

Letters from our readers

2 August 2011

On "More than 5 million households had their wealth wiped out since 2005"

I work for a non-profit organization that helps those with housing issues. Since May of this year, we receive an average of 2,000 phone calls a month. Most calls are from people who are being evicted from their homes or apartments because they have fallen behind in their payments. Up to this point, we have had funding from the government to help people who are in these situations. However, due to grant funding coming to an end, we are no longer able to assist those who are in such dire need.

The reason people have fallen behind in their payments is job losses most of the time. There are many callers whose unemployment has run out or their hours at work have been drastically cut. Things that now wipe out savings, such as an unexpected car repair or a utility shutoff, are now commonplace. People cannot afford to put money away because they are just trying to survive day to day.

One caller was given a \$2,200 bill by DTE because they couldn't reach the meter in the basement, so the readings were "estimated". She is a single parent with two young children who is now facing eviction because she had to choose between paying rent or paying her utility bill so she can keep her lights and gas. The calls are endless and the situations get worse and worse. People call in and cry on the phone because they are so desperate.

And now, it is hitting the upper middle class as well as the working class and poor. Many people from wealthier areas have called in with foreclosure issues and tax issues. I don't know how much more people are going to be able to take. Our three-year grant runs out at the end of July—what then? I would bet that the number of households losing their wealth and savings is going to be much more than 5 million before the end of 2011.

Linda P
28 July 2011

On "Democratic mayor rolls out Detroit downsizing plan"

While reading this excellent article by Jerry White, I couldn't help but think of the similarities all this has with the highland clearances and the forced emigration of the people and heritage of the Scottish highlands in the 17th century. The people were forcibly removed/cleared out of their homes and the land they had worked for centuries (many died in a bad winter, exposed to the elements) to make way for sheep as this was more profitable for the land owning gentry, who lived in their grand houses and frequented the gambling houses of London.

George D
29 July 2011

On "Imperialist powers seek exit from Libyan war"

What would we do without WWS and WikiLeaks to confirm our sometimes vague suspicions of imperialist malfeasance and deceit? These are precious instruments, nay, weapons, to fight global injustice, racism

and war, the impoverishment of the masses, whilst heightening consciousness and class identity in a struggle for a better world.

The Libyan imperialist "adventure" seems to be, at the same time, a defeat for big power ambition at a time of mounting crisis in capitalist mode of production itself, and its most virulent form, imperialism, and a strong signal that the latter is so weakened that it can be fought back successfully. There are, obviously, strains within the "Axis of Deceit" governments of France, Great Britain and the US, fueled both by their failure of "regime change" in their own interests, and the economic downturn in their own countries.

In France, for instance, the unemployment reached a record figure, the UK is mired in debt, and the US is experiencing a catatonic "debt ceiling" political crisis as well as an effective unemployment figure of around 20 percent. NATO countries, in reality US vassals, are experiencing similar economic problems; for example, Norway, so much in the news at the moment, has its aircraft bombing Libya as well having 500 soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan.

Clearly, there has to be a backlash, as the cynicism and self-serving calculations of that "troika" are coming out into the open. Maybe another unforeseen effect is the "bad example" to other countries and their peoples to fight back against imperialist attacks. It seems we are on the cusp of a revolutionary turnaround. I may be ahead of myself, but the trend is there to see!

Mirek
NSW, Australia
28 July 2011

On "Singer Amy Winehouse dead at 27"

This fitting eulogy for a genuinely talented performer says much that needs to be said. The building up and tearing down of celebrities is an integral part of the system of exploitation, another distraction from our real problems. Personal distinction in any field, artistic or otherwise, is treated like a license to make the person thus singled out into a target, and, should they prove to suffer from personal demons, a scapegoat. The world is apparently too rough for these people, but they should have known what they were getting into ... it's as if their talent and their desire to share it with the world is treated like a crime for which they need to be punished.

Kamilla V
British Columbia, Canada
29 July 2011

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Thanks for your informative and thoughtful piece on Amy Winehouse. I am not into popular music and heard about the death of this singer. An interesting question to me is why some singers survive the perils of a profit driven industry, such as Tony Bennett. Did Amy lack a support system and Tony did not?

Richard L
Florida, USA
30 July 2011

* * *

Dear Robert,

I agree with the obituary on Amy Winehouse. This young woman was not allowed any rest by the media et al. The singer she brings to my mind is the great Dusty Springfield. They shared the ability to give a real emotional reading to their songs and both had wonderful vocal control.

Given Dusty's problems with both prescription and illicit drugs, alcohol and her lesbianism you'd have to wonder how long she would have lasted under the "shock and awe" tactics media approach of today. Probably not much longer than Amy.

Substance abuse strikes many across the community and it is an inescapable fact that who it strikes most are the oppressed and dispossessed.

Put just about anyone under enough pressure and they will crack. Everyone, in that sense, has a sort of predisposition. We are after all, only human. Winehouse was caught up in one of the worst of environments—the music industry. An industry run upon the fad of the day and driven by declining sales to keep their star in the headlines come what may.

What wore her down more than anything was the focus on her lifestyle rather than her music. She knew she was a great singer but rarely received the praise and encouragement she needed to help her fully recognise her talent. I have little doubt that her best was ahead of her.

If only she had got the chance to work with some serious producers and musicians she well could have produced something as soulful as Dusty did with her album in Memphis.

Best regards,

Tony C

31 July 2011

On "Born This Way and the Lady Gaga phenomenon"

I would compare modern music to the making of blockbuster motion pictures. An album like one of Gaga's is a product that has been planned by the record company and prepared by a small and expensive army of professional writers, session musicians and producers. Millions are spent to promote the album by the record company and ultimately it is shoved before the public on the radio, in the stores and by the media.

However much she contributes to recordings released under her name, Lady Gaga is a marketing creation and a sideshow. Her many carefully staged stunts are barren of any relevance to the lives of those she is foisted upon and register only as insufferably pretentious and wasteful. However much the media pretends, Lady Gaga is not an artist just because of the size of her captured audience or the garishness of her cosmetics act.

The watery, prefabricated "politics" espoused by Lady Gaga come off as another means of self-promotion, if anything. Nevertheless, they have been embraced by various petty bourgeois groups, including the ISO, which wrote, among other things: "[Gaga's] proclamation that she was 'Born This Way'—was rather profound coming from a woman who has vocally stumped for both LGBT and immigrant liberation*." It's good to know that one need only lip-sync a three-word chorus to be profound these days.

[* "Putting the popular back in pop," Alexander Billet, *Socialist Worker*, 2/24/11]

TJM

Massachusetts, USA

28 July 2011

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Thank you for this article.

In addition to her bogus avant garde attempts, Lady Gaga's music tends to center on sex and hedonism. Her first album, and especially its first hit, "Just Dance," goes out of its way to glorify the most banal excesses. In the song mentioned, the singer tells us, "I've had a little bit too much / all of the people start to rush ... Where are my keys, I've lost my phone ... What's the name of this song? I don't remember but it's all right, all right, just dance, you'll be ok, da do do and just dance."

The hit song "love game" is even more boring, with the refrain, "let's play a love game ... do you want love, do you want fame, are you in the game ... Don't think too much just bust that thick ... I want to take a ride on your disco stick." One gets the sense that Lady Gaga spends all her time in dance clubs, wild sex romps, and, of course, on red carpets. Who lives this way? "Love Game" is such a poor song that it would put one to sleep, save for the unrelenting thump thump thump of the beat, striking the listener like a cattle prod.

She has her imitators. Not long after Lady Gaga came on the scene, she was followed by the revolting Ke\$ha, who sings that she brushes her teeth "with a bottle of Jack [whiskey] ... 'cause when I leave for the night I ain't comin' back." The refrain is an all too common appeal to a club DJ: "don't stop, make it rock, DJ blow my speakers up ... tonight, make it right, 'till we see the sun light." Even Ke\$ha's singing voice has an element of self-conscious ditzzy drunkenness.

Katy Perry, too, is of the same stripe, peddling the same mixture of gutter sexuality, intoxicated excesses, with a touch of teenage sentimentalism.

Tremendous cultural problems here! A song about life once in a while would go a long way...

Ed H

27 July 2011



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