

# LETTERS

## Solidarity

DISCUSSION OF ISSUES SURROUNDING THE ISRAELI-Arab-Palestinian conflicts are tainted with irrational emotional baggage and polemical sloganeering. *In These Times* continues to remain a shining example that this situation can be overcome relatively easily.

The articles by Eileen Flanagan on the Palestinian middle class and by Stephen Zunes on the history of U.S. abuse of Israeli dependency (*ITT*, Sept. 14) were good examples of straightforward honest journalism that can provide the basis for intelligent consideration of how best to respond to changing conditions in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Despite the rhetoric and the emotionalism attached to these issues, the central questions remain the same, as is clearly expressed in the reporting in *In These Times*. For progressive and socialist American Jews, the basic question is: how do we promote democratic and socialist values within the American Jewish and Israeli Jewish communities while we work for a better world for all? For progressive and socialist Americans, the basic question is: how do we promote democratic and socialist values and policies in the U.S. and throughout the world while we do grass-roots organizing in our various communities?

Our solidarity with the peoples of Palestine and Israel compels us to support those working individually and collectively for peace and justice and to oppose the work of those seeking to dominate, oppress, exploit or conquer others. We should not be surprised therefore to discover that one cannot be pro-Israeli without being pro-Palestinian or pro-Palestinian without being pro-Israeli.

**Benjamin Mordecai Ben-Baruch**  
Co-chair, Middle East Committee of Ann Arbor  
New Jewish Agenda, and Co-chair, Southeast  
Michigan Political Committee of Americans  
for Progressive Israel

## Damn!

DEBORAH DAVIS ("PRISONS FOR PROFIT," *ITT*, AUG. 17) has a lot to learn about what motivates government officials and the private sector. Her faith in the former is sorely misplaced, and her aversion to the latter is just plain wrong.

Davis implies that government officials and private-sector managers face different incentives: "public spiritedness" and "profit," respectively. But several respected economists—most notably James Buchanan, winner of the 1986 Nobel prize—disagree. Their "public choice" theory suggests that government officials act *not* out of "public spiritedness," but rather on incentives to expand their budgets, their levels of responsibility and their managerial prestige.

Government officials are, in a sense, influenced by a "profit motive" similar to that which influences private-sector managers—but different in one very important respect. Private-sector managers profit when they perform well. Public officials profit when they fail to perform.

In the marketplace, for example, a businessman who sells a low-quality product loses customers. A private-prison manager who mistreats prisoners or tolerates escapes loses his government contract. But a Department of Corrections official who tolerates double- and triple-celling, lockdowns and

prison riots is rewarded with a bigger budget, additional facilities and more employees.

Injecting the private sector's profit motive into corrections will do more to ensure accountability and high-quality corrections services than any "political reform." Profit is not a four-letter word.

**Diane Carol Bast**  
Publications Director  
The Heartland Institute

## Milking the calf

AT LAST, AN ARTICLE ON ABORTION THAT EXAMINES the facts instead of spouting a lot of ideology (*ITT*, Oct. 12). However, Denise Rinaldo left out that Ronald Reagan was the most pro-abortion governor California ever had.

It's clear to me that for the far right abortion is a "golden calf," and they plan to milk the issue as long as possible rather than trying to win anything. Therefore there is little chance George Bush's first choice for the Supreme Court will reverse *Roe vs. Wade*.

Perhaps if the fundamentalists scream "betrayal" loud enough, the second or third nominees might vote against it. But some pro-life jurists already on the bench may suddenly switch to pro-choice in order to protect the conservative mandate.

**Richard Kanegis**  
Philadelphia

## Let 'em rip

YOUR EXPOSÉ ON LIBERTARIANS (*ITT*, SEPT. 14) was smuggled to this Libertarian by a mutual friend. Its gossip on internal factions left little room for basic issues.

Presumably we all share your masthead's first desire: "liberty and justice for all." Libertarians would interpret its next statement in favor of the individual and diversity: "Americans must take greater control over our nation's basic economic and foreign policy decisions."

Any battles for control of policy will be dominated by those who have economic clout. Even in a democracy, big dollars will seduce officials, politicians—and voters. The evidence surrounds us.

Governments of men are far more likely to be used by financial giants than to discipline them. The alternative is government of laws. Judicial definitions of rights and wrongs will evolve in any society where momentary economic power cannot be leveraged. Judicial decisions apply to the goose and the gander—to the weak and the strong.

Less legislative and administrative policy and power are needed to tolerate the birth and testing of new ideas in every field—

goods, services, arts, education—and allow alternatives a brief moment in the "marketplace" before being replaced by better ones.

The benefits of diversity in "public" services such as food, clothing and shelter can extend to education, highway safety, basic research and, most important, to security "services"—judicial, police and military—which define and protect "liberty and justice for all."

Lasting protection for the powerless, which includes most new and better ideas, will evolve in the absence of stifling public decisions and dangerous monopolies of power. Benefits of the liberty that follows will include more and better jobs, widespread abundance and choice, genuine welfare—and peace.

**Jerry Van Sickle**  
Boulder, Colo.

## No bang

I AM GLAD TO SEE THAT THERE IS A GROWING awareness of the increasing environmental and ecological disaster in our world. I have only recently come to see it in all its alarming proportions myself.

We are destroying the land, air and waters on which we depend for life. The signposts down the road are all around us: Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, the greenhouse effect, acid rain, the rip in the ozone layer. There are 1,200 acknowledged toxic waste dumps here, and only 40 are being worked on to get them cleaned up. An environmental consultant told me that just about every large factory or production site in our country has its own waste-disposal dump, which brings the total to well over 100,000. Here is an image of our factory system: shiny new products coming out the front door, toxic waste dumped out the rear end!

Both the U.S. and Italy have had their wandering garbage barges looking for a place to dispose of their reeking contents. Millions of tons of chemical fertilizers and pesticides are spread on our farmlands; what doesn't end up in our food drains off the land into our rivers, lakes and seas.

All this is pretty well known. There is a Green Party in West Germany. The communist youth movement in Italy has five major campaigns, one of which is protection of the environment. Countless thousands of groups are working on environmental issues here. Gorbachov has insisted that the nuclear threat and "other human concerns" take precedence over traditional ideological concepts. And in the U.S. the presidential contenders trade barbs on the environment—Bush declaiming Boston Harbor in Dukakisland, and Dukakis charging Bush for his off-shore drilling stance.

I used to worry that the world would

come to an end in the big bang of a nuclear holocaust. Assuming we defeat that danger, it may now end in a whimper. People can visualize the dramatic image of a sudden explosive end. It is harder to see the slower—but just as certain—death of our future in the systematic destruction of the Earth's ecostructure.

Two recent occurrences disclosed the shape of that possible future. A storm in Bangladesh inundated practically the entire country. Thirty-five million homes were underwater. The reason, experts say, is that the mountains and hillsides in this country in the foothills of the Himalayas have been denuded of trees, which allows the waters from the rains to rush down to the valleys where the people live with the terrible consequences we observe. The second is the discovery of a rip in the ozone layer. The culprit is "Freon," according to the experts. Freon is the trade name of the chemical chlorofluorocarbon (CFC), which is the ingredient that makes refrigerators work. It is also used in car airconditioners, as the repellent in spray cans and in the foaming of plastics, among other things.

The damage we are doing right now will not be known for another 15 years. It is so bad that there already are international agreements to limit the use of CFC. The corporation that manufactures it says it will take an additional 15 years to develop a substitute for Freon (which, of course, is not true, but profits come first!). What, then, will be left of our protective ozone layer?

No piecemeal reforms are going to solve our ecological problems—they will at best postpone them. While we tinker here and there with band-aids consider the fact that the industrialized countries represent only one-third of the Earth's people. The rest of the world is trying to move ahead using us as a model of industrialization. The Earth can't take what we are doing to it now—even less can it afford the whole world rushing headlong down that path. The entire trajectory of the industrial revolution, technology, under capitalism is the basis of the evil.

What can we do? Environmentalists can tinker. Ecologists can give us scientific analyses. But as long as we have capitalism and the profit motive as the mainspring and ruler of society, profit will overrule ecology. On the contrary, a planned solution is the only solution. We have reached a point in history where no future is possible without it. Ultimately we need a radically altered economy and social life in ecologically sound communities.

**Don Amter**  
New York

## SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander





# Airline deregulation hurts consumers

By Paul J. Baicich

**T**HE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSAGE of the Airline Deregulation Act went by in October with barely a notice. When lawmakers passed the act 10 years ago they promised more competition with new airlines, better-quality service, lower fares, no decline of service to small communities and no erosion of safety. Each promise was false. Ten years ago the public was sold a bill of goods by deregulatory true believers in the Carter administration. The chief culprit was Alfred Kahn, appointed by Carter to head the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB), but he had plenty of help from liberals like Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and others who should have known better. We have, over the past 10 years, paid the price for the politics of foolishness.

Even if one were to accept the dubious claim that more competition and a choice in air carriers is a good thing per se, the fact remains that today there is less competition than 10 years ago. In 1978 there were 19 major carriers in the U.S.; now there are eight. As with the rest of the Reagan revolution's impact on industry, this airline-merger trend has consolidated wealth and power. With 22 airline mergers in the past two years we are now approaching an oligopoly in the industry. The image of the new upstart carriers prodding the industry with lower fares and creative entrepreneur-

ship is almost laughable today. The new carriers that burst on the scene after deregulation never captured more than 5 percent of the business, and only one significant new carrier survives to this day—Midway Airlines. Today a few big airlines dominate the nation's major airports and the country's important routes. Last year it was announced that at 15 of the nation's top airports, either half the business was already controlled by one airline, or two airlines shared more than 70 percent of that business. Of course, as with any developing oligopoly, competition still exists, but the competition now is between giants over some lucrative routes and the "proper packaging" of the product.

The airlines' passenger service has declined sharply—whether one considers delays, cancellations, cleanliness or meals. As Paul Dempsey, a transportation law professor at the University of Denver, explains, "Flying has become a miserable experience...the planes are filthy, delayed, canceled and overbooked; our luggage disappears and the food is processed cardboard." When the Airline Deregulation Act was passed no mention was made of consumer protection. As an afterthought, with the demise of the CAB, consumer protection responsibilities were handed over to an ill-prepared Department of Transportation. Since then, the poorly served customer has been abused

even more. Complaints go unanswered and passengers feel powerless. Moreover, without proper government oversight, not only can airlines boost fares, but they can also set extremely narrow conditions for refunds on many fares.

Pricing is highly restrictive with airfares steadily climbing. Unlike the halcyon days of early deregulation and the scramble for passenger dollars, cheap fares today are hard to find. Discounts are available to the individual passenger if that passenger is willing to tailor his or her travel around the airlines' requirements. Otherwise, as a study pointed out this year, the passenger will have to pay 10 percent to 12 percent

## Only a handful of giant airlines have gained from the changes.

more in 1988 than in 1987. Small communities, in the meantime, have had air service reduced or pay considerably more for poorer service. Halfway through our experience of airline deregulation—late 1983—128 locations had lost air carrier service altogether. An elimination or reduction in service has been noticeable not only in rural and mountainous areas, but also in locations suffering from capital flight.

Indeed, no-holds-barred, free-enterprise air service helped accelerate the deindustrialization of many American communities during the past 10 years. Rust-bowl towns become even less attractive when their air service is cut. This contributes to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the old industrial town without attractive features. Those small communities that are retaining air service often pay a high price. Under a regulated system the more costly long-distance flights helped pay for cheaper shorter-distance flights. Today the high-density big-city routes are subsidized by passengers flying to small towns.

**And the dangers increase:** Meanwhile the margin of air safety has declined. Safety has become a cost-accountable item for the airlines, and the government's ability to monitor safety has not been enhanced during deregulation. From 2,000 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspectors at the onset of deregulation in 1979, the FAA staff was cut to about 1,300 in 1984; and when the FAA investigated Eastern and Continental planes this spring, it was hard-pressed to find enough qualified inspectors to do the job. As author and former Braniff pilot John J. Nance explained, "In reality, the FAA is too undermanned and ill-equipped to have any idea what actually goes on at the heart of the average airline. In effect no one is watching." Nance adds that, "in terms of the vital influence of management, the airlines are on the honor system." Sadly, in 10 years we have witnessed the decontrol of safety.

In addition to these broken promises, there has been an added consequence in the industry—union-bashing. A long list of air carriers have broken unions or wrested large concessions from their workers. Pan Am, TWA, Alaska Airlines, Eastern, American Airlines and even foreign carriers operating in the U.S.

have joined the trend. No airline workers—agents, flight attendants, pilots, mechanics and related ground workers—have been immune. The dramatic example of Frank Lorenzo's Continental Airlines occurred in 1983, when the bankruptcy laws were used to wipe out virtually all the unions at that carrier. But we know that this arrogant anti-union trend started before 1983. It occurred right in front of the noses of airline management at airports throughout the country—the response to the PATCO strike of 1981.

In combination with the Reagan-fostered union-busting atmosphere, deregulation has broken the once-sacred shield of "industry-standard" contracts that airline unions used to rely on. A few years ago, Michael Derchin, former director of market planning for American Airlines, bluntly stated that airline deregulation has "been the most anti-labor legislation ever passed by Congress." He was not far off the mark. When Congress passed the Airline Deregulation Act a decade ago, it promised maintenance of Labor Protective Provisions (LPPs) to respect job and seniority rights and to pay displacement allowances to employees whose jobs were eliminated due to deregulation. However, these LPPs were not made mandatory and have never been enforced. In September, when friendly members of the House tried to include LPPs in a Department of Transportation appropriations bill, they were thwarted by Reagan's threat to veto the whole package. Instead the public is given more myths about highly paid airline workers and the advantages of deregulation.

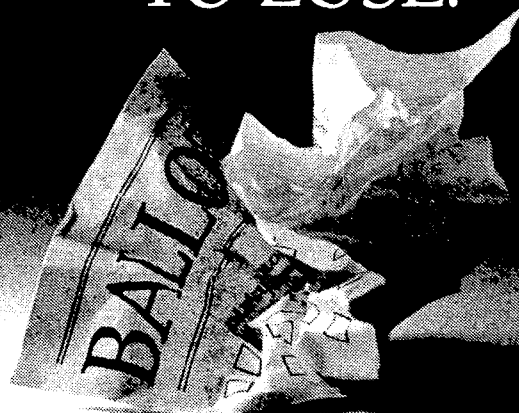
The deregulation mythology has produced similar anti-consumer and anti-labor results in trucking, communications and banking as it has in airlines. This is becoming clearer as more workers, communities and passengers are being taken for a ride. For the past few years there has been a slow process of renewed interest in re-regulation—and for the re-establishment of the CAB. But as yet there is not widespread support.

**The need for counteraction:** A barrier to resolving this problem is that unions, small communities and abused passengers have not found ways to unite in debunking the myths, and fighting a deregulatory monster that victimizes them all. In a moment of insight in the early '80s when the carriers were still slugging it out for turf, Thomas Plaskett, then with American Airlines and now head of Pan Am, said, "Deregulation has encouraged the concentration of services on major dense routes, and this has led to excessive, destructive competition and overcapacity. We find it difficult to reconcile such destructive competition with the overall public interest."

Today we know that the "destructive competition" then was a prelude to consolidation. But the key phrase here is "public interest." Though Plaskett would certainly not draw the conclusion that the "public interest" means that the airline industry should be treated like a public utility, that is the direction that those abused by deregulation must inevitably go. And, of course, the issue of public interest and public utility begs the question. Exactly how much of a "public" public utility—with elements of social/public ownership—can be involved? It is a question that communities, passengers and workers will have to consider.

Paul J. Baicich is an active member of the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers (IAM) in the airline industry.

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