

Letters from our readers

25 July 2013

On “Inmates punished in California prison hunger strike”

Stop *freezing* inmates and put an end to solitary confinement. It was originally intended to protect other inmates from dangerous inmates, but is now being used as permanent housing for anyone who upsets guards and/or is considered “validated as a gang member.” Our relative is in there just for associating with Mexican mafia members, but after 3 years, isn’t that enough punishment; no light 23 hours a day? That’s inhumane. They can’t get family visits except through a phone call for one hour if they are lucky. I have also witnessed shivering inmates walking through freezing cold/snowy weather with shoes that were thin as paper and no jackets. I do not understand where our tax money goes. *This is inhumane torture*. Many of these inmates are in prison for crimes that are not violent and do not deserve such torture. Treating these men like animals will result in them acting like animals and severe psychological damage. Please put an end to this torture.

Lachelle
California, USA
22 July 2013

On “Detroit bankruptcy sets stage for national assault on public-sector pensions”

Whether coming from the public or the private sector, pensions represent salary sacrifice, i.e., a worker receives less money up front so that a portion of his/her wages goes into a trust available upon retirement age as a pension. For the bankruptcy courts to rule that money that has already been earned can be stolen from workers, amounts to theft. In the immoral world of capitalism, such theft has been sanctioned by the bankruptcy courts during private-sector company bankruptcies. The illogical rulings of courts saying that money already earned can now be taken away from workers is hardly surprising in a legal system that operates for the benefit of the wealthy from whose

ranks so many judges come.

Use of bankruptcy laws to steal pension money of government employees raises serious questions about the application of the bankruptcy laws. The federal government has been able to enact and apply bankruptcy laws in the private sector because of its constitutional power to regulate interstate commerce. It may be argued that the bankruptcy laws can thus be used against the commercial creditors of the city of Detroit such as the bondholders. Such individuals are engaged in speculative activity of a commercial nature that is part of capitalism, and their speculative activities fall into the category interstate commerce.

Pensions are another matter, however. Every private company in the world has as its primary *raison d’être* to make profits for the owners be their private individuals or shareholders of corporations. The goods and the services private companies provide are simply the means to that *raison d’être* of making money for the enrichment of the owners.

The goods and services provided by government have a different *raison d’être*, namely to make society a better place for the citizens of that government thereby enhancing civil society. When they perform jobs for the city of Detroit whether it be teaching children, putting out fires, collecting garbage or any of the myriad services that government provides, the primary reason for their doing so is to serve the community and not to make money for private individuals. It is difficult to see how teaching school children, for example, constitutes a profit-making undertaking. That is why the privatizing of these functions of government over the last four decades has been such an important part of the neo-conservative economists’ (sometimes called neo-liberal in the hope of making these changes to civil society appear to have a noble purpose) agenda.

If Detroit's public servants perform services to enhance civil society, it is hard to see how this constitutes interstate commerce. If this work is not done

under the interstate commerce provision of the US Constitution, it can be argued that the federal bankruptcy laws cannot be applied.

All of the above is mere discussion, however, given the role of our courts as the handmaidens of capitalism. If I could be as sure of winning the lottery as I am sure that the courts will do all they can to disadvantage ordinary working people, the WSWS would be able to vastly increase the size of its staff complements of the sizable donation I would be able to make. Alas, the latter is not to be, for life in the plutocracy that is the modern USA provides the kind of certainty for the plutocrats that no other group enjoys.

Diane A
Michigan, USA
22 July 2013

On “UK government set on deeper cuts to welfare”

Julie Hyland’s article highlights the ongoing dismantling of the already underfunded welfare state in Britain. For the last thirty or so years, the bourgeoisie has used their political parties to attempt to restructure welfare, switching welfare payments to themselves the wealthy and taking it from low paid/unemployed workers. Now with the economic crisis in full swing, they are ratcheting up the pressure.

There’s also no surprise that the Labour leadership is going along with these plans, as Labour has always defended the working of the capitalist system from the cuts through the 1930s to today. What resistance there is is going to have to come from workers organising independently, with a clear Marxist programme.

Dave T
UK
20 July 2013

On “US secretary of state threatens Venezuela over Snowden asylum”

I believe that this is the first song about Edward Snowden.

Every Call You Make
<http://www.everycallyoumake.com>
Calm
22 July 2013

On “20 Feet From Stardom: The ‘most incredible artists you’ve never heard of’”

Thank you so much for this review. I have long admired and enjoyed back-up singers, and wondered about many of them. I think the first singer I really

noticed was Merrie Clayton in the Rolling Stones’ “Gimme Shelter”. Her performance struck me even when I was just a kid. During that song, one can hear the approving whoops of the Stones themselves as she scream-sings the chorus. They were rightly in awe of her powerful talent, and probably knew that she was pushing a good song into greatness.

Clayton’s own version of the song (found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCyTqnizcvI>) is astounding—strong, beautiful and passionate.

You write, “One could easily complain that 20 Feet from Stardom doesn’t feature enough of the great music it explores. That may be true, but the film covers so much ground in its 91 minutes it seems fair to suggest that the viewer will have to satisfy his or her interest and curiosity elsewhere.” Indeed, one is inspired to listen more closely, and to seek out the work of these excellent musicians. This film gives us the names for which to search, and this excellent and thoughtful review will help it to reach a wider audience.

Christie S
Washington, USA
20 July 2013



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact