Letters from our readers

15 October 2011

On the global Occupy demonstrations

I attended Sunday October 9's Block the Bridge demonstration, protesting against the privatisation of Britain's National Health Service. The demonstration was supported by UK Uncut and the London-based Assembly of the Spanish 15M movement, among others. It filled most of Westminster Bridge, and there was a General Assembly held in the style of the Indignados movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in New York. I think it was organised by UK Uncut. It began with a speaker from New York talking about the demonstrations there and how good it was to occupy Wall Street. Lots of people were into the idea of occupying places, holding demonstrations attracting the media, having a sit-in at the London stock exchange.

The organizers asked the assembled crowd if anyone who was involved in the Barcelona or Madrid demonstrations had any feedback. Someone from the Manchester demonstrations spoke about the protest outside the Conservative Party Conference.

I called out that I had some feedback, so went up and asked to talk. I told the organizers that I had been to Barcelona and seen what was going on there. They told me I could talk, but before giving me the microphone asked me what I was going to say. I said how I saw the Indignados movement and that I think the "horizontal movement" idea is doomed to fail. I said that these demonstrations cannot reject politics or any form of leadership, because they will achieve nothing. They then asked me not to speak or to leave out my criticisms because they would make people "lose hope in the movement". I told them that I would not change what I was going to say, and they had no right to tell me to.

I took the microphone and addressed the crowd. I said the NHS is something we need to save and right now it is being privatized. Everyone was gathered here to protest it being taken away from us, but I have been to the assemblies in Spain. While they were very much about giving everyone a say, and while it was good to have people on the streets and recognizing that things are going wrong, six months on they haven't achieved anything and the movements are dying out. I said the organisers had told me not to say this, but if we are truly going to make them listen to us, we can't just occupy public spaces. We have to strike and make it a class-based struggle. We need to have conscious political aims and make it a political movement. A policy of no politics will not work.

There was some booing. A few people came up to me afterwards and said they didn't want to strike because they were disenchanted with the unions and thought the strikes were too low impact. I said how I thought we should build independent workers' committees. These discussions were good and a few people told me they are going to read the *World Socialist Web Site*. I think it is important that the party try and influence these discussions as much as possible.

CM
12 October 2011

On "Youth and families targeted for collective punishment over UK riots"

Dear Sir,

Normally I would not be in agreement with your politics; however, on this issue you have my total agreement.

The sword of Damocles that had been placed on that woman and child's head is nothing short of a gross act of inhumanity. I am appalled by the idea that a barely elected body and their team of petty bureaucrat cronies can be allowed to behave in this fashion. Turning an eight-year-old girl onto the streets is totally unacceptable. I would be interested to know what lobbying opportunities are open to concerned citizens.

On the subject of the judicial response, again this is nothing short of disgusting. You are correct that the tragic deaths (and individuals' grief) are being seized upon as a pretext to this gross overreaction. Is the response to mass breakdown of law and order to be to dismantle the basic freedoms that safeguard people in the legal process?

You are right that the "all night court sessions" resembled kangaroo courts, and that legal procedure and sentencing guidelines have been cast asunder. I have been horrified by the sentences handed down to otherwise unconvicted people or those of previous good character. Is throwing these people into a uniformly failing and overcrowded prison system going to help anyone? The fact that many of them are on remand on the flimsiest of evidence is also unacceptable.

You mention thinly veiled campaigns by the media to get existing inmates to attack riot suspects. Knowing our tabloid newspapers this does not surprise me. I would be interested to see if you have any clear examples of such articles?

Kind regards,
Edward K
12 October 2011

On "US steps up sanctions and threats against Iran over alleged terror plot"

"US Attorney Preet Bharara clarified that no explosives were

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involved and ‘no one was actually ever in any danger.’”

This has become a common cliché—from small operations such as the alleged “Christmas tree bomber” in Portland last year on out. You Are In Terrible Danger/No One Was Ever In Danger. Such desperate scramblings.

The only plotting going on proves again to be that of the US government officials. To what ends? The long-wished-for attack on Iran this time, civil liberties at various other times, fear all the time.

Christie
Washington, USA
13 October 2011

On “Ex-SDS leader seeks to herd Wall Street protest behind Obama”

Bill Van Auken, your concerned analysis that the Occupy Wall Street phenomena be shielded from political exploitation is necessary reading for the brave young who are putting their values in motion and for the old young like me who remember Kent State.

Your essay has brought recollections of a time when I was 20 and young and idealistic, and believed in total societal and economic change (of course I still do). Since 1970, I’ve looked for another “special generation.” We shall see if this is one.

Today’s 20-year-olds need resources like WSWS to guide them and give them groundwork for first understanding the nature of the problem, and secondly a solution to it. The problems are ubiquitous because capitalism is systemic. To detach from the capitalistic state of mind is essential to gaining an understanding about it because that detachment alone brings into play receptivity to true alternatives, and brings the ability to differentiate those alternatives from ones regurgitated from old bottles. Saying no to the two-party system is a beginning.

You are correct that the New Left was not a socialist program for it did not challenge capitalism itself but sought concessions from it. A good percentage of activists were middle-class and college educated and perpetuated that lifestyle soon after Nixon, Mr. Gitlin no doubt being one. Many workers then were Vietnam War supporters and Archie Bunkers. Minorities, the African-American community in particular, sought equal opportunity not revolution. The anti-war movement then, unlike now, was fueled by the threat of conscription, of being drafted and killed; some who opposed war on moral and ethical grounds tolerated capitalistic excesses and visa versa. The counter-culture, a necessary catharsis to decades of imposed repression and social conformity, proved both a vehicle for anti-establishment voices and a veritable gold mine for the profit system. Abbie Hoffman’s *Steal This Book* earned millions.

The middle-class kids of the New Left purportedly spoke *for* the disadvantaged and disenfranchised. On the other hand, today’s young facing a fearsome, unjust, undeserved future by those who continue to prosper at their expense, and who *are* or soon will *be* disadvantaged and disenfranchised, are speaking for themselves. Concern that their original and spontaneous voices be co-opted, exploited and re-scripted for political purposes is critical, as you point out.

(Let no one speak for you but you!)

I do believe, through twists and turns, sometimes peaceful and sometimes violent, the next world is just beginning and upon us. I think deep down everyone knows or feels this. I do believe the young people are sufficiently self-empowered to emancipate themselves from the spider webs seeking to entrap them. I do believe we have capitalism to thank for bringing about its own destruction. But a new world can only be a better world if it is for the enrichment and betterment of all people on this globe, and that can only be decided upon by ALL people on this globe. In due time, such a world will be created once this vision takes hold. In due time.

Michael B
Maine, USA
13 October 2011

On “Conflicts deepen over European bailout”

If someone can provide a paper with the signatures of the population of Greece on it which says that they guarantee to pay off Credit Default Swaps then, by all means, they must repay them. I am sure that Goldman Sachs has, in their possession, such a document because as far as I know, when you take out a loan for fifty or one hundred billion dollars there are papers to be signed by all parties.

PK
13 October 2011

On “Video report: Wall Street protesters express the grievances of American workers”

Great video. Its impact on viewers is unfathomable during a crisis period as at present. Every one of the 99% feel the pinch. Video messages penetrate to the heart and tell viewers to join in exploring an alternative to capitalism, which is spreading suffering in global society.

IVE

Sri Lanka
13 October 2011

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