

# Letters from our readers

29 August 2013

*On “The American ‘left’ and Edward Snowden”*

Dear editor:

The *Militant*, weekly organ of the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party in the US—which ran the headline “Workers more confident in Egypt” on August 16, right after the army’s murderous attack on the Egyptian masses—told its readers in its July 8 issue that, “for working people, Manning and Snowden are neither heroes nor traitors.” It went on to state: “But there is no push for Big Brother repression. Spying by the propertied rulers isn’t currently directed against the entire population, nor is it primarily aimed today at working-class militants. The data-mining programs Snowden leaked details on are aimed at Islamist-jihadist terrorists.

“Down the road, the rulers will use all the power of its spies and cops, night riders, Pinkerton-style thugs, National Guard and other violent means in an effort to smash workers’ struggles—this is what class battles teach.

“Today the bosses are dealing blows to workers without having to resort to overt state violence. They are using lockouts, bankruptcies, government cutbacks and union-busting efforts to deal bitter blows to our wages, job conditions and social rights.

“Revelations like those of Manning and Snowden do not point a road forward for the working class. They foster conspiracy theories and paranoia that divert and demobilize us.”

Clearly, this suspicious ex-left group, which left Trotskyism decades ago, goes beyond refusing to defend Assange, Manning, and Snowden; its aim is to disarm any of its readers or diminishing circle of supporters in the face of a developing police state. Also, because of its checkered history on questions of security and government infiltration, the Socialist Workers Party is very sensitive on the issue of whistle-blowing.

Marty J

Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

27 August 2013

*On “How Egypt’s Revolutionary Socialists helped pave the way for military repression”*

Having visited Egypt twice in the last few years, I would like to add a couple of points. I was there during the occupation of Tahrir Square shortly after Mubarak was overthrown. I spent quite a bit of time talking with the Revolutionary Socialists. They told me that the occupation had set up a committee to run things in the square, as had occupations elsewhere in Egypt. This committee was intentionally kept “non-political” because, they said, they didn’t want there to be conflict. But conflict and debate are an inherent and necessary part of any revolution, and these committees could have developed into embryonic soviets. That is especially so if they had reached out to different groups of workers in struggle at the time. Instead, all they dealt with was items like sanitation, etc. This was a big mistake.

The RS also called for a vote for Morsi on the grounds that his election “would give the revolution more time to develop.” We see how well that worked out. Instead, it’s difficult to say from the outside, but it seems to me that there could have been a chance to run a workers’ candidate and call for a write-in vote.

Then there is the issue of the mass sexual assaults on women. In response, women have set up self-defense teams, some of which are armed. It seems to me these have the potential to be broadened out to become workers’ self-defense teams.

John R

California, USA

22 August 2013

*On “Lee Daniels’ The Butler: Identity politics at odds with history”*

I am compelled to compare Cecil, “who maintains a low profile and avoids airing any controversial views”, with Stevens, the butler from *The Remains of the Day*,

who also serves mutely in a house where world historical events unfold.

Both butlers take an understated pride in their ability to function as nonentities, that is to say as beings who have managed to subsume their entire sense of self within the performance of their duties. As Wikipedia puts it, “These philosophies of dignity, however, greatly affect his life—largely with respect to social constraints, loyalty and politics, and love and relationships. By preserving dignity at the expense of such emotions, Stevens in a way loses his sense of humanity with respect to his own personal self”.

I had this now archaic work ethic instilled into me as a child. “If something needs doing, you do it with no fuss and bother and no expectation of reward” was the dictum in our house. And then I met Marxists who explained that the idealization of selflessness is just the ruse by which the ruling classes rob us of our due. Alienation of the working class is a major theme in Marx, and I’m surprised your reviewer didn’t touch on it.

It turns out the real life Stevens heard rather more than was claimed in the film and suffered social consequences as a result of his political sympathies after the war.

While I never begrudge a worker his opportunity to better himself, I think it important to point out both the personal cost and the dangers of adopting reactionary attitudes of the ruling class.

One would do well to re-read Hegel’s famous master-servant dialectic from *Phenomenology of Mind* before viewing either film.

I’m sure the ruling classes would love it if we could all take these butlers as our examples.

Joan C

23 August 2013

*On the Australian elections*

Comments: The phony debate screened from the Murdoch-owned Brisbane Broncos Rugby League Club as part of the Australian federal election resulted in the profitable club receiving a cash windfall courtesy of the long-suffering Australian taxpayer.

The right wing Australian Labor Party promised \$3 million, while the Liberal Party promised \$5 million. The coming austerity agenda demonstrates the depths of depravity in mainstream politics in Australia.

Jeffrey G

Victoria, Australia

23 August 2013



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