

Letters from our readers

18 August 2009

On “The Google Book Search copyright settlement and the future of information”

This is the best article you have ever published on the information sector, digital technology and libraries. K. Reed has done an outstanding job of explaining how the economic foundations of capitalism subordinate the information needs of the public to the drive for profit, and the basically anti-democratic character of the Google Books settlement.

Librarians are losing the battle to defend “the public good.” In the best traditions of our profession, we would like nothing better than to provide free, universal access to information. However, information has now become the focus of a significant for-profit economy. Corporations like Google have the money to fund mass digitization projects, e.g., Google Books, and libraries do not. Thus, despite the complexities of the settlement, and the complaints about betrayals of “fundamental library values,” the partner libraries continue collaborating with Google, feeling they have no choice.

In my opinion, our professional library associations have failed us and the time is ripe for librarians to adopt a socialist perspective. The high cost of information and the complexities of corporate “business structures” are breaking us—whether in the form of a book registry or database licensing agreements. We will never have a “universal online catalog of mankind’s literature made available in unlimited form to everyone” under these restrictive conditions. It will take a socialist reorganization of society to straighten out the mess that capitalism has made in the information sector.

Lesley J
Ohio, USA
14 August 2009

On “The New York Times and Obama’s health care counterrevolution”

Even as the scab herds of the ruling class go, Obama is a piece of work. Public health continues to belong to

the HMOs, and now he and his little birdie Duncan will do for public education in their “Race to the Top” what the automotive industry has done for public transportation.

I’ve never idealized the Stalin period in the Soviet Union, but anyone who pays attention to history and to contemporary events can see how that mess came to be. There is a Latin American poet whose name I can’t remember who wrote a poem titled “Apolitical Intellectuals,” in which he excoriates the bourgeoisie “intelligentsia” for their indifference to the suffering of the poor, to the burnout of humanity that the deprivations of the capitalist system brings in people. Given the levels of greed and duplicity I see functioning in this country even now, at a time when one would think that these bastards would be moving to salvage what little democracy their system contains, even now all these creeps can think about is lining their own pockets with what remains of the public trust.

Meanwhile, our people struggle for the active articulation of the worker as revolutionary subject, and the increasing pressure from above that we remain atomized and demoralized. I think we’re going to win, but not without hardship the likes of which this country hasn’t seen since the Civil War. I wish I could think differently, but given the levels of duplicity we’re seeing at every level, and the appalling ignorance of what calls itself the “left” in this country, I can’t see where it can go any other way. We’re a long ways from the development of a revolutionary contingency of the quality Lenin engineered. It’s all uphill from here.

Michael H
Washington, USA
14 August 2009

On “Obama’s Abu Ghraib solution”

Yes, holding accountable those responsible for these crimes is a political task posed to the American working class, but also to the working class of the entire world, and not only to the working class but also

to the world's society in its very existence as humankind. Bush's governance, with its cynical face suddenly unmasked, provoked horror all over the world. Not only because of the Abu Graib released pictures, but especially because of the complete destruction of a functioning state which has the infelicity to own big oil reserves and was an undesirable neighbor for Israel (redoubtably not anymore since the first war and ten years of harsh sanctions).

Those millions of men, women and children overcame heroically the first aggression and massive bombings and 10 years of harsh sanctions, suddenly fell into a much bigger nightmare with no way back to decent life. Just because a handful of men and women bathing in their megalomania, far off thousands of km, decided to destroy this country and to steal their living resources. Those criminals were overriding all human concepts of sanity, morality and security for its own people together with all others in the world. The world suddenly dropped into a new era of horror. We have been driven back to the era of the burning of witches because of those criminals. It is true that since the Second World War there were many doubtful actions of the US state, but those actions were covert actions. Now the covert action became public and openly advocated. If we do not succeed in our effort for the impeachment of the previous government criminals, we have to face a world that we never imagined. All of us who are breathing on that earth will sink into an endless bestiality.

Karl F
14 August 2009

On "The New York Times and Obama's health care counterrevolution"

Single payer is the way to go—for comprehensive coverage for all with high quality care, but it also saves money, as can be gathered from the WHO website. I compared Cuba (7 percent of paltry GDP for health care), with Canada, Germany, UK, France (11.1 percent, second highest), and the US (15.3 percent, without covering everybody). Cuba and the US had the same life expectancy, 78 years. The other 4 were 79-81. Canada had 30 percent lower cardiovascular death per capita and France 40 percent than the US. Cancer deaths were virtually equal across the board. Risk of death between age 15-60 was up to 35 percent lower in

the Western countries compared to the US and equal to the US in Cuba. Single payer cannot only provide comprehensive quality care for everyone, but at a much cheaper cost.

Alfred L
California, USA
14 August 2009

On "Letters from our readers"

Michael B of Maine writes: "What's next in America? Anything can and will happen. This process of disintegration cannot be stopped. What can be done? Nothing. It is best to remain non-aligned and try to survive bodily, mentally and emotionally."

Remain non-aligned and survive. What sort of proposition is this? A very dangerous sort. There is no such thing as neutrality, though the word is often used as a cover for inaction. "Impartial," "Apolitical," "Neutral." All of these words serve as an excuse to step back and let whatever forces gather the most strength take power. It has never worked as a means to advance the cause of the working people of the world, and has often worked directly against us.

I could trace the results of such idealism back to the time of the Spanish Insurrection of 1873 (and before, I am sure), and show in that case, as in every one since, that to sit it out—don't vote, don't speak, don't organize a principled opposition—is to allow fascism and other such elements carte blanche.

Neutrality is a bourgeois conceit which the working class cannot afford.

Christie MS
Oregon, USA
16 August 2009



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