residential customers.

David W
8 March 2010

On "Mayor plans to relocate poor residents to 'downsize' Detroit"

The US population, as recently estimated by the Census Bureau, grew from 304.3 million in 2008 to 307 million in 2009. This is a 0.865 percent increase in the US population over one year. And yet "downsizing" the city of Detroit, and maybe another 50 cities as well, is on the agenda?

How can it be that, as the population steadily increases, 50 or more cities must shrink? It's obviously a huge land grab for the rich, who can apply state power to forcibly remove the population so they can pick up vast tracts of land for pennies on the dollar.

Depopulation has always been a very profitable business for a few well-placed people. As I like to tell my friends, "Marx wrote about it 150 years ago." In *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 27, he tells the story of the Duchess of Sutherland's forcible expulsion of the residents of 794,000 acres of Scottish land, and its subsequent conversion into a vast sheep-walk. Residents of Detroit and the other 50 cities on the shrinkage list need to read it.

Charles H
Texas, USA
9 March 2010

On "US and Europe drift toward trade war"

Good article but its title belies its content. What you are describing is not drift but a conscious policy of disentangling the European bourgeois from its pre-Cold War policies and commitments. The hope is clearly to separate the fate of the European elites from the fate of American imperialism. Apparently the "continent's priorities" (according to your quote of the European trade commissioner) doesn't include Russia. Whoa what a teller of 'pork Pies' (in Cockney rhyming slang normally shortened to 'Porky's'). And because it isn't drift. And because the policy is now publicly acknowledged. A showdown is likely to be sooner rather than later.

Chris
Ireland
12 March 2010

That is only half the story. On the other side of the US lays China. America's bravado dates back to World War II, when America kept telling itself that it was capable of fighting wars on two fronts because it had military in Europe and Asia. In addition, it was an industrial powerhouse at the time, but this industrial powerhouse at the beginning of the twenty-first century has become a cottage industry. This bravado has now spilled over into commerce and is getting the better of America.

The WWII reality was that, if the Soviet Union were not involved with Germany in the East and the Brits were not involved with Japan in their colonies in Asia, then America would never have been able to have a military on two fronts, and Germany against America would have been a toss-up, a 60-40 toss-up with 60 for Germany because they were fighting near their home while America had to sail all the way across the Atlantic Ocean.

This bravado is fed into Americans with their mother's milk, and now they think they can take on the whole world, be it military, economic or whatever else. Ultimately what we have is a conflict between diametrically opposing political economic systems. On the one hand, a United States military-driven empire, which focuses on conquering Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, backs the ambitions of a militarist Israel, seeks marginal client states in Latin America and militarizes Pakistan, Colombia and Mexico.

On the other hand, China deepens its economic ties with dynamic Asian countries; increases its oil links with Saudi Arabia, Iran, the Gulf States, Venezuela, Russia and Angola; displaces the

US as the leading trading partner of Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Chile; and increases its trade and investment links with Southern Africa in minerals and related infrastructure projects. The contrast is striking.

China's global economic expansion is confronted by US military encirclement, diplomatic provocations and a massive anti-Chinese propaganda campaign designed to deflect US public attention from the extreme imbalances in its domestic economy. Instead of looking inward to understand why the US is declining, the Obama regime encourages the public to blame China's supposedly unfair trade policies, its "restrictive" investment policies, its manipulated currency rate and its tough response to secessionist movements funded by the US.

In the end, the US will not resolve its budget deficits and trade imbalances, not to mention its endless imperial wars, by pandering to self-described divine rulers, like the Dali Lama, and provoking a dynamic economic power such as China. Nor can Washington escape its profound economic imbalances by catering to Wall Street speculators and ignoring the decline of America's productive forces. Drones, military surges and surrogate puppet armies engaged in endless wars are no match for the surging investments, robust developing markets and joint ventures linking China with the dynamic emerging economies of the world.

As always,
Frans
Thailand
12 March 2010

On "The liberals' lament: What's wrong with Obama?"

Obama's main problem, as was the problem with Bush and Clinton and Bush before him, is the University of Chicago Economics Department. Years ago they somehow brainwashed the universe into believing that water flows uphill. Instead of directing money to workers and having them buy cars, clothing, tuition, and food as was the case in the million years before advanced economics, they insist, to this day, despite 30 years of no increase in living standards, that poor people cannot be trusted with money. Everyone has bought this lie so completely that it is not even discussed.

This is the starting point of any serious discussion about "change" and if you're not talking about giving up the fantasy that water flows uphill then everything you say after that is illusion. Every word coming from the mouth of Mr. Obama about change is nonsense. Every action taken by Washington is folly. Every law enacted is absurd as long as they are grounded in this fictional principle of economics.

PK
9 March 2010

On "Germany: Prominent feminist Alice Schwarzer agitates against Clara Zetkin"

Thank you very much for this. I think the feminism of a hundred

years ago was and remains far more radical than what goes by the name of feminism today. In addition to famous women like Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin, there are many lesser-known but eloquent writers from the period before and during the First World War, including men who were involved in the effort to help women achieve their full human potential. They seemed to understand better, back then, that it would not be a step forward in the evolution of humanity if women were simply granted the right to participate in a system that degrades everyone!

Kamilla
Canada
11 March 2010

Schwarzer sounds like a gross anti-feminist feminist, but "hysterical"? Don't do that, please.

B
11 March 2010

On "New England supermarket unions approve new contract"

I've worked at Stop & Shop for two years as a part-timer, and I have to say the negotiations were a very peculiar thing from a regular employee's point of view. On the one hand we had management very dramatically out training temporary workers to replace us, and on the other hand there was a total lack of interest in a strike from everyone I talked to. "It would be a hassle" one of my co-workers said; most said "I doubt there will be a strike," or "the same thing happened 3 years ago." I think everyone saw the strike threat as posturing by the union. Having a bunch of phony deadlines didn't help (they kept extending negotiations at the last minute!). I don't want to speak for all Stop & Shop workers, but I think there is a general feeling of disinterested alienation from the union and a certain amount of confusion about what its role is and should be. I think to many workers (myself included) the negotiations seemed far away, occasional articles in the newspapers and ignored printouts on the bulletin board inside the break room. Nobody really knew or cared about what was being negotiated. The whole thing was just an irritant, if it was anything. I saw some articles and comments on the newspaper websites too that said things like "the days of not crossing the picket line to shop are over!" and "how can they strike in this economy?" Though it's hard to say, it felt like the general public wasn't interested in seeing us strike.

TJM
Massachusetts, USA
8 March 2010



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