

Letters from our readers

17 August 2010

On "UN report reveals sharp spike in Afghan civilian casualties"

The campaign by the international media (which the WSWs has detailed so well) to justify the Afghan war is well illustrated by this shameful report on civilian casualties. You will recall the famous saying, "There are three types of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics." It is well known that the thousands of pounds of bombs the Obama administration drops on Afghans (and Pakistanis) roughly every month regularly result in dozens of casualties. These are nearly always called "Taliban insurgents," of course. Yet even in the acknowledged cases, we have indeed seen reported (reluctantly) far more casualties in a few well-documented air strikes than this report attributes to the entire occupation over the last half a year!

In all probability the Iraq "times 10" rule discovered by the Opinion Research Bureau and *Lancet* applies here as well. For every civilian the international media claims, there are likely 10 more, whether ignored or reported as insurgents. Even beyond this, however, is the issue of destruction of villages and towns and the creation of refugees and forced migrants, the atmosphere of instability and fear and the cultivation of a corrupt puppet regime which exploits the laboring classes. Deplorable "traditionalist" movements exist in countless other Third World countries, under one name or another. The US chose to invade Afghanistan and not these other countries. Behind this is only the most naked imperialism.

TJM

Massachusetts, USA

11 August 2010

On "Pakistani floods: A man-made not a natural disaster"

The day that I heard of these floods on the news, I had a feeling that this would be on the WSWs because the devastation did not happen simply because of the magnitude of the river flows. Every time I see an advertisement calling for aid to help those in need, I become frustrated that more and more people are being thrown into poverty and despair as a result of no rational planning for natural disasters.

I almost want to shout at the TV screen "pleading for aid with advertisements designed to make viewers feel guilty and cough up is not going to solve the problem. This requires a political solution to ensure that these people will not be forced into these positions of need when natural disasters happen".

At last, I have seen a quote (in this article) that puts into expression my thoughts.

"Infrastructure has not been planned to deal with natural disasters ... rational planning is impossible under a social order dominated by private profit and the anarchy of the market."

This is the most important point from the article.

Ben H

Sheffield, England

11 August 2010

On "Spanish government prepares to use military against air traffic controllers"

Spanish Air Traffic Controllers have been relentlessly hounded by the Spanish Government and by their company, AENA, for months. After a fierce media campaign to defame and discredit ATCOs in front of the public opinion, AENA suddenly walked out on them in early February during their last reunion, after trying to reach a collective agreement. Only two days after, the Spanish government issued an urgent Royal Decree Law (RDL) unilaterally abolishing the Collective Agreement in force and setting specific working conditions for ATCOs. Since then, the government has issued a Law, two additional RDLs and two ministerial orders to regulate the ATC profession, the service provision and the working conditions of Spanish ATCOs without conducting any prior negotiation with them.

The working conditions for Spanish ATCOs have changed substantially and overnight:

- The annual regular working hours have been increased from 1200 to 1750.
- Resting periods within working hours have been reduced drastically.
- Now, ATCOs have to work monthly rosters of 200 hours, 28 shifts within a single month. Sometimes not a single day off.
- Rosters now do not provide a proper work/life balance, nor reasonable levels of predictability and do not take account of the fatiguing aspects of shift work.
- Mandatory services are scheduled on days off at very short notice (sometimes only a few hours). ATCOs have to attend these services under threat of dismissal.
- Leaves and holidays have been suspended and/or unilaterally canceled and moved to different dates.
- Wages have been reduced by more than half.
- Operational decisions are now taken by an office manager instead of by ATCOs themselves. A good comparison would be if you had an

administrative office manager in a hospital directing surgery.

All these hardened working conditions have led to a deterioration of service provision and to a significant increase of air safety incidents. Furthermore, there has been no previous study of safety nor any occupational risks assessment before implementing all these drastic changes. This has led to a dramatic increase of fatigue, work stress and anxiety disorders, as well as sickness and medical leave.

Behind these unjustified, not negotiated changes lies a sudden large-scale privatization of airports and air navigation services in Spain. The present economic scenario of AENA is an insurmountable debt of almost €13 billion resulting from the construction of pharaonic terminal buildings in Madrid-Barajas, Barcelona-El Prat and Malaga, as well as the construction of far too many unprofitable airports nationwide only projected for political interests. The outcome of this disastrous management has been to make believe to public opinion that the ATCOs are responsible for their debt.

AD
Spain
12 August 2010
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As a Spanish controller, I've got to say that it is sad that this government defeats our negotiating rights with decrees and the threat of a military intervention. We had a labor agreement with AENA that no one had the right to change, because it was working and a law is not there to change an agreement. The agreement is before and over the law. It gives us better working conditions than the law itself, so is to be respected, as laws determine maximums or minimums, but you can deal something in between with your employer.

AENA is, since February 5 (six months), imposing the maximums the law permits without any negotiation. Two hundred of us are requesting a contract rescission due to the changes in our labor conditions.

Now they say we *must* make 480 hours a year (40 percent surplus) at the basic price. The problem of this time not being extra but basic, is that every controller is forced to assume it whenever AENA determines. When it was extra time we could choose if we wanted it, because personal reasons made you decide and organize your living towards this end. Now we receive our monthly schedule within 10 days before, when previously we had it three months in advance (much easier to organize).

Our free time during the shift has been also reduced, and less positions are open so they need less people for each shift, but the consequence is we work more each shift and with much more traffic density so we are much more stressed and tired. Besides, Spain is a tourist country, so in many towers we have a real peak season for six months and the rest quite quiet. So they are trying to make us accept heavy shifts during the peak and holidays in winter, which is not the legal thing for the general workers. But everything is being hidden by focusing on our large salaries—is this a sin?—can't we [negotiate] our working conditions, including our salaries, with our employer without being forced by the military men or the mass media?

We are responsible and we know that tourism is important for our country's economy, but this also is our job. We only request some respect and not being called blackmailers or racketeers at any time on TV or in the papers. Thank you for your interest.

Teresa B
Spain
12 August 2010

On "*The European press and the WikiLeaks revelations*"

I never quite know what to make of Amnesty International. Occasionally, they come up with something that is pretty good. But I can't understand their criticism of WikiLeaks for potentially endangering the assets of the criminal occupation of Afghanistan. Those people are directly responsible for aiding an illegal war of aggression against the people of Afghanistan. What is the great concern in protecting those criminals from retribution for their aiding the US imperialist war? Protecting those assets only means that more Afghan people will be killed by the imperialist beast.

Brian M
Florida, USA
13 August 2010

On "*A sense of unease: Tobias Wolff's recent fiction collected in Our Story Begins*"

Congratulations on a good review, Sandy.

When I transferred from an anti-intellectual cinema production department to a not particularly progressive English one (that, at least, gave me the opportunity to research and write), I was assigned some lower level English classes that I could develop on my own and include texts such as Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* and Wolff's short story "In the Garden of the North American Martyrs" to students. Very appropriately, Sandy has not done a "spoiler" for a short story that is not only still very relevant today but gains on each reading in terms of its important insights. The author belongs to a time when coming from a poor family into college education was not as difficult then as it is now. So, other reasons exist why tuition fees are rising making university education costly and access to non-political superstars such as Martin Amis in Manchester University become the norm for those who can afford it.

Tony W
10 August 2010



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