

Letters from our readers

29 November 2012

On “German defence minister promotes militarism”

How disgusting is German Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière and his crowd of sycophants and bootlickers?

De Maizière “called for a broad public debate” over Germany’s role in the world. He said German security and defense policy should be discussed in “schools, universities, churches and wherever public debate is conducted.”

But it seems that one person tried to do just what de Maizière described—to carry out that debate, in part, by unexpectedly addressing the audience, as described near the beginning of the article. Citing, according to the report, only known historical facts, he was heckled and jeered off the stage. Debate over.

De Maizière talked about the “certainty of faith in a world of uncertainty.”

The audience of neomilitarists was not prepared to discuss any sort of facts of yesterday that might color the interpretation of the world today. No. That might lead to ... uncertainty, at least for the incomes of the probably well-heeled audience. But that audience was concerned to shape today’s and tomorrow’s facts—war, death, and colonial slavery—over yesterday’s and today’s beliefs in ghosts, spirits, nonmaterial beings, and religious mysticism.

De Maizière said that National Socialism had a “world view that had a ready explanation for everything—and thus offered security and certainty, while demanding fanatical adherence in return for this kind of certainty. But precisely this promise of absolute certainty exposed their totalitarian character—and thereby their contempt for the freedom of the individual.” And then he went on to try to contrast what he is calling for today with National Socialism, by offering a ready explanation for everything.

Herr de Maizière, I’m sorry, but nothing you said made any sense whatever to the working class. As for your petty-bourgeois audience, there is none so blind as

him whose paycheck depends on his not seeing.

CH

Texas, USA

26 November 2012

On “Britain: Soup kitchens become part of mainstream welfare provision”

A good article by Mark that ends with a very appropriate quote from Jack London, an author now subjected to neo-conservative academic scholastic revisionism designed to remove any “taint” of socialism from his work. I’ve recently returned from Manchester UK where I encountered “economic shock” rather than culture shock. Prices had risen hugely since with last visit there with \$5 being the average price of a cup of coffee and a full tank of gasoline nearing \$200. When a friend paid this amount at a gas station, the woman at the desk expressed her outrage. “We should do what they’re bloody doing in Greece.” More beggars were on the city streets than before. Poverty is definitely creating a new version of the group described by London in one of his revealing exposés— “The People of the Abyss.”

Tony W

28 November 2012

On “Australian government proposes new ‘Accord’ between business and unions”

The election of the Hawke-Keating Government in 1983 saw the ALP move from a centre-right to a far-right political orientation warmly embracing neo-conservative economics (referred to as economic rationalism in Australia). Each subsequent decade has seen the ALP move further to the right, thereby allowing the conservative parties to go still further right, in an endless game of conservative follow the leader.

Accord #1 forced smaller unions into amalgamations ostensibly to make them stronger. The reality was that the amalgamations made it nigh on impossible for union militants, union reform groups and any union

member promoting a socialist agenda to have any genuine influence.

The one saving grace from Accord #1, however, was the introduction of Medicare, the government health care system. Medicare had been introduced by the Whitlam Labor Government (1972-1975). Like the NHS in the UK, Medicare is the primary health care provider in Australia, but operates with an optional private health insurance scheme.

Medicare was abolished by the Fraser Government (1975-1983). As an inducement to get the unions to bend to Accord #1, the Hawke-Keating Government reintroduced Medicare. It should never have been necessary to trade off union rights for a government health care system as any Labor Government worthy of the name would have done so automatically.

When the Howard Government came to office (1996-2007), Howard knew Medicare was far too popular to simply abolish à la Fraser. Instead, he sought to undermine Medicare's efficiency with the proverbial death by a thousand cuts. The undermining of Medicare was accomplished by the removal of \$5 billion from the Medicare budget and transferring that money into subsidies to reduce the cost of private health insurance. Affluent voters thus had the cost of their private health insurance subsidized, thereby allowing them to jump hospital queues for elective surgery.

When the Rudd and later the Gillard Labor Governments came to power in 2007, neither Rudd nor Gillard genuinely reasserted the primacy of Medicare as the preferred deliverer of health care in Australia. Some marginal reductions were made to the private health insurance subsidies, but nothing was done to reform the system into a single payer system, which is both more cost effective and equitable than a dual system.

Now the unions are back at the table "negotiating" Accord #2. This time there will apparently be no "social trade-offs" such as the introduction of Medicare that was the centerpiece of Accord #1. Demanding the reform of Medicare into a single provider system is clearly not up for discussion. Instead, union officials and Gillard government ministers are apparently joining hands with the bosses for a Kumbaya moment. When the capitalists run the line that we're all in this together, the alarm bells should sound. Sadly for Australian workers, for too long elements of the trade

union bureaucracy have disconnected those alarm bells.

Diane A

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20 November 2012

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