

WSWS replies to letters on US-China confrontation

12 April 2001

Many readers have commented on the WSWs articles published April 3 and April 7, written by Patrick Martin, on the clash between the United States and China following the emergency landing of a US spy plane on the island of Hainan. Below Martin replies to several of these correspondents.

Dear Editor:

Your recent article on the rising tensions between America and the PRC [People's Republic of China] could not be more off-base. As a committed socialist I understand the impulse to criticize American foreign policy, but your characterization of China's response as mild and restrained is very, very far from the truth. I am a Canadian student living in Beijing, and get most of my news from domestic, Chinese sources. The language now being used by the Chinese leadership is unbelievably vitriolic. Chinese people are being encouraged to hate the US in a manner that reminds me of the American hard right's poses during the Cold War.

Worst of all, the Chinese media contains exactly one point of view, so there is no use trying to explain to my friends here that the incident might have been accidental or that this sort of electronic monitoring is normal all over the world. They don't want to hear any dissent, just as they still are not interested in the possibility that the embassy bombing in Belgrade might have been an accident.

China is a very scary country. Defending its rhetoric is extremely irresponsible. Please try to be a bit more open-minded.

AW

4 April 2001

Dear AW,

The socialist opposition to America's aggressive and provocative policies in the Far East in no way implies political support either for the Beijing dictatorship or its foreign policy. Our approach is not to line up reflexively behind either government in the clash between the United States and China, but to analyze and explain this intensifying conflict from the standpoint of the interests of the international working class, including the working people of both countries.

The starting point in such an analysis is not the motivations of the leaders of either side, or the media propaganda—just as one-sided in the US as in China—but the more fundamental social and class relations which are expressed in the conflict. The United States, it bears repeating, is by far the most powerful imperialist power, with a ruling class increasingly committed to the unilateral bullying of any country or regime that seems to offer the slightest resistance to the dictates of Washington. Its initial response to the incident was entirely in that spirit. If Bush & Co. have been compelled to tone down their rhetoric in recent days, it is in large part because China is not Iraq or Yugoslavia and cannot be quickly bombed into submission.

As for China, the People's Republic is a peculiar hybrid, an

essentially capitalistic economy ruled by a bureaucratic tyranny originating in a peasant-based revolution (1949). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded as a revolutionary socialist political party of the working class, but soon degenerated under the influence of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. The CCP took power at the head of peasant armies, but despite its socialist phraseology, the state it established was never based on or controlled by the working class. Through a protracted process over the past 50 years, traced out in a statement published on the WSWs several years ago [Deng Xiaoping and the fate of the Chinese Revolution, <http://www.wsws.org/history/1997/mar1997/dengx.shtml>] the CCP has come to openly support the profit system and the exploitation of the Chinese workers and peasants by imperialism.

Despite the impression you give from Beijing, the tone of the Chinese media seems to have been relatively restrained, at least compared to the anger expressed over the 1999 Belgrade embassy bombing. This fact is acknowledged even in some Western press commentaries. Indeed, the “democratic” US capitalist press today praises the Chinese state for suppressing anti-American protests at home!

There is a noticeable disparity in the relationship between official and popular opinion in the two countries. In China, public opinion is far more militant and anti-American than the official media, which has sought to discourage any open protest. In America, there has been up to now little popular anger over the incident, despite the efforts of the media and the Republican right to whip up such sentiments.

This disparity is perfectly comprehensible. It is, after all, Chinese soil, Chinese waters and Chinese air space, 10,000 miles from America, where the conflict is playing itself out. The Chinese people are justly outraged over the arrogant posture of the American government, its claim of the right to conduct electronic espionage right off the Chinese coastline, its indifference to the death of the Chinese fighter pilot. The American people, whatever their confusion over the US policy towards China, have not responded with any enthusiasm to media attempts to foment anti-Chinese hatred.

Patrick Martin

To the editor:

Your article “Spy plane standoff heightens US-China tensions,” by Patrick Martin, is rife with anti-American, pro-Chinese-Communist overtones, to put it mildly. Martin writes as though China has been perfectly statesmanlike in this whole affair, and America and the Bush administration have been, at least initially, engaged in “harsh rhetoric.” Please. America has simply demanded, yes demanded, that we be given access to our fallen crew and that our servicemen and women be safely returned—hardly an extremist stance. China, meanwhile, is being very slow and stubborn in their deliberations, taking close to three days to grant access. They still have not released

the captives.

Even more ridiculous is the assertion that the Bush administration is “picking on” (my own words) China because of its criticisms of China’s well-documented and well-known human rights abuses, as well as China’s aiding Baghdad (if they were, how is it wrong to point this fact out?).

As a socialist media organization, your aim is purportedly greater freedom for all human beings. Instead of constantly criticizing the US for its inevitable faults (all countries have them in this fallen world), exercise some intellectual honesty, and acknowledge that China is far more repressive and anti-democratic than America is. Where is your outcry for the religious persecution that persists in China? Where is your outrage at the forced labor camps in China? You of all people should be at the forefront of the criticism of China—the government, not the people. And a cheap charge, completely bogus, that anyone who criticizes the Chinese communist government is just racist and bigoted and anti-Asian doesn’t work.

In sum, your claim to be concerned with democratic rights is nonsense so long as you reserve the brunt of your vitriol for the democratic US, and engage in apologetics for communist China (again the government, not the people—I can make the distinction: can you?). America has done, and is doing more for the cause of democratic rights than China even wants to. It’s about time you recognize that (I have a hunch, though, that you already do) and certainly high time that you acknowledge it.

JW

USA

Dear JW,

You maintain that you can distinguish between the government and the people of China, but you fail to apply this same distinction to the United States. Hence your references to “America”—i.e., the Bush administration—demanding that “we be given access to our fallen crew.” Who is the “we”? Is there or is there not a great distinction between the interests of the government of the United States and the interests of the American people? There is an enormous social gulf between the working people of America and the wealthy elite that controls corporate America and the American government.

As it happens, the information provided by the Chinese government about the details of the incident off Hainan has been more substantial and more accurate than that provided by the Pentagon and State Department. While the US government presses for regular access to the 24 crewmen of the spy plane, it has given the American people relatively little information about how they came to be on Chinese soil.

In particular, they have told the American people nothing at all about the conversations held between the pilot of the EP3 and his ground controllers and other US planes and warships during the 30 minutes between the collision with a Chinese jet and the emergency landing on Hainan. These conversations almost certainly took place—there is no doubt that the pilot would have attempted to consult with his superiors about whether to ditch the plane at sea or attempt a landing—and they were probably taped. But no information has been released.

The *World Socialist Web Site* does not have to be reminded that the government in Beijing is brutal and repressive. We have a long record of public and vociferous criticism of the crimes committed by the Maoist bureaucracy, and not just in the recent period, when Beijing has been in conflict with Washington, but throughout the 20 years

(1971-1991) when it was closely aligned with American foreign policy and consequently was largely immune from official US criticism.

It is one thing, however, to expose the Tienanmen Square massacre, the persecution of the Falun Gong or the repression of rebellions by workers and peasants against the Stalinist oligarchy [The Falun Gong crackdown: a crisis in China’s corridors of power, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/aug1999/gong-a03.shtml>]. It is quite another to suggest that the government of the United States is the chosen instrument for redressing these wrongs. Precisely because we do distinguish between the Beijing autocracy and the Chinese people, we recognize that in the current conflict, what predominates is the arrogant assertion of the power of American imperialism against a country which only two generations ago was subjected to semi-colonial domination.

Patrick Martin

To the editor:

I read your article on the China spy plane incident today. I agree entirely that this aggressive posturing by Bush & Co. is dangerous and stupid (not unlike the entire regime), but as a pretty unlearned fellow on the issue of China I often wonder exactly what are we supposed to be doing?

China is a bit of a moral dilemma ... there is a large “Free Tibet” movement as you know, and I think they are right on and I would assume Taiwan deserves its independence. Then of course there are the human rights issues that are difficult to stomach. What are some decent minded diplomatic strategies for dealing with these situations in the current capitalist political climate and how would a socialist deal with these issues?

DS

Dear DS,

The WWSWS opposes both the foreign and domestic policy of Beijing and defends the democratic rights of the Chinese workers and peasants, as well as of the people of Tibet and Taiwan. But we hold that these democratic rights can be upheld only through the independent mobilization of the working masses of China on the basis of a socialist program, not through pressure on Beijing from the United States or other imperialist powers. Despite their posturing about human rights, the capitalist powers with huge investments in China rely on the bureaucratic dictatorship to suppress workers’ struggles and guarantee access to cheap and easily exploited labor.

As for Tibet and Taiwan, the question of independence cannot be considered in isolation from the social structure of these territories and of China as a whole. We do not regard the theocracy of the Dalai Lama or the US-backed regime in Taipei as genuinely democratic alternatives to the Maoist dictatorship, nor do we regard Beijing as a progressive representative of Chinese “national unity.” Each of these forces, in different ways, is a reactionary obstacle to the struggle to unite the working masses of the region in the struggle for democratic rights and social equality.

Patrick Martin



To contact the WWSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact