

Letters from our readers

16 February 2012

On "Vote Socialist Equality in 2012!"

As a world citizen living in the nation state called Sri Lanka, I take pride in the candidacy of Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer for the US presidency and vice presidency. The SEP, based on the perspective of the ICFI, stands today as only force in the world to displace global capitalism by international socialism. US society, which is based on the principle of the survival of the fittest, is the biggest threat to humanity for it being the most indebted, and militarily the mightiest, nation on the earth. Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya are casualties at present in our beautiful world. There are many more to come. You, Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer, are the true representatives of the world citizenry in the US election this year. I sincerely wish you victory for all of the oppressed to overcome our death agony. Down with US bipartisanship. Victory to the SEP!

IVE

Sri Lanka

14 February 2012

On "The implications of the Obama administration's capitulation on contraceptives"

Proponents of this type of religious liberty fail to understand that religious freedom is merely a subset of freedom of conscience. The latter is fundamental to the free functioning of a democratic society. If you don't own the contents of your own psyche, you do not own your own life. Furthermore, sound law cannot be made on the basis of un-provable assumptions, which is what matters of morality are.

I have a right to try to convince people that a religion based on human sacrifice is just what we need to solve the world's problems. But if I actually commit a human

sacrifice, I cross a very important line. I have crossed from the land of make believe into the land of *rerum natura*, where real laws against homicide will throw me into a real jail.

If the Church wants to run a hospital based entirely on volunteer labour, and funded entirely with voluntary donations, they are still faced with the necessity of meeting current standards of medical care as mandated by medical associations and government regulation. If they accept government grants or tax exemptions, they are forcing taxpayers to fund practices based on religion.

It should be remembered that charity is a fairly recent endeavour for the Church. After the Edicts of Constantine, the Church went on a two centuries' long orgy of destruction of all things pagan—including institutions of higher learning where medical knowledge was housed. For centuries afterwards, medicine was considered an affront to the will of God. The first hospitals opened by the Church were hospices of the type run by Mother Teresa, where people received succour but very little medicine—and where only those without family and social support were allowed to live out their last days.

The charitable works we associate with religion were a reaction to the success of social reformers in the wake of the Enlightenment. They constitute a propaganda effort on the part of religion, and one that we as taxpayers should not be required to support.

Joan C

Canada

14 February 2012

On "Greece heads toward a revolutionary explosion"

I saw for myself the militancy of the Greek people

when I visited there in 1999. They came out in full force onto the streets during the bombing of Kosovo. It is my understanding that many starved there during WWII. Not for nothing is it called the Cradle of Democracy.

Vicki

Illinois, USA

15 February 2012

On "Letters from our readers"

I am horrified to read RD's comments that the Greeks had "the best working conditions in the world". According to a Forbes report released in April 2008, the OECD ranked Greeks as the second hardest working people in the world behind South Korea, clocking an average 2,052 hours per year per employee behind the South Korean equivalent of 2,357 hours. In the same report the US came in at 9th position with 1,797 hours worked on average and Norway, Germany and the Netherlands came close to last.

I understand the taxation regime hits ordinary working Greeks, especially those running small businesses, very hard and discourages people from setting up entrepreneurial ventures that might grow into viable, innovative businesses. Hardly what I'd call the "best working conditions"! According to the Wikipedia article on the Greek taxation system (yes, such an article exists), tax exemptions apply to those who earn income or part of their income from ships or shipping (a major money-earner in Greece by the way), from the sale of shares traded on the Athens Stock Exchange, from capital gains earned from selling property to family members as defined by law and from dividends received from Greek-based companies. To me, this sounds like a taxation regime that favours the rich and steals from the poor.

There is considerable tax evasion in Greece: about 20 million euros have been salted away in Swiss banks by Greeks as of 2011, according to the Tax Justice Network which also says that there are over 10,000 off-shore companies owned by Greeks. Again, this information can be found on Wikipedia.

According to a documentary, Debtocracy, by

Katerina Kitidi and Aris Hatzistefanou, which can be viewed on Youtube, many of Greece's debts are actually illegal and include bribes paid to politicians by foreign companies.

One big problem which the film doesn't mention is that Greece devotes a major part of its budget to military expenditures, apparently more than any other country in southern Europe except Macedonia as a percentage of its budget, and most of its military supplies come from (and are often forced on the country by) the US, France and Germany.

While it is true that civil servants in Greece enjoy enviable benefits, this came about as part of an attempt by the post-1974 government to reconcile the families of socialists and republicans who had been persecuted by the previous military government with mainstream society and to find these disaffected people jobs.

Now about the "best working conditions" in the world ... it turns out that only the very rich, those who could apply for tax exemptions on the grounds described above, had the best working conditions and they would have been a very tiny percentage of the Greek populations.

Jennifer H

14 February 2012



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