

Letters on war in Afghanistan and attack on civil liberties

27 November 2001

Below we post a selection of recent letters to the WSWS

Dear editor,

Thank you for Kate Randall's excellent article, "Military tribunals, monitoring of lawyers: Bush announces new police-state measures" on Nov. 17. Your web site remains the only news source I know that places events in a context, not only with the historical background, but even with other events in the same week!

In your article you quote some high-placed editorials that have spoken out against Bush's military tribunals. I wonder if you saw this one from the *Washington Post* on November 16: "End-Running the Bill of Rights." I found it noteworthy because its so-called opposition was based on cynical and morally bankrupt arguments that eloquently lay bare the reasons why the liberals in this country have no power to stop the current attack on democratic rights.

The editorial is surprisingly outspoken about the nature of the military tribunal plan. It calls it "only a hair's breadth from a policy of summary justice," and notes that "Mr. Bush is claiming for himself the authority to unilaterally exempt a class of people accused of particular crimes from the protections of the Constitution."

But instead of opposing the policy on the basis of democratic safeguards and the rights of the accused, the *Post* argues that the order is dangerous because it risks undermining the credibility of the United States in its current imperialist campaign.

The editorial states, "When Americans accused of terrorism are tried in secret courts by hooded judges in Peru or other nations, the U.S. government rightly objects. To authorize comparable trials in this country will erase any legitimacy of such objections. Worse, it will erode throughout the world the image of America as a place where certain freedoms cannot be compromised—freedoms that ultimately provide the most basic justification for this country to stake its claim to lead the world and wage the war on terrorism."

In other words, the real problem with the United States government depriving people of basic legal rights is that the country will thereby squander the perceived "legitimacy" of its intervention in foreign countries, and the "justification" for its drive for global hegemony and an ongoing military campaign.

As for any concern with actual democratic rights, the editorial states up front its fundamental agreement with all the arguments used to justify such military courts. "There are potential terrorists, likely living in this country, who would do Americans great harm if they could. ... We can imagine cases in which the government might take custody of such a person, too dangerous to be released or deported, against whom the evidence came from sources too sensitive to reveal in open court, *or was insufficient to win conviction in a normal court*" (My emphasis added). The *Post* has no problem with imprisoning or executing such persons, who would be legally innocent under the United States legal system. Its tepid opposition amounts to the following: "The potential damage is so great, to U.S. credibility abroad as well as U.S. liberty at home, that such courts should be viewed as an absolutely last resort."

The editorial also hints at the danger of the Bush administration provoking social revolution with its policies, speaking of "the potentially irreversible injury at home if Mr. Bush proceeds, as his order would allow, to undermine the rule of law."

To me, this editorial speaks with the voice of a broad section of the political elite that is confused and bewildered to see its own policies actually being put into practice and taken to their logical conclusion. These are the people who are quite content to advocate stripping human rights from masses of the world's population in the name of their security, as long as they themselves retain those rights. While the writers pay lip service to the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, and the rule of law, their own arguments make it clear that they have lost all ability to formulate a principled argument based on the necessity of popular freedom. They are reduced to pleading that the train they launched proceed at a slower pace.

Anyone who still believes that the liberal elite in the U.S. is capable of mounting a serious defense of democracy would be wise to read the editorial's opening sentence. "After the attacks of Sept. 11, many predicted that the demands of domestic security would eventually clash with traditional American reverence for civil liberties." In a world-view where domestic security presents "demands," while civil liberties evoke mere "traditional reverence," it is a foregone conclusion as to which will triumph in a "clash."

MW

19 November 2001

Regarding the war at home and on the Constitution. We have bombing and war, yet there is no declaration of war. A new cabinet position (Homeland Security) has been created, yet Congress passed neither enabling legislation nor funding of such. The cabinet member for Homeland Security (shades of *Reichs Führer das Deutschland!*) has been appointed, yet has not been confirmed by Congress.

Thousands of people have disappeared with not even their lawyers knowing their whereabouts. Congress has passed legislation under duress while it was being attacked by anthrax mail. They did not even get a chance to read legislation that it has passed let alone debate it. Congressman Ron Paul (R) said: "It's my understanding the bill wasn't printed before the vote—at least I couldn't get it. They played all kinds of games, kept the House in session all night, and it was a very complicated bill. Maybe a handful of staffers actually read it, but the bill definitely was not available to members before the vote."

The Patriot Act passed voiding significant chunks of the Bill of Rights, including the First Amendment (right of free speech and association) and the Fourth prohibiting searches without warrants. There does not now exist any category called "unreasonable searches and seizures"—all searches are effectively legal, specifically secret searches.

People can be declared or defined as a terrorist by executive order. Organizations can be declared terrorist or terrorist linked by executive order and have their assets seized and membership list confiscated. Secret courts disburse secret search warrants. People are charged with secret evidence, which even their lawyers cannot see and are unable to confront

or challenge their accusers.

Open permission to kill has been given to intelligence agencies (i.e., death squads organized, financed and run by the US Government). Who will decide which of the enemies of the US government is beyond the pale and need to be exterminated? How long before this horror strikes home as the US government certainly has many opponents, both presumed and real, both at home and abroad?

One of the internees died with an alleged heart attack. When his body was autopsied in Pakistan he had several broken bones and possible internal injuries (amid requests from the FBI to legalize torture). Some internees have smuggled out letters, which describe the pressure to denounce each other as a way to get out of isolation and or avoid immigration charges.

In summary I wish to raise your attention that while you focus on the war overseas the war at home is just as important. On Sept 11 we have turned like the Roman Republic before us to an Empire. After 911 the empire and empire builders come openly to the forefront while the forms and pillars of the republic are systematically destroyed.

R

20 November 2001

Dear Sirs:

I want to commend David Walsh for examining the terrifying confluence of Washington and Hollywood: two industry towns that both work hard to determine what the American people want as they tell them what they want. Phrases one hears often from Washington: "What the American people want is...." or "I don't believe the American people deserve...." In Hollywood one hears: "Nobody wants to see that..." or "It's not commercial."

Washington seems to want to create a self-fulfilling ethos by assuming a direct line into the consciousness of the American people. "The American people" describes a group that is decent and honorable and understands true goodness. They compliment as they manipulate. Hollywood has only the first weekend of a film's release to worry about—they address known appetites that can be agitated in fast clips seen on TV screens. In both industry towns vision is not the great natural resource that it has been in the past and as it is in other parts of the planet. The objective in both towns is to give the consuming public things they would like to believe about themselves and their enemies. The objective is to strip it all down to the kind of adrenaline pump that the World Wrestling Federation has developed into an operatic art.

The unique imagination of an author or a statesman will not find room at the inn in either industry town. In Hollywood an author hands over his work to those who will shape it any way they wish to fit whatever concept of marketability they determine. In Washington each heartfelt representative is hooked to an IV that pumps poll numbers into his bloodstream. Words become meaningless—the objective is to say nothing important or dangerous.

The one movie that David Walsh did not mention in his piece is the summer release of *Pearl Harbor*. I felt war was in the air (or the pipeline as it were) when I saw trailers and promos for that movie. I felt war was on its way when the Bush cabal stole the election—I thought for sure we would be in a war within eight months. When *Pearl Harbor* hit the screens with its glossy centerfold patina I wondered what was being sold. When CNN broadcast "Beneath The Veil" I wondered what are they gearing up for. I've noticed in the past when an invasion or a military action is desired, the plight of women in that region, ignored prior to the decision to invade, becomes a major focus. I wonder, as the new book *Bin Laden: The Forbidden Truth* suggests, if the groundwork for the invasion of Afghanistan was laid well before September 11.

The thing that the military needs in order to continue its mercenary campaigns is public support. Americans must believe the military does what it does to protect us and our way of life. Hollywood can do that for

the military because it is likely that the mercenary forces are doing the bidding for the same transnational corporations that own both the White House and most of Hollywood.

BD

19 November 2001

I just read the article about your opposition to the war in Afghanistan and I would like to comment. First, the primary reason Americans are now attacking the Taliban and their Arab supporters is because of the twin towers massacre. If Bin Laden was being protected by the French; France would be bombed. Remove that horrible event and there is no way Bush sends the bombers. The intrigue that you describe may be a case of over analyzing the situation, and over estimating the intelligence of our leadership. Of course, the oil is a concern, but secondary at best. If there must be one super power in the world, which country would you choose? Politics aside, the homogeneity of the U.S. is what makes it my choice. I would think that Socialists would oppose religious dictatorships and monarchies at the drop of a hat. The U.S. has many negative qualities, as you are aware, and frequently point out, but; I can travel freely and my family has food on the table. Also, do you honestly believe Saddam would have been bombed had he not attacked and invaded Kuwait?

Fondly,

DM

23 November 2001

I've just been reading the piece you published by Chris Marsden and Julie Hyland ["Britain: Parliament overwhelmingly approves anti-terrorism bill"]; although far from a socialist myself, I must say it was the most thoughtful and (alas) accurate commentary on the anti-terrorism legislation—and on the government's general attitude—that I have ever read.

My thanks.

IP

24 November 2001

Dear editor,

Thanks for Chris Marsden's piece on the renewed eruption of imperialism onto the world scene ["The bombing of Afghanistan and the new 'Great Game'"]. I am deeply impressed by the *WSWS*'s clear and consistent analysis of world events.

Perusing the liberal press, I am struck by the mixture of utter confusion, self-absorption, cynicism and sheer ignorance which characterizes the commentary on the war in Afghanistan. Varying from tearful hand-wringing to outright calls for the complete destruction of Afghanistan and Iraq, it seems as if an entire layer of people has completely lost the capacity for independent thought.

However, it is also clear that the media pundits are completely out of touch with sentiments on the ground. In South Africa, ordinary people are mostly deeply concerned about the Bush government's belligerent stance, and express fears that one day, they too, might bear the brunt of US aggression. The lack of a clear perspective on these events also leaves many feeling helpless, confused and angry.

I find myself encouraging increasing numbers of people to access your website and to spend time studying the analysis of world events presented there. The PDF leaflets are also a boon to those who do not have access to the Internet. I encourage you to keep up the good work.

Yours

EG

South Africa

16 November 2001

From the first time I entered your web site I found it to be informative. It would be greatly appreciated if you could educate me further on how to make a difference in this ever-growing struggle against the fascist leadership that has taken a strong hold against the liberties of working class America. Thank you,

WS

20 November 2001

Dear editor,

A thousand thanks for finding and revealing the truth about who the real terrorists and war criminals are. May god bless you and protect you.

WL

Australia

20 November 2001



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact