

Letters from our readers

20 December 2011

On “Obama, Congress back legalization of a police state”

It should be no surprise that Obama has turned our country into a police state. He's done more for the Republicans than Republicans had done for themselves. He increased the war, attack and kills citizens and political leaders. He increased the military spending, gave them more powers. He spied on anti war groups. He militarized our colleges, turning the campus police on its own students. He allowed the anti-Wall Street crowd to be arrested, without a trial. I hate to say this but he is another Bush with a black face on it.

Paul
Washington, USA
17 December 2011

On “Bipartisan proposal targets Medicare for privatization”

This proposal, backed by the two main parties, illustrates the belief that reduction in health care costs, particularly through innovation, cannot occur unless private industry is able to profit from these measures. Thus only through the incentive of greater profits can health care be provided for the elderly. This may show some initial success but that success is only ephemeral. Once a tipping point is reached then profits can only be maintained through a reduction in service to those who cannot pay. Additionally, as the wealthier seem to get fewer and fewer benefits from traditional Medicare, it will lose its support and wither away, leaving many with little or no medical insurance in their old age. The fact that one of the more liberal Democrats has a hand in this shows once again that neither party cares about the average citizen. The result will be a system of gold-plated care for the wealthy, minimal care for the poor, and an ever-shrinking middle class using more of their available assets to obtain affordable, decent care. As long as both parties continue to support a system driven by the profit motive, change for the better can only occur if people work from outside the current system and demand health care for all at a level the country can easily provide its citizens.

MZ
Maryland, USA
18 December 2011

On “Imperialism and the Khmer Rouge trials”

A point missed here is that the Communist Party of Cambodia had first adhered to more of a Menshevik strategy which argued that the victory of Vietnam would enable economic development that would benefit Cambodia in the long run, but that the goal of their party was not to seize power in Cambodia at this time. There was a major turnover in the Party in 1972-3 as the old line was discredited and a new party line came forward that Cambodia should carry out its own peasant revolution in national rivalry against Vietnam. It was this new faction which Saloth Sar (Pol Pot) led to power. That factional turnover within the Communist Party of Cambodia would not have occurred if the war had not been expanded from Vietnam into Cambodia. Instead the party line would have been more like the way that the Communist parties of France and Italy maintained "solidarity" with the Soviet Union after World War II but served as bourgeois labor parties in their own nations, except in Cambodia it would have been Vietnam playing the role of the USSR.

Patrick M
17 December 2011

On “Supreme Court intervention in Arizona anti-immigrant law poses threat to democratic rights”

I have couple points to make: first, about SB1070 and second, about the American Civil War and “states’ rights”.

If you live in southern Arizona—the old Gadsden Purchase—as I do part of each year, you would know that SB1070 is already virtually in place. Law enforcement agencies (Federal, State and County) feel free to “harass, intimidate and tyrannize”—not only the immigrant population, as Tom Carter pointed out—but the 99 percent living in the border communities, regardless of citizenship.

The entire region, from Douglas in the east, to Yuma in the

west—and I’ve lived and worked throughout—is monitored by DEA, Border Patrol and other alphabet agencies under Homeland Security.

During this year, 2011, I have been detained by US Immigration for questioning simply for engaging in bird-watching on Department of Interior lands, just a mile from a retirement community. I was suspected, no doubt, of being a “coyote” or “mule” for human and drug trafficking. My binoculars, presumably, were a dead giveaway. Or perhaps it’s simply the policy to get people used to submitting to detention and questioning.

All motorists are stopped at checkpoints on egress roads from the border communities in this part of Arizona; Jersey barriers and drug sniffing dogs are the rule. You are screened on your point of departure and destination, and further questions, if you exhibit any anxiety. My camper—my primary residence—has been searched without warrant, violating constitutional rights.

When travelling in Iraq or Afghanistan, I suppose you keep your mouth shut and obey any command the soldiers give you; you do the same at the border regions of Arizona. And the continual drone of helicopters patrolling the area is another experience we share the people whose land our military occupies.

The border patrol presume that motorists are smugglers and they don’t hide it; just part of their psychological manipulation. The encounters I’ve had are all more or less humiliating. If you fail to obey an order to remain in your vehicle, or emerge from it without permission, the officers can explode, as trained, to correct your error. I made that mistake—once.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) resource personnel stride into dispersed camping areas and collect vehicle license plates without a word of introduction or explanation. If you don’t cooperate in divulging information about your stay, they threaten to call law enforcement. The BLM field offices deploy undercover monitors to enforce camping limits regulations. Many homeless people rely on these lands as secure areas to live, surreptitiously. The Department of Interior is run by the notorious Ken Salazar.

I’d also like to respond to the remark from Arizona Governor Jan Brewer that “This [SB1070] case is not just about Arizona... it’s about the fundamental principle of federalism, under which these states have a right to defend their people.”

This “states’ rights” canard has some of the same characteristics it did when invoked by the slaveholding elites

before the Civil War. On the latter topic, historian James McPherson has provided a beautifully compressed and informative rebuttal to the advocates of state sovereignty in his essay “Slavery and the Coming of War” in *This Mighty Scourge: Perspectives on the Civil War*, 2007. If you want to understand the antecedents to this controversy, I urge you to read it.

Essentially, “states’ rights” was an ideology formulated and applied as a means of advancing slave state interests through federal authority—but thwarting free-soil interests by application of the same federal authority. Thomas L Krannawitter puts it succinctly: “[T]he Southern demand for federal slave protection represented a demand for an unprecedented expansion of federal power.” (*Vindicating Lincoln: Defending the Politics of Our Greatest President*, 2008, p. 232) Jan Brewer likes “federalism” just fine when it suits the interests she represents—right-wing ignorance and big business.

And what, finally, does the quartet of reactionary Supreme Court justices today resemble so much as the six justices, led by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, who finessed the logic for the Dred Scott decision in 1857, which opened all US territories to the institution of slavery?

The Gadsden Purchase, where I live, itself was part of the massive acquisition of territory that was acquired between 1803 and 1854. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, soon to be President of the Confederate States of America played a key role in obtaining this portion Arizona. There’s a nice irony here.

Tension; fear; and anger: working people feel it in this part of Arizona over these “states’ rights” issues. You all come down and visit us, won’t you?

Randy R
Arizona, USA
15 December 2011



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