

# Letters

## Workers of the world: block that kick

Editor:

When your newspaper came out, I thought I had seen the last of Irwin Silber. But in the latest issue of *ITT*, he reappears under the name Jack Russell.

Just as Silber used to see the twilight of capitalism in every film, Russell sees the class struggle writ large in sports. For Russell, the football audience can conveniently be divided into the working class and professional/managerial types. The former like defense; the later offense. He even divides teams into working class and capitalist.

He reasons: the working class, being dumb bastards, are only interested in smashing things; therefore, they like the defense. Our rulers, who are interested in planning, like the offense.

Most football fans like both. If Russell wants to understand why Pittsburgh's defense was given great publicity, while their offense was given little, he should look at their relative statistics.

On cities: Oakland, the working class town, has a team known for its offense; San Francisco, sophisticated managerial town, has a team known primarily for its defense.

You need a new sports columnist.

—Robbie Keith  
Oakland, Calif.

## Better alternatives to schlock rock

Editor:

Re your article "Alternative networks give public a chance" (*ITT*, Feb. 9), it gives a distorted view of the non-commercial radio field. Specifically, your view of National Public Radio. As a former employee of one of NPR's backbone stations, and a former All Things Considered reporter, I can justify the fact that people in my position refer to the network as National Bullshit Radio, or Mushroom Public Radio. NPR has a reputation as a network that presents a liberal image, that questions the status quo, that reports the unreported. For those of us who know it, however, NPR is a censorer and a distorter. The alternative they present is like Jimmy Carter's pardon: it's great for some cases, but for the majority of Americans, it's meaningless.

Certainly, NPR is some sort of alternative. It is 600 percent better than most radio in the country. That is simply because most radio in the country stinks. There are much better examples of alternatives to schlock rock and middle of the road mush music. The stations of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters are examples to be checked out closely. These stations are listener-supported, meaning more of a no-strings attached situation, more open to disenfranchised elements of

society, and sometimes, worker-controlled or community controlled. And real, every-day people community controlled, not Rockefeller Foundation, corporate executive, college communication department head community controlled.

The progressive developments in NPR, in large part, are changes forced by the NFCB activists. Much of the best programming on radio today is put out by such people. NPR may have more listeners, but that is because they are less controversial. Much of their programming could fit onto any commercial station, if commercial breaks were given in the shows.

—Ed Schoenfeld  
Oakland, Calif.

## A sickening dish

Editor:

Don Rosg's recent article on Richard Daley's legacy is an example of the worst tendencies in left journalism. Those tendencies may be summarized in this recipe:

Put in a large bowl one city, state, or nation in which the working class wields little or no power.

Stir in the word "totalitarian" or, better yet, "fascist" as descriptive of class rule in said city, state, or nation. (Season with empirical data if any are at hand.)

Add stale references to "public apathy" and, if the cook is so inclined, some phrases that suggest how backward the masses are, or how willing they are to tolerate what is so manifestly intolerable.

Sprinkle with sentences hinting darkly at the impending doom of human freedom, and the plight of those few who still love it.

Place in standing file at room temperature.

When moldy, or when the situation warrants rigorous analysis, remove from file and serve to left audience.

This is a traditional offering on occasions when the failure of the left to generate any sustained movement seems to require explanation. It nourishes the souls as well as the bodies of the redeemed, because it ascribes the abject powerlessness of the masses to their sinful refusal to combine in a "class alliance" against corruption and tyranny, and accounts for the failure of the left by reference to the sins of the masses.

It gives me indigestion.

—J.L. Leavitt  
Chicago

## Didn't go far enough!

Editor:

An article written by Barbara Ehrenreich "Will national health insurance insure anyone better health?" (*ITT*, Jan. 19) did not go far enough.

Certainly, it is difficult to believe that any meaningful NHI would involve private insurance companies. In fact, private participation would cause the whole affair to be a calamity. NHI has to be completely federalized, from the doctors on down to the pharmaceutical companies. I think that it is this latter

point that Ehrenreich fails to emphasize. Not only can NHI not be run by private insurance companies, but the tax monies used to finance the program (the same taxes which come predominantly from the poor) cannot be used to pay private doctors. Otherwise, it would be the same old case of the capitalist rip-off found in all phases of American society.

Tax dollars go to subsidize private business—one very major case being the war industries. If NHI is to be truly national, the monies used to finance it must be for the payment of public workers used to carry it out. Private medicine is the precise reason why costs are so high. Publicly salaried employees effectively would put a cap on the system. As it is proposed now, no one would really know how much is needed for the program, for it would be determined by how much profit the greedy capitalists want; that would be determined by their whim.

NO PRIVATE MEDICINE!

—Jeremy Horne  
Tallahassee, Fla.

## Attica is still with us

Editor:

On Dec. 30, 1976, New York Gov. Hugh Carey pardoned seven Attica indicts and commuted the sentence of Dacajeweah (John Hill). He ordered that disciplinary proceedings be dropped against the ten correctional officers and ten state troopers.

Many of those who identify with our courageous struggle were elated at the prospect of Dacajeweah's release.

On Jan. 13, Dacajeweah appeared before the New York State Parole Board. And on Jan. 18 it was official that he had been hit with two more years (parole denied for another two years).

The Parole Board explained their denial of his release as the result of protest from various communities unfavorable towards his release.

The Commissioner of Parole had apprised legal counsel for Dacajeweah that the New York State Parole Board was pleased with the interview they conducted with him.

Once again, the forces of reaction and retaliation are escalating their campaign, and Dacajeweah remains the Scapegoat of Attica.

The Attica struggle is not over, though many would like for it to be. As long as one of the 62 Attica Indicts' case is open, there must be people to be supportive. We need Dacajeweah out here with us on the outside.

Currently, two concrete things can be done. Letters, telegrams, petitions, etc. should be sent to both Gov. Hugh Carey and to the Chairman of the New York State Parole Board.

- Gov. Hugh Carey  
The Capitol  
Albany, N.Y. 12224
- Edwin Hammock  
Chairman, N.Y. State Parole Board  
State Office Campus Bldg. #2  
Albany, N.Y. 12226

—Akil Al-Jundi  
New York City

## Sweezy and Magdoff quit as IN THESE TIMES sponsors

Editor:

During the formative stages of what eventually turned out to be *IN THESE TIMES*, we were asked if we would sign a statement of support. We were glad to do so, not because we necessarily agreed with the new paper's editorial or political stands, but because the left press in the United States is woefully small and it seemed to us that only good could come from the founding of a new independent socialist newspaper under the direction of people whose competence and dedication were well known to us. We did not then understand, however, that our names would be included on the paper's masthead among a list of permanent sponsors, and we would not have agreed to this course if we had been consulted. Now that the paper has been coming out for more than two months, it is clear to us that the fact of our being listed as sponsors has been the source of considerable misinterpretation and confusion. Quite a few *Monthly Review* readers have written asking us just what it means, whether we endorse editorial policies espoused by *IN THESE TIMES*, etc. In view of the plausible interpretation that we are somehow involved in making decisions on the paper's coverage and editorial policy, and since we do not participate in any such activity, we ask that you remove our names from the sponsor list. At the same time, we wish you success in spreading the word on socialism.

—Paul M. Sweezy  
—Harry Magdoff  
Editors, *Monthly Review*

## A Chinese Stalin?

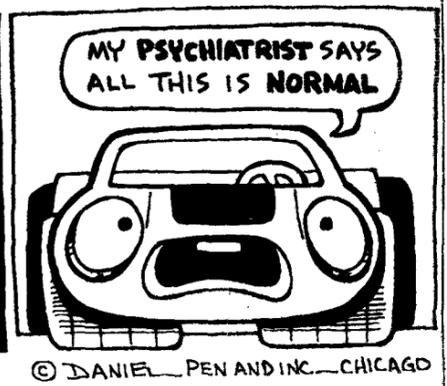
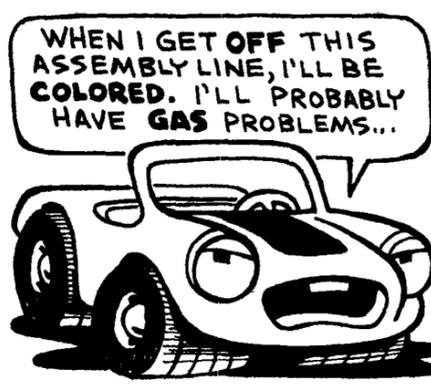
Editor:

Your editorial "China shakes the Maoists" (*ITT*, Jan. 26) takes an historical relativist position regarding the virtues of the Maoist regime and its recent developments. I am not so sanguine.

In many respects, Mao's historical role can be compared with Lenin's. Could it also be that, unwittingly yet logically, he paved the way for a Chinese Stalin? Let us hope that such a development will never eventuate; nevertheless, we should keep this in mind while watching the evolution of the situation in the near future.

—Joyce Goodman  
Ithaca, N.Y.

**Editor's note:** In the Lincoln feature of Feb. 9., several paragraphs were printed out of order. The correct order is: From the end of column 1, p. 13, go to line 11, column 3. Read to end of page. Go back to top of column 2, read through line 10 of column 3, and continue on page 14. Also, Carl Schulz is of course Carl Schurz, the great German-American Republican leader.



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Ira Shor

## Education in crisis: the gains of the '60s under attack

Education in widely separated places and at all levels is in a new state of crisis. Unlike the political eruptions of ten years ago, the school crises of the '70s revolve around cutbacks, poor performance of students and the reassertion of conservative rule.

In the past year, national attention has focused on 'Why Johnny can't read.' The mass media have sensationalized school failures into a 'literacy crisis,' ranking the decline in education along with the decline of the church and family life. In California 75 percent of the top secondary graduates were reported to have failed a new writing test, and in New York half the high school students are dropping out before graduation, while more than 50 percent read below grade level. As school discipline breaks down in many locations, a 'career-education' conference urgently meets in Texas to consider how to lower the "unrealistic" aspirations of high school youth. At the same time, the Massachusetts School Board investigates declining SAT scores, and national journals like *Change* join the debate on the value of college. The prestigious *Chronicle of Higher Education* as well as *Time* and *Newsweek* have already joined the 'literacy crisis' dialogue. Meanwhile, the academy waits for the other shoe to drop, as Harvard convenes its first reassessment of liberal arts since 1945.

### ►Fishing in troubled waters.

Centrifugal forces pulling at American society affect schools and all other social institutions. As one eye of a hurricane

with many centers, the new school crisis is a complex involving more than poor pupil performance. Amid shrinking funds there is curriculum confusion in school and a lack of jobs in the economy for aspiring graduates.

The best fishermen in these troubled waters are the conservatives. Entrenched before the insurgent '60s, they are now restoring their rule. Their offensive is reversing the opening to the left that brought new students to college—workers, minorities, women—and new pedagogy into the academy. Popular organizations, weakened by years of recession, clandestine state repression, and political fragmentation, have not been able to halt conservative reversals in school or government cuts made in city halls and state capitols.

The conservative housecleaning of the '70s is different from the dramatic firings of radical teachers in the previous decade. Under the guise of budget retrenchment, young teachers (where women and minorities are over-represented) are fired first. The newest compensatory, non-white and female programs are the earliest to be closed or curtailed. 'Seniority,' an important trade-union principle, is set against 'affirmative action,' dividing teachers against each other by age, sex and race.

In addition, public colleges face stiff competition from private schools for state subsidies. Private colleges promote 'portable' state scholarships, which students can use on any campus. The older public universities, in turn, out-compete the newer, less politicized working-class colleges for a shrinking public dollar. As in

other areas of American life, the least organized suffer the greatest losses.

Naked competition for money and jobs is accompanied by ideological warfare. School conservatives on the offensive attack 'excessive egalitarianism' and 'unworthy' students floating through college on inflated grades. They call for the stricter standards that gave way in many places some years back. Their 'standards' are the familiar old ones articulated by elite schools in the days before millions of working people entered college. While proclaiming a national 'literacy crisis,' they want fewer people in college. While seeing the failure of their traditional standards, they demand the imposition of more 'standards.' They offer water to a drowning man. Their old teaching methods dominate America's school machine, and it is the very failure of these methods that creates rebelliousness and functional illiteracy.

### ►Literacy crisis a hoax?

Conservative critics of new pedagogy and egalitarian education judge school from the top down. Enconced in an ivory tower, they measure the failure of mass education by the distance between an Ivy Leaguer and a worker-graduate. In contrast, a voice positively judging the gains of workers, women and minorities, is that of Richard Ohmann, author of *English in America*. Writing recently in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Ohmann sees the 'literacy crisis' as a near-hoax engineered by mass media, and used by elite academics to justify a new austerity in

education. The long-time editor of *College English* magazine defends 'egalitarianism' by showing how some test scores are bound to decline as under-represented groups finally get more education and more testing. Ohmann cites a few test scores that are rising and reminds us that the real failure is the functional illiteracy provoked by school and compounded by the media.

The new 'egalitarianism' debate echoes a New York school crisis of a hundred years ago. Diane Ravitch records in her *Great School Wars* how conservatives back then argued that too much education made workers insolent or uncomfortable with their station in life. Voices in the democratic tradition said that democracy owed more than three R's to the people. In that centennial fight, City and Hunter Colleges survived as publicly-funded higher education for working people. The issue is still be contended, as the pendulum swings right and knocks 50,000 students and 2,000 teachers out of the City University of New York.

An educated workforce is more crucial now to progressive social change than a century ago. Skills of reading, writing, and critical thought must have the widest possible distribution in an advanced society dominated by mass media if working people are to organize in their own interest. The quality and availability of mass education is one test of the health of American society.

Ira Shor, teaches at Staten Island Community College. His column appears regularly.



## Madison primary

Continued from page 3.

that Soglin simply did not take his responsibility as an elected official seriously enough.

### ►No land-use plan.

Sack charged that the incumbent mayor failed to follow through on many of the campaign promises he made in 1973. He pointed out that Madison still has no land use plan, something Soglin called essential four years ago. More serious, Sack said, the mayor continues to permit both suburban sprawl and the decay of the central city's housing stock while committees debate appropriate land use. Sack promised an "immediate" end to sprawl, including a moratorium on housing development on the city's fringes, if necessary.

Sack charged Soglin with lax administration of building inspection codes, and he scored the current administration's policies on housing in a detailed position paper examining the causes and cures for speculation in the housing market. He also criticized the mayor for lack of leadership in seeking alternatives to the property tax as a source of city funds. Sack frequently noted that the wealthy residents of two villages within Madison's city limits use city services, but pay no city property taxes. He promised to make these "predatory tax islands, bastions of great wealth and privilege" pay their fair share into the city's coffers.

Thirty-seven percent of Madison's electorate turned out for the primary on Feb. 15, and those who voted obviously took the criticisms of Soglin seriously.

### ►Conservative return possible.

The mayoral election on April 5 could restore to Madison the conservative politics of the pre-Soglin era. Soglin's vote total in the primary combined with Sack's would

have been enough to defeat Amato by a relatively narrow margin, but Amato and Duffey together outpolled Soglin and Sack by 1,500 votes. Neither Duffey nor Sack has endorsed a mayoral candidate. Sack says that he will not support Paul Soglin unless Soglin adopts the position Sack advocated during the primary campaign. Some of Sack's campaign workers, however, have indicated they will now

been closely identified with the local Chamber of Commerce, and his supporters may well lean toward Amato.

Madison traditionally votes more conservatively in the spring off-year elections than in presidential and congressional races. This concerns Soglin's supporters, who also worry because the April 5 election occurs in the middle of the university's spring break, when many students will be out of town. Soglin's campaign staff will encourage students to vote absentee, but this strategy could backfire. Last November, a surprisingly large percentage of the vote in student wards went to President Ford. An absentee ballot drive on campus could stir up more votes for Amato.

In any event, Amato's primary victory shocked Madison's liberals and left-liberals out of their self-satisfied complacency. "The positive part about it," a sober Paul Soglin told the press Tuesday night, "is that it's going to make our people move."

Judy Strasser writes for *In These Times* from Madison.

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