

Letters from our readers

10 December 2013

On "Former South African President Nelson Mandela dies"

Thank you for this assessment of Nelson Mandela's character and legacy. I've always sensed something a bit whiffy about the man, and not just because he was once married to the odious Winnie Mandela, or that he presided over the ANC's betrayal of the people who supported the fight for equality and the end of apartheid by embracing a business-as-usual approach to running the country's economy and affairs. The tributes are nauseating. Somehow it seems fitting that the rock stars Bob Geldof and Bono, who smell just as bad with their obeisance to the past Bush and Blair governments of the US and UK respectively, are attending Mandela's funeral.

Jennifer H

Australia

7 December 2013

The first thing that came to my mind when I learned of Nelson Mandela's death was, "When will the WSWs report on this?" I knew that our eyes and ears would be assaulted by media tributes and outright flights of fancy that would prove at best useless in helping to understand him and his politics in the context of the anti-apartheid struggle and at worst sickening justifications for the current state of affairs in South Africa.

And they would come at us from the entire official political spectrum, with "progressives" in particular emphasizing the wonders of class-blind "nonviolence," as if post-apartheid South Africa (and post-Gandhi India for that matter) were some kind of validation of that perspective.

Thank you for promptly giving us this excellent antidote. I'm sure I will refer to it more than once in the days to come.

Lary M

6 December 2013

On "UAW considers dues hike"

Great analysis of the extortion rackets that call themselves "labor unions."

Many years ago at my work place, SEIU called for a dues increase from us low-paid workers. As a naive shop steward at the time, I believed what they told me about needing it for a "strike fund." This was because they had given away our cost of living increase (COLA) and frozen our wages for 3 years all for the sake of "saving" our jobs, and so on. After 3 years of rent, gas, and food increases, people were very angry because management continued getting a 10% salary increase annually during that time. So most people, expecting a fight back, voted for the increase. Needless to say, there never was (or will be) a fight back. And there was and still is no strike fund. However, shortly afterwards, we (stewards, not the rank-and-file) found out that the salary of the president of the local almost doubled along with the salaries of the worksite organizers (from \$40-\$70K a year), and other staff increases. We don't need to ask what happened to the "strike fund" dues increases.

As a sidenote, it was also shortly thereafter that the union president began to refer to herself as the "CEO" of our local.

Gene

9 December 2013

On "Governor and media rush to blame train's engineer in fatal New York derailment"

So locomotives are now PUSHING trains from behind? I am astonished. A decision like this could only have been made by a capitalist bean counter!

What is the first rule an engineering student ever learns? You can't push a rope!

Now it turns out that the agent doing the pushing weighs two to three times much as the individual cars being pushed, and is following right behind them at high speeds.

Anyone who's ever been tailgated on the highway by

a massive tractor-trailer rig will instinctively understand how wrong it is to push a train from the rear.

How much does a diesel locomotive weigh? Various non-authoritative answers were found on sites like Ask.com, where people representing themselves as railroad employees gave answers like:

"Modern hood unit weight around 75 tonnes for 2000 HP passenger unit up to 250 tonnes for 6000+ HP freight units like the dual engined EMD DDA40X."

"Approximately 285,000 lbs. dry weight [= 142.5 tons]. You would need to add the weight of 2500 gallons of diesel, 295 gallons of oil, 395 gallons of cooling water, and approximately 4000 lbs of traction sand." — A railroad employee of 12yrs. [The added weights can be estimated fairly easily based on densities.]

How much does a typical Amtrak passenger car weigh? Similar answers also were found:

"Date: 12/14/08 07:05

Re: Amtrak passenger train weight

Author: AmtrakPalmetto

Hi,

P42DC are 268,000 lbs [= 134 tons]

Baggage Cars are 67 tons loaded, 67 tons empty

Superliner Is are 80 tons loaded, 80 tons empty

Syperliner IIs are 85 tons loaded, 85 tons empty

Amfleet Is are 58 tons loaded, 58 tons empty

Amfleet IIS are 57 tons loaded, 57 tons empty

Horizons are 57 tons loaded, 57 tons empty

Viewliners are 65 tons loaded, 65 tons empty

Auto Carriers are 82 tons loaded, 42 tons empty"

Another writes:

"The weight of passengers is sufficiently small as a percent of the weight of a passenger rail car that it is usually disregarded."

"Weights of passenger train cars vary considerably. Average weights were as follows:

standard coaches, 61.14 tons;

baggage, express and other non-passenger cars, 53.00 tons;

dining cars, 83.11 tons;

club, lounge and observation cars, 76.49 tons;

parlor cars, 71.01 tons;

mail cars, 61.81 tons;

Pullman sleeping cars, 82.45 tons, ..."

So, on average, a locomotive weight of 150 tons, and

a standard coach weight of 60 tons each might be about right for estimating purposes.

How high would a wheelset have to rise above the track to no longer be retained laterally by the wheel flange?

There is apparently no standard rail and wheel profile; designs vary around the world. It's also proving hard to find concrete data on profile dimensions.

I finally found an online Engineering Standard [for] Rolling Stock, called CRN RS 005, "Minimum Operating Requirements For Rail-Bound Infrastructure Maintenance Vehicles," Version: 1.1 of December 2011 giving the "standard ANZR profile" for a railroad wheel (It is also called the "ANZR-1 profile"). The online version of this standard is not too explicit about where it is considered authoritative, but from the "ANZ" in the profile name, it would appear to be from Australia/New Zealand. A diagram on page 12 shows a flange height of 28mm (about 1.1 inches) above the rolling diameter of the wheel.

Summary of the outrages: A 150-ton locomotive is pushing -- /pushing!/ -- ahead of itself, at upwards of 80 miles per hour, a string of rail passenger cars weighing about 60 tons each, where only one-inch-high wheel flanges separate the passengers from the icy waters of New York Harbor. And this is based on a new, not worn, wheel and rail profile shape; rails and wheels do wear out, after all, and need to be replaced whenever the degree of wear exceeds maintenance standards—a highly questionable assumption in this age of ruthless cost-cutting.

All this just to avoid reconfiguring the train for the trip back whence it came.

Remember, only a single wheel flange needs to jump the track to derail the entire train.

CH

Texas, USA

4 December 2013



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact