

Letters from our readers

23 February 2012

On "Drones come to the US"

Drones will make life even more intolerable here for dissenting people and people such as Arabs, undocumented immigrants and newly designated "terrorists." That an elected "democratic" government would do this, in the midst of a depression, is extremely reactionary and the mark of a totalitarian president and a totalitarian government... Keep tuned as we enter the new age of Big Brother in the sky with sudden death occurring anywhere, anywhere at anytime. It will keep us on our toes!!

Steve H
21 February 2012

On "Telephone industry pushes to end landline service in Kentucky"

The removal of landline phones in rural Kentucky could very well be a trial that, if successful, could lead to a removal of other utilities such as electricity generally, gas and water to communities.

It's also ironic that on the same day that this article was posted online, WSWS also featured an article on the Obama government's approval on the use of drones as a form of surveillance on the US population. So one day rural Kentucky residents will be cut off from all essential services and utilities and will only be allowed to use cell phones; at the same time, drones flying over them can intercept their cell phone communications.

Rural Kentuckians will have to figure out a non-electronic way of communicating if they don't wish to be spied on; perhaps they should use smoke signals to communicate as aboriginal Americans in the prairies did in the 19th century. That might have a good side-effect: smoke could jam the electronic circuits of drones and bring them down!

Jennifer H
21 February 2012

On "Video: Cooper Tire workers speak with SEP candidate"

The worker who spoke at the end of the video made it clear that what they are fighting for is nothing outrageous, but a decent living wage. However, if the working class struggle is deliberately limited to obtaining a living wage, as the trade union conducts it at best, it will fail. The reason is that the very definition of a "living" wage is decided by the owners of property, based on their private profits and, most crucially, profit rates.

Every dollar (or yuan) they deny the worker is worth more than a dollar to the owners. These dollars they rob from the worker are used to chase after more dollars—this is how a company re-invests in itself. The very dollars denied the worker are now being used to introduce new speed up mechanisms, automated systems giving rise to layoffs etc.

As Marx explained in 'The Capital' (Vol. II), it is in fact this constant changes in the factory, involving large inter-company sales/purchases (and not the money the working class spends to buy necessities) that becomes the more dominant economic activity. When capitalism can grow, these

changes actually create more jobs. When it is in decline (like it has been for a while), the same changes only cause more job losses, and the introduction of more low wage jobs...

Thus the workers must—to secure a living wage—place our struggles on a higher plane, that is the breaking down of the capitalist property relations and building socialism, the truly democratic method of organizing production, as the economic model to establish.

Thushara
18 February 2012
On "Vote Socialist Equality in 2012!"

I would dearly love to vote for Jerry White or any of your SEP candidates. But, alas, only the votes of US citizens are counted in American elections—despite the fact that foreign policy decisions made in America often affect everyone on this planet. In the interests of justice, we should all get to vote on these policies.

Your position paper, "The Working Class and Socialism", provides us with a reminder of why Marxism is different from all other forms of "progressive" politics. While many "leftists" and self-styled Marxists claim to sympathise with the sufferings of the working class, they fail to understand why Marx designated the class consciousness of the proletariat as the only creative force in this period of history.

This proposition of Marx is blasphemy to the petty bourgeoisie, who like to imagine themselves as the creative class. They have a little education—whether formal or self-acquired—and like to think of themselves as imaginative, visionary, intellectual, and on that basis believe themselves to be the truly creative class. They are also, at least in their own minds, masters of their own destiny if they have a profession or own a small business. Or they could be if only big business would stop crushing them in competition and if only big unions would stop demanding a living wage for their employees.

We see more and more leftists focusing their rhetoric on the destruction of the middle class in the wake of the economic meltdown of 2008. This is the focus of The Young Turk, billed as the most popular progressive news show on the Internet, and the Thom Hartmann Show. These pundits express what appears to be a very genuine and laudable concern over the erosion of living standards of vast swathes of humanity. But they also express a fear of the kind of social upheaval we see in places like Greece, where economic devastation has been much more severe. In this, they differ from the liberal bourgeoisie only in the extent to which they wish to redress socioeconomic grievances.

But the middle class is by no means a naturally revolutionary class. They are a mass of contradictory impulses, on the one hand admiring the culture and advantages of the liberal bourgeoisie, while at the same time fearing the their economic advantages in business. They admire the rebellious spirit of the proletariat—as long as it does not lead to genuine

social upheaval—while at the same time viewing the proletariat as merely a mass of uncultured brawn whose productive power is necessary to the fulfillment of petty bourgeois dreams. In times of economic crisis, their emotions all run to fear and spite and their politics are based on dreams of vengeance. They can be mobilized into, as Trotsky put it, “...a battering ram against the organizations of the working class and the institutions of democracy..” -What Is National Socialism? (June 1933) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1933/330610.htm>

Historically, the petty bourgeoisie (what we now call the middle class) has been mobilized as a reactionary force to crush any serious attempt at revolution in capitalist society. Marx detailed this in “The [18th] Brumaire of Louis Napoleon”, showing how the aspirations of the liberal bourgeoisie and its proletarian allies were crushed via a mobilization of the petty bourgeoisie. Since then, the liberal bourgeoisie has given up on revolution, and the petty bourgeoisie has been mobilized against proletarian revolution. They were the basis of Bismarck’s reforms, which Marx dubbed “anti-social socialism”, and they were mobilized to crush the Paris Commune. Trotsky has shown how they were mobilized to purge Old Bolshevism in Soviet Russia.

Adolf Hitler devoted an entire chapter of *Mein Kampf* to an explanation of why he chose the petty bourgeoisie as his base. He explained that they hated the proletariat as much as he did. He explains why he hated the proletariat: “Everything was disparaged—the nation, because it was held to be an invention of the ‘capitalist’ class (how often I had to listen to that phrase!); the Fatherland, because it was held to be an instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie for the exploitation of the working masses; the authority of the law, because that was a means of holding down the proletariat; religion, as a means of doping the people, so as to exploit them afterwards; morality, as a badge of stupid and sheepish docility. There was nothing that they did not drag in the mud.”

This last phrase, “drag in the mud”, encapsulates the reactionary core of petty bourgeois politics. They hate any hint of material reality that threatens to destroy the illusions on which they build their lives. For them, the proletariat, with its constant demands for higher wages and better working conditions, represent a material reality abhorred by the petty bourgeoisie. They themselves often practice austerity in the pursuit of their ideals. Why can’t the proletariat just tighten their belts in hard times?

As Trotsky put it, “Not every exasperated petty bourgeois could have become Hitler, but a particle of Hitler is lodged in every exasperated petty bourgeois.” – “What Is National Socialism?”. (June 1933) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1933/330610.htm>.

Because their consciousness lacks firm rooting in material reality, they are prone to mysticism: “Fascism has opened up the depths of society for politics. Today, not only in peasant homes but also in city skyscrapers, there lives alongside of the twentieth century the tenth or the thirteenth. A hundred million people use electricity and still believe in the magic power of signs and exorcisms. The Pope of Rome broadcasts over the radio about the miraculous transformation of water into wine. Movie stars go to mediums. Aviators who pilot miraculous mechanisms created by man’s genius wear amulets on their sweaters. What inexhaustible reserves they possess of darkness, ignorance, and savagery! Despair has raised them to their feet, fascism has given them a banner. Everything that should have been eliminated from the national organism in the form of cultural excrement in the course of the normal development of society has now come gushing out from the throat; capitalist society is puking up the undigested barbarism. Such is the physiology of National Socialism... The program of petty-bourgeois illusions is not discarded; it is simply torn

away from reality, and dissolved in ritualistic acts. The unification of all classes reduces itself to semi-symbolic compulsory labor and to the confiscation of the labor holiday of May Day for the “benefit of the people.” The preservation of the Gothic script as opposed to the Latin is a symbolic revenge for the yoke of the world market.” (“What Is National Socialism?”)

Today, more and more leftists are wondering if the US is “going fascist” or has already done so. They bandy about Mussolini’s phrase, “Fascism is corporatism”, without realizing that this is an empty phrase. Capitalism is corporatism. Fascism is merely a remedy of last resort when capitalism is in extreme crisis. It is not merely a totalitarian regime: it is a regime brought into power by a mass movement of the despairing and disillusioned—not just the petty bourgeois, but also the working poor disappointed by the impotence of the union movement and the corruption of the union leadership. It is brought into power by the very people whom the petty bourgeois left imagine will save them from the worst excesses of capitalist rule.

The middle class can be mobilized to the side of socialist revolution—but only if the working class steps onto the political stage and takes leadership in its own right. Hitler and Mussolini knew this. When will the left learn?

Joan C

Canada

18 February 2012

On “*A Dangerous Method: The Freud-Jung controversy, among other matters*”

I have only a couple of little comments to add to the letters in response to the remarks about Freud and Jung in your review of “*A Dangerous Method*”. I remember being enamoured of Jung myself many years ago, before I came to understand that Freud, for all his faults, was the one who had really made a genuine contribution to the effort to heal the damaged human psyche. For a real attempt at understanding the nature of myth and its importance for human psychology, I would recommend thinkers such as Claude Levi-Strauss and especially Suzanne K. Langer.

I appreciated the fact that David Walsh in his review acknowledged the very real help that psychoanalysis can offer to the person suffering from mental trauma. For an excellent elaboration of what psychotherapy can and cannot do, I would highly recommend the writings of the British psychotherapist David Smail, along with his web site, Social Power and Psychological Distress.

Kamilla V

Canada

18 February 2012

On “*British Agent (1934): Early Hollywood looks at the Bolsheviks*”

Tony’s essay is absolutely brilliant. Packed with historic background. So much more than just a review of an old movie, a movie which, by the way, Netflix does not carry.

Rich H

Arizona, USA

21 February 2012

On “*The death of Whitney Houston*”

I have always enjoyed reading your articles, especially obituaries of popular cultural figures, which are always touchingly humane, applaud their abilities where deserved without compromising on intellectual and

critical honesty that has been so thoroughly lacking amongst the mainstream media today. Even by your already superb standards, this obituary exceeds them by a long shot, and one cannot finish reading it without a tearful sympathy and respect for the deceased singer, and impassioned hatred for the immensely unjust system that has sent Whitney as well as many other talented stars before her down this tragic path. Unfortunately, unless the present socio-economic order is overthrown, we can only be sure that singers like Whitney will not be its last victims.

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21 February 2012



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