

Letters to the WSWWS

26 May 2003

The following is a selection of recent letters to the World Socialist Web Site.

Dear Joseph Kay,

I really appreciated your articles, "The science and sociology of SARS." The impact that this disease is having on the world should certainly not be underestimated.

The world's perception of SARS is illustrated by the fact that, according to travel executives, SARS has caused more damage to the global airline industry than the September 11 attacks and the war in Iraq COMBINED. Clearly, disease is a more realistic fear than terrorism!

You accurately contrast the scientific research that has gone into understanding SARS and HIV/AIDS. "Within two weeks of isolating the virus [SARS], the entire genetic sequence and exact structure of the virus had been determined and is now publicly available...In contrast to this rapid pace of scientific understanding, it took two years in the 1980s to identify HIV as the cause of AIDS."

However, I do think there is more to this difference than "the power of modern science." While these two diseases, as with many infectious diseases, have the greatest impact on the poorest, most marginalized populations around the globe, one large difference is the means through which each is transmitted. HIV/AIDS is predominantly spread via sexual intercourse and/or intravenous drug use—behaviors which are considered taboo. This in itself has made it extremely difficult for infected people to come forward and seek the necessary testing, counseling, and medical care. In addition, HIV/AIDS has also been a direct target for US Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson's backward proposals to continue abstinence promotion as the primary method of prevention.

People suffering from HIV/AIDS are often stigmatized due to the behaviors associated with transmission. Even though SARS has a very different mode of transmission I do not think SARS-infected individuals are immune to threats to their human rights. For example, China's Supreme Court has threatened to execute people who "knowingly" spread SARS. Unfortunately, decisions such as these are primarily driven by the greed and economic policies of political and business leaders around the world—an indication that, as you mentioned, capitalist society is incapable of effectively and ethically handling these diseases.

An example of this greed-driven prevention is within big business. AIDS prevention programs have seen some of their greatest strides in industry, where the disease has 'stolen' from company owners' enormous pockets, such as in the diamond industry and Coca Cola plants in Africa. Again, I would agree that SARS is not immune.

Thanks,

CL

15 May 2003

On "Australian budget advances 'free market' agenda"

Tonight, I read your report on the Howard administration's attempts to privatize and dismantle higher education in Australia. This story has a particular resonance for me, as I am one of the 70% of the instructors at my community college who are teaching without benefits or representation. The situation in the United States is remarkably similar, despite the large number of highly regarded institutions of higher learning. The discourse emanating from politicians, private foundations and

corporations is identical to that of Brendan Nelson, in that these political institutions invariably emphasize the corporate aspects of higher education. College administrators and even many self styled progressive educators regularly tout the virtues of "consumer" based education, "leadership" programs, "teamwork" and "life skills," usually at the expense of curricula that encourage an active critique of culture. Paradoxically, those who attempt to institute the latter are referred to as "elitists."

F

16 May 2003

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing in response to your article: "Community colleges in US facing massive cutbacks." I teach in the Dallas County Community College District. At my college, in north Dallas, some summer school courses have been eliminated because of budget cuts. Adjunct professors rely on these courses as an essential part of their incomes. The college has 600 adjunct professors and only 200 full-time professors. I have been teaching philosophy for eight years. The full-time professor retired eight years ago and the college still has not hired a full-time replacement.

Charles Bogle's article highlights the difficulties facing students today but I think there is an even bigger story here. Over the last several decades, tax rates have fallen for the wealthiest 1 percent from 91 percent in 1961 to their present level. Today student loans make up a greater percentage of college costs than grants (ten years ago this was not the case).

Adjunct professors are living at the poverty line (almost half of the college professors in the country are adjuncts). The end result is that future workers are educated, employers benefit and the wealthy do not have to foot as much of the bill. The gains of the wealthy are clearly coming at the expense of professors and students.

North Dallas is a Republican stronghold (80 to 90 percent). My college is just a few miles north of where Dick Cheney lived before he became vice-president. It is also just a few miles north of Ross Perot's home. I wonder if people know that there are college professors living at the poverty line in Dallas.

Sincerely,

TP

20 May 2003

Thank you for your many excellent sane WSWWS articles during this terrible period of insanity. After the bloodbath will come an aftermath of reprisals and deep-seated resentment which will take years, if ever, to mend. Both Bush and Blair spout like programmed robots to hide their guilt for destroying the lives of innocents in a defenceless country. We are demonstrating on London streets to protest against their criminal acts and even our school children have found their voices.

CB

13 May 2003

On "Terror bombings bare US crisis in Middle East"

To the editor,

Having never written to you before let me first say that I'm a daily reader of your web site. I often agree with you and always highly prize

your articles and analyses. Even on those occasions where I'm not in full agreement, that difference makes me think harder than differences encountered in most media of concern. Needless to say, I don't even bother to include the corporate media in that category.

I begin with the above because I find myself writing to you for the first time with a bit of a complaint. After the recent bombings in Riyadh and the subsequent revelations that one of, if not the, prime targets was the Vinnell Corporation (currently a subsidiary of Northrop Grumman), which is serving as a "training force" to the Saudi National Guard, an entity that serves a similar purpose to the old Somocista Nicaraguan National Guard in protecting the regime against "its own people," I find myself somewhat shocked that you haven't addressed the topic at all.

The targeting of Vinnell (seven of the eight reported American victims killed were employees) and the near complete failure of the corporate media to even acknowledge that fact beg desperately for explanation. Some of the more obvious conclusions that come to mind for the corporate media silence are: the American elites need to elide the relationship of U.S. support for the brutal House of Saud against the Arabian masses; they need to erase the connections between that support and terrorist attacks; the acknowledgment that the Americans were killed could in fact be considered a military target in a civil war could lead some to question the formulation that "they hate our freedoms," etc. etc. etc.

The attack on Vinnell could also serve as a useful starting point for a discussion of the privatization of U.S. militarism which, in the form of Vinnell, DynCorps, MPRI, and others, has served the American Empire as a useful tool of deniability and unaccountability. While we probably won't get to the level where such tools can be used for the "Rape of Iraq" (as y'all so accurately put it recently) and while the Bush administration appears to be significantly less concerned with issues of deniability and seems to actively celebrate their unaccountability, such a discussion could serve to illustrate both how we have gotten to where we are in terms of foreign relations and, just as importantly, how privatization serves domestically to foster deniability and unaccountability to the "Rape of the U.S." (not to mention the rest of the world).

Anyway, these are just some thoughts that I had that I expected to hear some of addressed by y'all, and I found myself rather surprised at the fact that you haven't yet discussed the implications of the bombings in any way, shape, or form.

Anyway, consider this a note from a friendly anarchist who's glad that you're around.

Cheers and keep up the good work!

RJ

16 May 2003

On "William Bennett: the secret high-stakes gambling life of a former drug 'czar'"

The moral nostrums espoused by William Bennett are indeed the ideological underpinnings used to justify the extreme inequality of modern society. Arm in arm with every invader seeking to exploit a newly colonized country walked the Christian missionary, there to "civilize the savages." The same arrogance and goals characterize these new missionaries.

But, take note of the very narrow range of reaction from his "critics," from 'he never directly criticized gambling,' to 'so what,' to Jane R. Eisner's column in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* which, at most, expresses discomfort with such blatant hypocrisy. None are able to raise, let alone defend, the political concepts of the Enlightenment, which were among the first targets of these reactionary charlatans. Look at the Christian right's effort to dismantle the Constitutional wall separating Church and State. Then look at Bush's championing of government funding for "faith-based" initiatives. These are important issues crying out for public debate.

Incredibly Eisner has nothing to say about these issues. Instead, throughout her column she uses Bennett's own moral yardstick to attack

him, at one point advising: "To maintain your credibility... you have to walk the walk." The refusal of liberalism to defend what was to an extent its own philosophical heritage is abundantly evident in Eisner's column. Also evident is the advanced state of putrefaction for what is passed off as political thought in the United States.

I believe it was Marx who wrote something to the effect that the bourgeoisie indulges in private all the vices that it condemns publicly. It's a great piece, unfortunately I could not locate it. So I'll leave you with what Trotsky wrote in *Their Morals and Ours*: "The ruling class forces its ends upon society and habituates it to considering all those means which contradict its ends as immoral. That is the chief function of official morality. Such a regime could not have endured for even a week through force alone. It needs the cement of morality."

HC

Portland, OR

13 May 2003

When the candidate who raises the most money in politics tends to win, and with over half of that money coming from wealthy individuals and corporations, how can Bush stand before an audience at a factory in Omaha and pretend to represent their interests? This goes a long way in explaining his inability to stop smirking.

Bush has ignored the criticisms of 10 Nobel Prize-winning economists regarding his tax cut plan, although it doesn't take someone of their caliber to explode his economic quackery: if "tax cuts for the wealthy" is the answer to all economic woes, then what could be done if the economy were still struggling but there were no more taxes to cut? Why didn't the slashing of tax rates throughout the 1920's prevent the Great Depression?

Bush is the representative of a social layer that stands to increase its wealth by billions of dollars as a result of this policy. He can not be taken seriously by anyone who does not stand to gain, in much the same manner that no one outside of the United States took seriously the claim that billions of dollars worth of Iraqi oil was "not a factor" in the invasion.

RG

15 May 2003

On "Worsening global economic problems see G8 divisions deepen"

Dear Editor of WSWS,

You comment on "the failure of European policymakers to initiate measures to counter the stagnation." I think you are right. Those who are going to suffer for this policy are the millions of unemployed and the wage earners of the euro area.

I wonder, however, why you do not mention the European growth and stabilisation agreement that was negotiated as a follow-up to the European Monetary Union (EMU)? The agreement came about very much on German initiative, because the Germans were fearful about abolishing the Deutschmark in favour of a European currency. Hence the stabilisation pact with its stipulation of penalties for non-fulfilment of the convergence criteria. The monetary union furthermore operates with a central bank whose primary concern is to combat inflation.

The French Jospin government wanted a central bank that also had to take employment considerations, but the Germans prevailed. Ironically, it is the Germans who have a hard time now fulfilling the criteria. And there is a very real danger of deflation that may precipitate the European economies into the abyss of an economic depression. The conservative financial orthodoxy of the EMU makes it impossible to stimulate the European economies.

Perhaps the Americans are aware of that when they so readily forget about the Strong Dollar policy. They have really got a chance now to hit at the Europeans and get revenge for the acts of non-compliance of obnoxious "Old Europe" in the Iraq war.

The dollar has devalued far more vis a vis the euro than compared to its rates to other main currencies like the yen, and the Chinese yuan, which is pegged to the dollar. That makes Europe much more exposed to Chinese

cheap goods exports that may hurt the fragile parts of European labour markets even more.

The economic centre of the euro-zone, consisting of Franco-Germany/Benelux, has a very strong balance of payments position. "Old Europe" is actually one of the strongest and most competitive globalization centres of the world. That would normally call for expansionist financial and monetary policies to do something about the dreadful employment situation. But the unemployed Europeans have obviously been sacrificed on the altar of the silly financial orthodoxy of the EMU, the ECB statutes and the stabilisation pact. They are victims of the atavistic German financial orthodoxy. In the EU financial policy is not a union prerogative. The finance ministers of the euro area cannot agree on concerted stimulation of the economies in their own countries.

This is not the way that the economic difficulties of the euro-area are explained in the dominant media. They rather see the high unemployment of Germany as a result of "structural rigidities" of the market. This leads to the liberal agenda of labour market reforms and privatisation, which will only hurt the unemployed even more, if the "reforms" are implemented.

GF

20 May 2003

I very much look forward to reviewing the news items provided daily in WSWS. I have stopped reading mainstream news/media outlets almost entirely because of the propaganda and pro-Bush, ultra-conservative drivel that they pass off as objective news. Thank you, and keep it up!

PF

Dayton, Ohio

13 May 2003



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact