

# Letters

## A socialist nude centerfold?

Editor:

"You should see what you're missing" (ITT, Nov. 29) gives its centerfold uncritically to well-meaning TV writers. But never asks why—why most people watch "pap" instead of public TV or shooting their TV sets; or why we would be culturally or politically better off if professional TV writers were free to use TV as their personal "artistic medium," or whether TV could have "feelings and passion" unless this is desired by the owners and advertisers (and why they would desire this).

You shouldn't write about "culture" with your right hand and at the same time write about politics with the left. Or are we being prepared for an "artistic" independent socialist female nude centerfold?

Good luck, nonetheless.

—David Webster  
Cambridge, Mass.

## Boxcars without engines

Editor:

One can no more judge what unions do by comparing union and non-union wage rates than one can judge what locomotives do by comparing their rate of travel with that of the trains they pull. If David Moberg saw a box-car going along just as fast as the engine that preceded it, I hope he would not conclude that box-cars could get around just as well without engines. But people unfortunately do come to that sort of conclusion from the sort of comparison of union and non-union pay rates that Moberg gives in "Labor movement—stuck but stirring" (ITT, Nov. 29).

An IWW cartoon showed these wage relations clearly. It depicted a union man, carrying a non-unionist on his back, and pushing a wheelbarrow in which sat a man whose boss paid a dime above union scale to discourage unionism. Its moral was that all would get along faster if the two riders got off and pushed. Throughout the same general culture pay rates from below minimum to top scale are so tied together by historically developed notions of living standards, that one can come a bit closer to estimating what unions do by comparing these living standards in lands where unions are active and in lands where they are not. That approach also gives us some idea of what misery we would be in if the growth of industry had not been tempered by the growth of unions.

—Fred Thompson  
Chicago

## Socialism without gobbledegook

Editor:

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The New Republic is taken over by Singer Sewing Machine and now the Nation is taken over by Rockefeller money, so nothing is left that is not sectarian or phony, and the new newspaper should really get a good reception. I will recommend it highly, I know. And I think it should be made plain that it is possible to write about socialism without gobbledegook.

—Virginia Durr  
Wetumpka, Ala.

## But we know what we like

Editor:

I hope in your arts section that you will go beyond specific coverage of art events and persons and deal with the politics of culture. This should set up a lively exchange from your readers.

Questions of interest to artists/rebels/consumers:

•Are we recovering from the cultural purge of the 50's? Is that era responsible for the cultural alienation of the labor movement from artists and intellectuals? Is the women's movement mending the "culture gap" between art and the left?

•Why aren't "fine" artists organized? Will they forever be captive to the "art establishment"? When will they be able to make an honest living? Why are young musicians so anti-union? Is the musicians union trying to adapt to a new generation's needs? Let's hear it from the Musicians Union and from Actors Equity.

•Does art need democracy? Can an esthetic develop without a leisure class? Without a middle class? Without a free press? Without non-aligned critics (critics who serve art before politics)? Is there an authentic esthetic in China? In Russia? Can you describe it? What's happening (besides film) in countries where artists have more state support, like Sweden, Germany, Israel? If we subsidize our artists, will they bite our hand? (see Ingmar Bergman)

•Does the life support of art necessarily proceed from "the system"? History seems to say so; medieval art served the Church, the Renaissance served the princes, and most employed American artists serve commerce. American capitalism produced graphic art, architecture, design and film. Even our anti-art and popular and comic art comes from commercial inspiration (pop, op and objective art, animation, computer art and electronic music). The only American esthetic (with a major, universal impact) that owes nothing to capitalist values is the black esthetic, as reflected in its musical and dramatic art forms.

•Does revolutionary art have to be collective? Can artists brought up under "individualism" think collectively? Are artists inherently elitist?

Mary Beth Guinan  
Chicago

## Give it back to the pigs

Editor:

Your editorial on the swine flu vaccination program misses a very obvious solution to the controversy. There may be some doubt as to the susceptibility of swine (as pigs prefer to be called) to the ailment. Since there are fewer swine in this country than humans and since their flesh is worth more than human flesh in the open market of this society, the answer is to inoculate all of the swine. A massive program should be immediately instituted to inoculate the paltry few millions of swine in this country. Trained teams of medical personnel could be dispatched hither and yon across the land to vaccinate the animals.

Of course those swine that were wealthy enough to afford the shot from the veterinarian of their choice should be allowed that option. But in the case of swine without resources, the government should be the pig sticker of last resort. Television crews could be sent out to film the proceedings for viewing on the evening news and prominent pigs could be interviewed for their opinions of the program. Perhaps it is utopian to believe that all pigs would allow themselves to be guinea humans in the experiment, but perhaps enough would stem the alleged epidemic. And besides, it is far less utopian than believing that 200 million humans would allow themselves to be guinea pigs in a project to stem a disease that may or may not exist.

—Jacques Couchon  
Paradise, Mont.

## Trying to do the same

Editor:

I am very encouraged by the first few issues of *In These Times*. Wesleyan socialists are effectively spreading your newspaper to the four corners of our small campus and I'm sure you will find a substantial readership here.

Also, please share the enclosed copy of our own newspaper amongst your staff. Perhaps you will be encouraged to know that we are trying to do some of the same things here in Middletown that you hope to do nationwide.

—Andy Polsky  
Assistant Editor, *Hermes*  
Wesleyan University  
Middletown, Conn.

## A revolutionary situation in Italy?

Editor:

"A Leftwing Government Is Not Enough" (ITT, Nov. 29) contains inaccuracies as well as distortions that will prevent an objective judgment regarding developments in Italy. I was surprised to find this extraordinary Independent Socialist Newspaper present the first major piece on Italy from the viewpoint of the Proletarian Unity party (PDUP), a tiny left splinter, which is in considerable disarray ideologically and organizationally and which represents only its own 40,000 members. Far better first to give an overview of the complicated and extremely delicate political situation of the Italian socialist working class movement, and then also point out the position of the PDUP.

The millions of Italian Communist party (PCI) members and voters participate in the most highly sophisticated political-educational processes. They read and study communist and socialist publications on a large scale—news-papers (daily and weekly), magazines, books. There's a continuous dialogue in their own ranks as well as with the Christian Democrats. It is impossible at this stage of Italian history to stop the flow of dialogue on all major questions; the position of the PCI is too widely known. And it is quite disappointing to read that a leader of the small splinter party, the PDUP, G. Magoni, can present a distorted and untrue picture of developments without comment by the author or editors.

Examples: 1) Magoni is quoted as saying that to avoid the army and police force from turning against the revolution, as in Chile, the PDUP is organizing a democratic movement among the soldiers and police, while "the PCI doesn't like this. They prefer to negotiate with the army and police from the top." But the work of PCI cells within the armed forces has been discussed openly in the communist press, even while negotiations are also proceeding at the top.

2) Magoni complains that the trouble with the PCI policy is that it won't prepare the people for the kind of struggle necessary to achieve independence from the U.S.; because the PCI fears a similar coup in Italy as was perpetrated by the U.S. in Chile in 1973, the Communists don't press too hard. "But it's like giving in to blackmail," Magoni says. "Support for the deflationary policy will mean higher prices for utilities and the like, higher taxes, and lower wages."

Who in Italy is today more aware of this situation than the PCI? It is fighting with the working class to relieve the poor of the pressure of the impossible tax situation, and shift the burden to those who can pay; it is fighting against the rise in utilities; its members in the trade unions are the most disciplined contingents in carrying out the strike actions of their respective unions, whether it be for higher wages or for shorter working hours, or other important demands.

The fundamental question from which Magoni shied away is whether there is a revolutionary situation prevalent now in Italy. The PCI estimates that a revolutionary situation cannot develop without the active participation of the three major forces in the country: the Christian Democratic masses, the Socialists and the Communists. The PCI's entire program is geared toward creating a situation in which these forces will work together and fight together for the fundamental change in society that the PCI teaches must eventually take place.

—E.S. Berto  
Venice, Calif.

Editor's note: We did publish an article on the PCI in the issue prior to the one discussed here. See "The Left in Italy's Crisis" (ITT, Nov. 21-28).





Joshua Dressler

# Death penalty is class punishment; Socialists must join opposition



By the time this column reaches your eyes the macabre spectacle going on in Utah may have reached its final climax. Gary Gilmore may have gotten what he, and apparently most Utahans, say they want—his extermination. Although the fate of Gilmore appears sealed, the spectacle of mass executions is only beginning. More than 592 people sit on death rows throughout the nation, awaiting death in the various ways our society has devised. More significantly, the population of these death islands are growing weekly at a startling rate.

Nobody has been executed in the United States since June 2, 1967. There is a special irony in Gilmore's being the first human sacrifice since then. Gilmore is a white male; the murder he perpetrated was particularly vicious. He exudes almost as much warmth as Richard Nixon. Many will point to these facts to support their thesis that the death penalty is a valid governmental act. In fact, however, Gilmore's place on death row and his membership in the roles of those executed support just the opposite conclusion.

Statistics are often kept regarding those awaiting death. Much has been made of the fact that a grossly disproportionate number of non-whites are executed. It was partially this reality that led the Supreme Court in 1972, in the case of *Furman v. Georgia* to declare invalid virtually all death penalty statutes then in existence. The court noted that juries had been given unlimited discretion to decide which murderers would be executed and which would be given life imprisonment. The Court pointed to the fact that certain groups seemed to be singled out by juries for the special punishment of death, most notably "racial" minorities.

This was true, of course, but it misses

the main point. Race is not the overriding factor that explains who ends up on death row. After *Furman* was decided, 35 states rewrote their death statutes to take unbridled discretion away from juries. Nonetheless, the racial complexion of death row has not changed. Prior to *Furman*, a staggering 53 percent of those awaiting death were non-white. Since the Court decision and the promulgation of the non-arbitrary statutes, 51 percent of those sentenced to death are non-white.

The point regarding the death penalty, then, is less the racial aspect, or even the arbitrary character of the system by which we select the honored members of the row. No matter what death penalty statute is devised, the key strand that draws together all those awaiting death will remain the same: their class origin. The death penalty is a class weapon, a class punishment. In California, for example, of the 61 people presently awaiting death, 48 percent are non-white, but 100 percent were either unemployed or working at very low wages when the alleged killings occurred.

As long, therefore, as we retain the social system of capitalism, death rows will necessarily be frequented almost entirely by the poor. Capitalism breeds all of the factors that cause people to turn to violence: unemployment, "escape" through drugs, and the deep frustration of seeing a select few living handsomely at the apparent expense of the many.

The class aspect goes deeper than the fact that poor people tend to kill more frequently. Class distinctions also tend to cause police to ignore the crimes of the non-poor, and prosecutors to charge wealthy murderers with lesser crimes (such as manslaughter or assault).

Furthermore, poverty expresses itself

in the judicial process. The not-so-funny joke of "how much justice can you afford?" is all too close to reality. Those who can afford counsel of their choice tend to be convicted of murder less often than those who must accept the assistance of the over-worked Public Defender. Likewise, among those convicted of murder, as Texas figures indicate in one recent period, 31 of the 39 who were represented by court-appointed counsel received the death penalty. Among those who could afford paid counsel, only 11 of 20 were given the heavier sentence.

This is why socialists must fight the death penalty in the United States. The Supreme Court ruled in July 1976 that the death penalty for murder was not, in itself, "cruel and unusual punishment," yet many legal and non-legal avenues remain untraveled.

First, the court declared unconstitutional various state laws that failed to allow convicted defendants to argue mitigating circumstances that might cause a jury not to order an execution. Court battles in many states are now challenging state laws that seem to fail in this respect. In the long run, however, this legal avenue is a dead end. If successful, these court battles will save the lives of those now awaiting death, an important victory, but the states will simply rewrite their statutes and resume executions of others at a later date.

There are more fruitful legal avenues available. Presently, prosecutors may prevent those opposed to the death penalty from being on a jury. This ought to be declared unconstitutional. Even more important, virtually no state presently gives a poor person sufficient resources to prepare proof to a jury that he does not deserve the death penalty. Thus the

Court has given the convicted murderer a right without a remedy. Finally, most states will furnish no counsel to prepare post-conviction appeals to executive clemency boards and other such bodies.

As usual, however, the long-term solution is not through the courts. The Supreme Court unwittingly has shown the way in its death penalty decisions. It has made clear that the concept of "cruel and unusual punishment" changes with public sentiment and some more obscure notion of human dignity. Thus the court is making clear once again what Mr. Dooley said in 1901 in reference to the American seizure of the Philippines: The Constitution may not follow the flag, but the Supreme Court follows the election returns.

This is a clear signal to socialists to join hands with criminologists, religious leaders, and civil libertarians to educate the public regarding the death penalty. While others can show that executions do not deter crime, and while the morality of the death penalty is debated, socialists must strike hard at the class nature of the penalty, and more fundamentally, at the social reasons for violence.

Berkeley attorney Ann Fagan Ginger recently wrote in the *National Lawyers Guild Practitioner* that "The Nixon Court is not the court of last resort. That function is reserved, in our country, for the people." Socialists should turn now in that direction.

Joshua Dressler is a lawyer who teaches at the University of San Fernando Valley College of Law, Los Angeles. His column appears regularly.



Ira Schor

# Part-time workers move around a lot—But 'non-career career' is revolving door

With full-time jobs scarcer, part-time work keeps more and more people going in circles. Business and government are not only cutting gains made by unionized workers, but they are also freezing job opportunities for the rest. The merry-go-round world of the part-time workers is one of motion without progress. Their terrain is villaged with low-pay, temporary positions in a wide variety of dead-end jobs, supplemented by unemployment, off-the-books hustling, public assistance and college attendance.

In low-skill and growth areas of the economy, part-timers are indispensable to profit margins. Retail sales and fast foods, like MacDonalds, keep an army of unskilled labor tied to short-shift strings. The use of part-time employees is also profitable in the public sector, for managers who face shrinking budget allocations. A conference has been called just to promote use of part-time staff in community colleges. Already in these schools for workers, young instructors have been laid-off and re-hired part-time, for half-pay or less.

All workers who have to settle for less than full-time work—especially the young, women and minorities—take part in a magical business profit-formula. The problem is that the profits don't go to them. They are simply paid less for doing the same amount of work as full-timers. Further, part-time staff don't un-

ionize as easily as do full-time workers, so they rarely get health plans, pensions, vacations, and sick leave. The lunch-hour, almost mandatory in an eight-hour shift, can be eliminated in a four- to six-hour workday. Part-timers are expected to eat before, after or on the job, or between jobs. They are also encouraged to lower their aspirations. No careerist ballyhoo surrounds their no-frills work. In contrast, many full-timers expect some kind of "career ladder" along with fringes and security. In an economic crisis, the part-time job market manages to elevate profits while it depresses worker aspirations.

Even as the economy stagnates, it remains diverse. Our advanced society still offers workers some choices. The spouse who enters a part-time job as a supplement to the breadwinner's main income can still think of a 20-hour job as an advance for the family. For workers who seek but can't find full-time work, confinement to the part-time work-world is softened by the ability to move laterally. Lateral options come from the large number of enterprises that use part-time labor. Workers can go from food service to retail sales to clerical desks to gas pumps to table-waiting to boiling bagels between midnight and dawn. Few of the jobs are satisfying, but at least they are all different. Indeterminate periods of part-time work in the private sector can

be juggled with spans of unemployment benefits, or with unrecorded hustling like gardening or cleaning for private homes, or helping on a truck, or vending on the streets, or taking in typing.

The public sector, especially in health and recreation, can offer some chances for a few hours work during the week. However, government cut-backs have made public service labor harder to come by. More reliable are the seasonal demands of private enterprise, even if they are short-lived. Here-today-gone-tomorrow part-time work is especially available in retail sales during the pre-Christmas rush, and in recreation or agriculture or construction during warm weather. The "seasonal" aspects of public employment are found in life-guarding on state beaches, or the post office in December, or school districts in September of February, when instant demands for part-time and substitute teachers open up for the legions of unemployed college grads.

Laid off between seasonal or dead-end jobs, workers not only have the option of collecting unemployment benefits, but many are able to enroll in college. Community colleges still offer opportunities to workers to accumulate credits, gain credentials, and get the best formal education they've ever had, despite narrowing admissions policies. In college between jobs, or while working part-time, workers can use such income supplements

as welfare, food stamps, the military reserve, veteran's benefits, campus work-study jobs and off-campus internships. These options are not fun to have or easy to get, but they do cushion the impact of declining full-time employment. Wrapping up a package of subsistence options is a "non-career career" forced on many workers for whom the economy has no full-time work. It demands constant attention just to make ends meet.

The workers who find themselves on a part-time merry-go-round are not especially happy there. They take their revenge in sabotage, theft, absenteeism and low productivity. When young workers get flush from hitting a number, or settling an insurance claim, or from a month's straight work, or from a small family legacy, or just married with a bundle of cash gifts, they often fix up a van and head out west. When the money and the van wear out, they hitch back and start again with the lateral options. But, moving around is just not moving up. Energy sapped and talent untouched, the part-time worker's life is a rite of passage through revolving doors. For an economic crisis they didn't cause, they are asked to pay heavy dues. Eventually, they will present their own full-time bill.

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