

# Letters from our readers

17 July 2010

*On "Imprisoned for debt in America"*

Thanks for exposing this grim new reality of the plight of working people in the US. I don't want to go too far quoting numbers here, but I think they provide an interesting backdrop to this story. In 1949, household debt represented 32.9 percent of disposable income in the USA, with constituting about 2/3 of this. In 2003, household debt was 114 percent of disposable income with mortgages (1st and 2nd) being about 85 percent (see here). One can only imagine that this situation is worse now given that we had a debt-fueled housing price surge that was in progress in 2003 and later crashed in 2005, and if one were to stratify these figures by wealth, it would be an even more desperate picture. To claim that these people were arrested for being egregiously profligate is entirely disingenuous. These statistics also illustrate the institutionalization of permanent interest payments as a feature of American life.

Mike T  
Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA  
16 July 2010

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Well this is troubling. I'm in the process of filing for bankruptcy for being unable to make the minimum payments on my credit card debt. Just to apply for a *pro bono* lawyer here in New Hampshire means filling out an application of some 30 pages, and after that there's still a six-month wait. I hope I don't have to spend any time in jail, but if I do I'll let the wsws.org know (after I get out of course).

Greg S  
Dover, NH, USA  
16 July 2010

*On "Oregon budget cuts, recession darken outlook for unemployed"*

A small, but perhaps important correction: Mr. Cordon says, "Many have spent over two years on the dole and are still unable to find employment."

I once used the term "dole" when discussing my employment benefits with some Europeans. They were shocked that I thought of these earnings as part of the "dole". The dole, to them, were things like food stamps and Section 8 housing; in other words, welfare.

Of course, unemployment benefits are earned, pure and simple; they are, quite literally, part of a worker's pay. This distinction is not clear to many people who collect UI.

The rules for accruing these earnings are rather strict and narrow, at least in California, but you can only qualify if you have worked enough hours to reach the threshold to qualify for earnings.

Last night on KGO (San Francisco) Radio, a caller on the Gene Burns program accused UI recipients of being on "welfare" if they got benefits through an extension by Congress. This is a slanderous lie aimed against working people (and their dependents). It's not the "dole" and it's not "welfare".

Silly rabbit, didn't you know? Welfare is only for the RICH!

Randy R  
CA, USA  
16 July 2010

*On "Swiss authorities decide against extraditing Roman Polanski"*

As usual the *World Socialist Web Site* reaches substantive legal and political issues in the Polanski extradition matter that mainstream media intentionally or negligently omit. Although it dates from 1977 the Polanski matter has significant lessons to teach us today. First it reveals that judges (in this case state but in reality federal too) have virtually unlimited discretion to manipulate substantive rights of litigants with no scrutiny. Rittenband could make representations about Polanski's sentence on which Polanski and his attorneys relied and then strongly imply that he would renege on them with no consequences.

Polanski was then left in the situation of trusting a judge who had indicated a legal fate for Polanski far different and far harsher than that to which the parties seemed to agree. The actual effect was to shift to Polanski the burden of Rittenband's misconduct: trust the judge and risk a lengthy term of incarceration or flee the jurisdiction and be labeled a fugitive from justice for life. Had Polanski remained in California and received the anticipated lengthy sentence he would have had no way to bring Rittenband's actions to the attention of the Appellate Court. This type of situation is quite familiar to most criminal defense attorneys. For example an attorney who successfully appeals a client's conviction may very well find himself on retrial before the same trial judge from whose conduct he originally appealed. The likelihood of such an attorney's client receiving a fair hearing on retrial is remote. The trial judge's prejudice on retrial need not be overt; it can consist of rulings on evidential issues consistently in favor of the prosecution which involve judicial discretion and which will not be overturned on appeal. If the client is convicted either through a plea agreement or jury verdict the judge may add on several years to the client's sentence if he feels the client has lied at trial; in most state appellate courts it is virtually impossible to get a sentence overturned for this type of vindictiveness.

There is also a vicious element of racial and economic class prejudice involved as most of the victims of this misconduct are African Americans or poor whites caught in the criminal justice system possibly through the “war on drugs”. There is a filthy counterpart to this type of misconduct in the civil side of the federal judicial system: Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 11.

This allows a federal judge to threaten sanctions against litigants and their attorneys for claims the legal underpinnings with which the judge disagrees or simply “dislikes”. The litigants are then confronted with the choice of continuing their case and possibly facing an unlimited award of costs against them if they receive an unfavorable jury verdict. Given the inherent uncertainties in trial work no competent attorney would advise his client to face such a risk. This means in a time when the federal judicial judiciary is increasingly dominated by reactionaries working and middle class claimants will increasingly be denied access to judicial relief from corporate misconduct whether employment or investment related. Naturally such prejudicial conduct is “discretionary” and not reviewable.

Peter L  
East Granby, CT, USA  
14 July 2010

*On “Michigan woman dies after Medicaid dental care is cut”*

Read your article on the woman who died from infection in her teeth. It’s scary. I am going through the same thing. I have severe decay and been in the hospital over three times for severe infection. I have Medicaid, but no oral surgeon will work with me. The doctors say it’s gonna kill me if I don’t get these teeth removed. What do you do? Thanks to our wonderful Governor Granholm. I guess people like us will die waiting for help.

Joseph H  
St. Johns, Michigan, USA  
14 July 2010

*On “Sri Lankan authorities ban student group from Jaffna campus”*

I’m a student in the university of Colombo. While one may argue that we don’t suffer the same hardships as these Jaffna students do, I find the conditions that we are facing to be quite similar to these. We are also not allowed to organize any meetings without the permission of the authority. Recently, VC organized a meeting and warned to discontinue ragging.

While I personally oppose ragging, I strongly believe that this warning was directed with the intention of threatening the students should they stand up against the government, especially in a situation when so much talk is going on about establishing private universities. VC also noted that we, students should be responsible for the establishment of these universities. According to her, students choose private universities because they don’t want to come government universities because of the ragging! This I find hard to believe.

There are so many problems that we face such as lack of facilities, lecturers and buildings etc. VC has no solution for those, when she addressed us she completely forgot to mention those. The system is so corrupt and spoiled. Exams, results... there are so many ambiguities and partiality in them. Therefore I believe that

we all face the same, common difficulties.

SR  
14 July 2010  
*On “A conversation with Judith Ehrlich”*

Sorry if this sounds a bit harsh, but Ms. Ehrlich needs to get her head out of her liberal ass! Other than Obama being the White House’s black poster child thereby relieving the bourgeois liberal guilt of so many, there is NOTHING that this man has done to improve the lot of the working and middle classes of this country, and that includes whites, blacks, women and anyone else you can think of. He is neither an innocent victim nor an inheritor of W’s politics. He is an amalgamation and affirmation of that ideology and the past 30 years of neoliberalism which he wholeheartedly supports. Obama is not going to be the president she thinks he can be. He IS the president he wants to be and is going to remain! This is a man that defines teachers unions as ‘special interest groups’. Ehrlich obviously did not read *The Audacity of Hope* nor does she fully comprehend who and what this man represents: American empire and global corporate domination at any cost to life, limb, the economy and the environment. Obama is hardly a revolutionary out to change the world in any fundamental way. He is a slick rhetorician who knows how to talk well and hoodwink naive liberal dittoheads like Ehrlich who still believe in some sort of thing called change, though they are unwilling to commit to a precise definition of it. Socialism or revolution, perhaps? Wait as you will, change is NOT coming. Only a fool would continue to put her hopes and dreams into Obama and the Democratic Party!

MBH  
Illinois, USA  
10 July 2010



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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