

Letters from our readers

8 November 2011

On "Papandreou cancels referendum on Greek austerity plan"

Concerning Papandreou's now-withdrawn referendum plan, a recurring phrase wrinkles my nose, namely, that Sarkozy and Merkel "summoned Papandreou" to express their displeasure at his announcement of a democratic measure that would have allowed Greek citizens some semblance of an input to the formation of their own government's economic policies.

I'm sure this choice of language on the part of the mass media has not gone unnoticed, but it deserves some discussion, especially since the WSWs has picked up the usage without any explicit comment.

My first reaction was along the lines of "Who the hell do they (Sarkozy and Merkel) think they are to 'summon' the Greek head of state for a dressing down, as if he were a mere errand-boy?" After all, putting the shoe on the other foot, would Papandreou be in a position to "summon" the German and French heads of state to vent about their policies? For that matter, would Sarkozy/Merkel dare to "summon" the president of the United States for similar treatment? ...

Of course, a moment's reflection showed that my question contained its own answer, and revealed the initial flaw in my thinking that doubtless comes from having been marinated in the bourgeois broth for most of my life. My kneejerk reaction was that all "sovereign" states should share an expectation of mutual respect. But, of course, there is not and never has been any such basis for international affairs.

The very use of the verb "to summon" exposes the reality of a master-servant relationship. I may be summoned to court for violating a law, but I cannot summon the court to me for any reason. It is very hard to deny at the present turn of events that Papandreou is definitely not the master of his situation. "If the mountain won't go to Mohammed, then Mohammed must go to the mountain."

Marxists know perfectly well (and the WSWs has done a masterful job of showing) that neither Papandreou, nor Sarkozy, nor Merkel, nor Obama are in any way masters of their situation, but rather, in a period of terminal decay of the entire capitalist system, are its mere servants. They are all tied together, as Marx pointed out, by "relations of production appropriate to a given stage" of their technological development, involuntary relations that master them all.

A ship has a captain, an executive officer, and a boilermaster, all of whom are in a condition of relative masterhood and servanthood to one another in normal times. But with a 20-foot gash in the hull and quickly taking on water, their relationships are going to be intensified tremendously.

I hope I've shown here how insidiously certain points of bourgeois propaganda, unexamined, can condition one's emotional reflexes, and

thereby cloud one's thinking. Almost without noticing it, people can find their very minds colonized and turned to the service of imperialism by such simple tools as words.

CH in Houston
Texas, USA
4 November 2011

On "Are Obama and NATO plotting a military coup in Greece?"

There are two additional points that need consideration if we assume that the military shuffle was linked to political calculations.

1) A military coup would imply the immediate ejection of Greece from EU, meaning they would have to pay for their full debts, not the reduced part of the EU plan. While this may point toward financial institutions backing the coup, this would also imply that all the European leaders who might have given a green light for this would already have given up any hope of maintaining the Euro as a currency, and probably the EU as a political entity too. I could understand it for UK, and possibly France under Sarkozy, but for Germany or the part of the French ruling class that places bets on the PS, that seems less likely to me. What do you think?

2) The reason for the shuffle could very well just be that Papandreou knows he will need the military to crack down on renewed protests when the EU plan will kick in, and so he needs persons in these high positions with whom he has closer ties.

Yours,
OL
France
3 November 2011

On "Police raid Occupy San Diego, make 51 arrests"

Wall Street will go to any lengths to protect their profits. Judges are imposing high bail and denying the protesters their rights. I live in a small town and I was arrested for trespassing and spent three days in jail waiting for the judge. If you think that we have rights, think again.

Paul
Washington, USA
30 October 2011

On "Police attack Occupy protests in Denver, Colorado"

Listen to the major media outlets, from NPR radio to Fox News online: all of them are warning the Occupy protesters to obey authorities and conduct "lawful" demonstrations.

And if by any chance, the protesters fail to break the "law", the police will be happy to provide a provocateur to set fire to a suspiciously unattended patrol car.

Let's get one thing straight about these protests. The expression of fundamental rights must never be sponsored—or approved of in advance—by the agents of repression, namely, the police and the city mayor. Once obeisance or deference is elicited by police from so-called

protest “organizers” for “safety” concerns, the battle is lost. The police care not a whit about the safety of the protesters.

Here’s what the Marquis De Lafayette, American Revolutionary War hero and intimate friend of George Washington, had to say on the matter: “When the government violates the people’s rights, insurrection is, for the people...the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.”

And the playwright and social critic Oscar Wilde made this observation: “Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made; through disobedience and rebellion.”

The occupiers must design their own protests and actions: as they adopt a socialist outlook, the protests will become increasingly effective and draw huge attendance. Just wait and see.

Randy R
Oregon, USA
1 November 2011

On “Occupy Wall Street: The ISO promotes the unions against workers’ interests”

If anyone needs further proof of the danger inherent in the collusion between the ISO and the trade unions, today’s Perspective, The UAW and the “reincarnation” of the US auto industry, provides just that. Here we have a stark and brazen example of the intentions of these organizations—keep the workers in line, keep them poor, scared of losing that job they should just be grateful to have, and keep them voting Democrat.

Having watched these groups over the years it is interesting to see just how far they will go to do so—the UAW with its history of “no-strike pledges”, decisions to “ignore” the no votes of members, and at the same time withholding the contracts’ details from workers and lying to them about what the contracts contained, all the while “negotiating” a two-tier wage system (is there, pray tell, also a two-tier *dues* system? I doubt it) and handing back any gains won over the previous decades.

Trumka, King and their ilk have the nerve to declare that the unions have brought about a higher standard of living and through unity so many gains were made so you’d better keep supporting and blah and blah and ever blah—well they’re going to see pretty soon that those gains were made by the *rank-and-file*, and the rank-and-file gets riled when starved.

In every encounter I have ever had with the ISO, be it in person or through their paper, I have been struck by a few things—one of which is a distinct lack of knowledge of the “party’s” own history (facts as basic and recent as that they supported Nader in 2000 and 2004 are practically unknown by many)—which I can only think is by design—they have, as Obama exhorted, “taken the rear-view mirror off and are driving forward”. Only a group without principle and with as rotten a history as theirs would do such a thing.

Their consistent betrayals and backing of “lesser evil” capitalist candidates, their pushing of the trade unions as a viable way forward for the working class—even in the face of such outrageous behaviors as that detailed in the Perspective—*demand* that they not look back and try to distract those who would from doing so.

Christie
Washington, USA
28 October 2011

On “Whirlpool cuts 5,000 jobs, other US companies prepare for economic slowdown”

David Walsh notes: “In the US, part-time workers are often excluded from health care coverage or receive entirely inadequate coverage, thus endangering their health and the health of their families”.

As one of those pushed out of full time and into part-time work, and as a former local union officer, I think it’s truer to say that in the US part-time workers are almost always excluded from health care coverage. I note this not to nitpick but because part-timing the labor force is so very much at the center of the employers’ agenda now. The conversion from full-time to part-time majority workplaces is a vicious cost-cutting and union-busting technique that has become generalized in the US.

Bob M
Massachusetts, USA
29 October 2011

On “Letter to WSWS from Todd Kelly, AFSCME Local 1259 President”

...“if closing a library means your son is going to prison he was probably going their anyway.” Well here is an entrant for the Marie Antoinette prize for social sensitivity. When Marie said “Let them eat cake” in response to the information that the peasants had no bread she probably thought she was being witty. Historians treat the remark as a measure of the fatal gulf between the objectives of the existing political regime and the needs of the mass of the populace (perhaps not as high as 99%). Todd is an excellent example of the widespread disconnect between those connected to the regime of political power in the USA and the lives of tens of millions of American workers.

P.S. Perhaps you can explain why on earth anyone would put these ideas in an email?

Chris
Ireland, USA
2 November 2011

On “These are the Royal Courts of Injustice”

I read this article with much interest and noted particularly the comment by one WikiLeaks supporter about the abhorrent behaviour of supposedly progressive newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Independent* towards Assange. I have complained to *The Guardian Weekly* over a book review of Assange’s unauthorised biography; the review was a character assassination that made him look like a sociopath. So far my email has not been acknowledged.

The WikiLeaks supporter may like to know also that a journalist at *The Guardian* who incidentally is the brother-in-law of editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger co-wrote a book published by *The Guardian* in which he revealed details of the password and encryption software Assange used for the digital file that held the US diplomatic cables. As a result of this revelation, for which he did not check with Assange as to whether the password or software were still current, WikiLeaks was compelled to release all the cables without redacting the names on them.

I’m not sure why WikiLeaks fell out with *The Guardian* over the release of the cables as they had originally agreed but the newspaper blames Assange, in particular his personality and style of communication, over the falling-out whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Jennifer H
3 November 2011

On “Margin Call: A look at the parasitical one percent”

During the Lehman crisis, but before the stock went to absolute zero, Richard Fuld was using the treadmill in the senior officers’ gym. A vice-president went up to Fuld and punched him in the face. That has been Fuld’s only punishment.

I gave my daughter some Lehman stock. Like a fool, I believed in Fuld, and I rode it down to zero. I guess that one punch will have to stand as the punishment for billions lost and jobs destroyed. Fuld probably is still worth hundreds of millions if not a few billion. But woe to the driver who fails to use his turn signal!! \$100, please.

Rich
Arizona, USA
4 November 2011

On "The American Historical Review discredits Robert Service's biography of Leon Trotsky"

The question now is How reliable are Robert Service's other biographies?

LM
Illinois, USA
4 November 2011

On "150 years ago: The election of Abraham Lincoln touches off secession crisis"

This was a superb summation of the crisis of the mid-19th century. It deserves to be the preferred chapter on the topic in American high schools.

Alan B
2 November 2011

On "'Ostalgia': Art from the Stalinist and post-Stalinist bloc, 1960s to the present"

Bravo. Excellent article, and some of the best artistic criticism around, which I have come to expect of the WSWS. I would love to explore Soviet and post-Soviet art, despite the terrible haze which the bureaucracy threw over every aspect of life, Soviet citizens did indeed stand "on the shoulders of giants", giants of history and revolution. The most insightful artists could catch the intimations of this. Again, fantastic piece, keep it up.

Julian Q
3 November 2011



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