

Letters on the death of US Senator Paul Wellstone, and a reply

11 November 2002

The statement published by the World Socialist Web Site October 29 on the plane crash that killed Democratic Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota has sparked considerable commentary from our readers. The majority of the correspondence was favorable, and a selection of these letters has already been posted. Some readers, however, have taken us to task for what they view as unsubstantiated speculation that Wellstone may have been the victim of a political murder. Below we publish a number of these letters and a reply from Patrick Martin for the WSWS editorial board.

While I'm not totally in agreement with your views, I consider your web site a valuable resource for news hidden or distorted by the corporate media. So your credibility is important and your Wellstone murder story fails. As I understand, Wellstone chartered the plane the morning of the crash, so it's difficult to believe that one of Bush's goons could get to it. Don't get me wrong, I wouldn't put anything past the Bushies, but it seems clear that they didn't have the opportunity here.

BR

29 October 2002

"... the official investigation will in all probability conclude that Wellstone's death was the result of an unfortunate but unexplainable mechanical malfunction."

Poor visibility due to inclement weather in combination with pilot error contributed to the failed landing attempt. Mechanical malfunctions would put the plane's manufacturer, maintenance contractor and insurance company in the position of conducting their own investigation.

You are so silly!

Anonymous

29 October 2002

Paul Wellstone murdered? Now, I've heard it all! Oh, please.

KW

29 October 2002

I wish I had more time to thoughtfully respond to your suggestions in this article. Unfortunately, I must keep my comments painfully brief. I refuse to believe that any sane person would make such accusations that I have found within your article. Your accusations are inflammatory, hysterical and not remotely stimulated by fact or reason. You discredit yourself and your cause with such baseless attacks.

Again, I wish I had more time to disabuse your much faulted perception of reality...

AW

29 October 2002

Editors,

I make frequent stops at your web site to read intelligent and all-too-frequently overlooked viewpoints on important issues. It is in that context that I must express my extreme displeasure over your sloppy, sensational bit of conspiratorial nonsense regarding the death of Paul Wellstone.

While I'm certain that the views you expressed crossed the minds of many sympathetic to the unpopular (in Washington power circles) causes that Wellstone championed, I would think those who have assumed the

responsibility of informing the public and shaping opinions should be more circumspect before giving voice to entirely unsubstantiated rumors.

Do you have any evidence to offer that is in any way suggestive of foul play? No. Are you aware of any instance to this point in which the investigation of the accident has been inadequate or unscrupulously manipulated? No. The deaths of two Democratic Senate candidates in plane crashes suggest "a pattern"? Really? Well, WSWS editors are wasting their talents. There is a lucrative actuarial career awaiting anyone who can establish a predictive pattern based on that data set.

In addition to your total lack of evidence, you are unable even to establish a reasonable motive. Surely these nefarious Republican operatives you concoct are aware of the outcome of their murderous Missouri scheme? A large sympathy vote is likely to result in a similar outcome for Mondale in Minnesota.

It seems we are left with a litany of seedy innuendo amounting to "I wouldn't put it past 'em." This is the sort of unsubstantiated fear-mongering that you would never tolerate from those seeking to justify, for example, a war with Iraq. You should hold yourselves to that same standard.

AN

29 October 2002

Patrick Martin replies:

Most of the letters attacking the WSWS commentary on the death of Senator Paul Wellstone do not actually address the content of the October 29 statement. We did not assert that Wellstone's death was definitely a political assassination. Rather, we argued that the possibility could not and should not be excluded in any investigation.

It is our critics, not ourselves, who are jumping to conclusions and presuming an explanation—that the plane crash was a tragic accident—before any serious investigation has begun.

There are two reasons to consider the possibility of a politically motivated assassination. The first is the lack of any obvious explanation—mechanical failure, pilot error—for the crash. As the WSWS statement declared: "It is possible that there will emerge a credible explanation of the October 25 plane crash that killed Wellstone, his wife Sheila, daughter Marcia, and five others near Eveleth, Minnesota. Initial reports, however, are disturbing. None of the typical causes of a small plane accident—engine failure, icing, pilot error—appear to be involved."

Since the WSWS statement appeared, further information has come to light tending to discount mechanical failure or pilot error as the causes of the crash. According to new accounts published in the Twin Cities:

Investigators determined that the Beechcraft 100A King Air plane had its flaps extended and landing gear lowered, indicating that the pilots had been preparing to land.

The landing flaps were extended 15 degrees on each wing, refuting the suggestion that one flap might have malfunctioned, causing the plane to make an asymmetric approach that would have led it to turn away from the correct approach to the Eveleth runway.

The lead pilot, Captain Richard Conry, underwent a routine six-month

test of his flying proficiency less than 48 hours before the crash. Conry's wife, Johanne, said, "He passed the check with flying colors," adding that her husband was in good health and well rested for the Wellstone flight.

A Minnesota reader e-mailed us a report that NTSB acting chairwoman Carol Carmody initially made reference to a cockpit voice recorder being on board the plane and an effort to recover it. Subsequently the NTSB denied that such a recorder existed. (Its presence on board the plane would have been optional.)

As far as the practical means of deliberately causing such a crash, several readers have written in to suggest that mechanical sabotage of the aircraft is not the only possibility. Interference with navigation, the deliberate sending of false signals to mislead the pilots who were on instrument approach, remote-control takeover of the plane or even the firing of an anti-aircraft weapon are all technically feasible.

The second reason for considering the possibility of foul play is the political context in which this event took place. The WWSWS statement said, "Under different political circumstances it might be possible to dismiss the Eveleth crash as a tragic accident whose causes, even if they cannot be precisely determined, lie in the sphere of aircraft engineering and weather phenomena. But the death of Paul Wellstone takes place under conditions in which far too many strange things are happening in America."

These "strange things" include the previous death of a Democratic Senate candidate, Mel Carnahan of Missouri, under remarkably similar circumstances two years ago. As the *New York Times* noted, in its lead article summarizing the election results November 7, the Republican margin of victory in the US Senate was supplied by the two states, Minnesota and Missouri, where the leading Democrats died in plane crashes.

Even more important is the character of the Republican right that has come to power in the Bush administration. In an escalating series of political conflicts—the partial shutdown of the federal government in 1995-96, the Clinton impeachment, and finally the theft of the 2000 presidential election—it has demonstrated political ruthlessness and contempt for democratic procedures.

The campaign of investigations launched to destabilize and oust the Clinton administration was an attempt to overturn the results of two presidential elections, while Bush's victory in 2000 was accomplished, not by an appeal to the voters, but by an appeal to the US Supreme Court to suppress the counting of votes.

Once in power, the ultra-right has resorted increasingly to methods of political provocation, suppression of information, and violence. Many questions remain about the government's role in the September 11 terrorist attacks, either in failing to prevent them or permitting them to take place so as to provide a pretext for the policies of militarism and reaction that unfolded following the destruction of the World Trade Center. Ever since September 11, the Bush administration has conducted itself as a government with something to hide. Only a week before the election it was revealed that the White House had reneged on earlier promises and was once again opposing any independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the terrorist attacks.

Nor has there been any serious effort to bring to justice the terrorists who attempted to assassinate two leading Senate Democrats, Majority Leader Tom Daschle and Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy, using anthrax derived from US Army germ warfare stocks. At the very least these facts warrant the following warning: in George W. Bush's America, leaders of the opposition party would do well to avoid small planes and avoid opening their own mail.

Those who react dismissively to such observations only reveal their own naivety and complacency in regard to the deeply reactionary and anti-democratic character of the present American government. The Bush administration has publicly voiced support for assassinating political

leaders overseas who, in its view, stand in the way of US interests. Why should anyone assume that the arch-reactionaries around Bush would rule out using such tactics within the borders of the United States? This is not to mention the possibility of independent action by fascistic elements in militia groupings, the gun lobby and the Christian right—all of which have the closest links to the Republican Party.

It would be the worst kind of blindness to reject out of hand the possibility that the death of Wellstone was politically motivated, not only because of Wellstone's opposition to Bush's policy on Iraq, but also because of the enormous political and financial stakes involved in the contest for control of the US Senate, which the Democratic Party held by the margin of a single vote at the time the Minnesota senator died. There are more than a few people in high places who stand to win or lose many millions, or even billions of dollars, depending on which party controls the upper chamber of the federal legislature.

Reader AN suggests that we are applying to the US government the same methods of "unsubstantiated fear-mongering" that the Bush administration is applying to Iraq. Let us not pull any punches about the danger of such a false equivalence. The Bush administration is far *more* dangerous to the peace of the world and the lives of American citizens than the government of Iraq, and Bush himself is, if anything, a more brazen liar than Saddam Hussein.

The WWSWS and its predecessor publications have a long record of political opposition to the bourgeois-nationalist politics and repressive methods of Saddam Hussein—going back to the years in the 1980s when he was a *de facto* instrument of the US government in waging war against Iran and was praised and favored by Reagan, Bush senior, Rumsfeld and company.

But Iraq is a weak, impoverished, largely devastated country, incapable of waging war even against its neighbors, letting alone projecting military force on the other side of the world. The United States, on the other hand, is an imperialist power driving for world domination. Its government has already demonstrated a greater capacity for lies and aggression than any regime since that of Adolf Hitler.

These political considerations must inform any analysis of the possible causes of the death of Senator Wellstone.



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