

Letters from our readers

4 February 2004

Below we post a selection of recent letters to the World Socialist Web Site.

On "Will Vice President Cheney be Indicted—and will the US media report it?"

According to the article, there is a lack of media attention with regard to television and newspapers. However, I'd like to let you know that National Public Radio did a fairly good report perhaps a month ago. Also, take a look at the transcripts on the White House web site. On January 23, Russell Mokhiber asked Scott McClellan if the president would allow VP Cheney to be extradited by France. The question was met with laughter from the White House Press Corps. I hope he continues to bring it up in the future.

Personally, I would like to know a little more detail about the law that allows for such extradition. NPR briefly touched on it. They reported that the very law that France may use to extradite the VP is a recent law that the US pressured France to sign in an effort to extradite a French citizen. Although we know the US/Franco relations are tense, I think it is important to mention the background and details of the law in an effort to put the issue in proper perspective. Otherwise, if and when major newspapers report it, the inference will be that France's motivation is solely revenge. Is this law a result of what Mr. Martin refers to in his article as the "convention on cross-border corruption"?

AD

Fairfield, Connecticut

28 January 2004

P.S. I suspect this bribery incident isn't isolated to Nigeria. It's probably "business as usual."

Thank you very much for being brave enough to report this ugly incident of bribery that took place in Nigeria.

The involvement of the US vice president (Cheney) has proved that there is no act of criminality/corruption that has taken place in Nigeria by Nigerian government officials without the strong backing and support of some government officials of the developed countries.

The influx of these officials into bribery and kickbacks in developing countries such as Nigeria without being indicted is a reflection of the failure of the developed countries and United Nations in general to address corruption practice among leaders.

MN

28 January 2004

Patrick,

I really liked your article. It pulls together many of the things I've been picking up from other sources. (I'm certain you're familiar with Google's News Alerts which I've been getting regarding various issues and the growing number of people who have something to say about the Bush administration.)

But I was wondering if Al Franken has seen your article? If I had his email address I'd send him a copy. It provides good material for his new radio show soon to launch, and is very much in keeping with his book *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them*.

Good luck in finding additional readers for what you have to say. Maybe there's hope for our country and the world after all.

May truth, honesty and forthrightness prevail.

Best regards,

HM

29 January 2004

I believe what President Bush is doing is insane! I think this is what happens when we put a Republican in office. This is a very important time of year, with the election coming up. This will cost him thousands of votes. I hope he doesn't get reelected. He focused too much on the war overseas and settling an old grudge against Saddam and his father, when he should have helped out the Americans living right here in the United States. If he was smart, he would step down now!

SG

Texas

28 January 2004

On "Academy Award nominations: the globalization of mediocrity"

I am an American writer who worked for over a decade in Hollywood...in both TV and film. I now teach at the Polish National Film School in Lodz. Mr. Walsh's comments were very good...but didn't really get to the essential points of Hollywood's cultural product these days.

The Oscars are, of course, mostly publicity...but they also reflect something important through the lens of self-satisfaction. The fact that nothing of any importance is given attention is not surprising...since little that is important even gets made. Walsh is spot on regarding how more is concealed than revealed. The virus of sentimentality is one reason...another part of the fabric that is current mainstream consciousness. Lurking behind all of these films is an assumption about society...that society works...that somehow even the damaged and hurt people will eventually be given rescue. Charlize Theron is possibly going to win...playing one of the hurt and damaged...but one who is eventually executed...the proper ending for an outcast. *Mystic River* is sentimental and yet, in a strange way, in spite of itself, almost DOES tell us something about the lust for punishment in America...and the near eroticizing of same.

Actors are actors...some of those nominated are good (Depp, Theron, Kingsley) but the issue is how compromised the social critique is.... Walter Benjamin once suggested Beckett was more revolutionary than Brecht...so I am not arguing for polemics...only for serious and challenging work. If a *Lord of the Rings* can win an Oscar, what does this suggest? More of the infantilizing of popular culture probably. Hollywood cannot allow serious artists to control million dollar budgets...studios routinely demand changes to scripts (especially endings) and often demand thematic alterations as well. Unless one goes along with this one does not work. This goes back even to Orson Welles. Film has the potential for being a great medium...but rarely does it achieve this. Charlie Chaplin never won an Oscar for instance...but Barbara Streisand did. The society of the spectacle is now hegemonic...and the Oscar spectacle is only part of it...a self-adoring evening of mediocrity and careful speeches about general topics...oh, and occasionally a Michael Moore protest moment.

This year's films reflect a great deal about the popular mindset...the youth-addicted and smug arrogance of the culture...as well as its indifference to poverty and pain and tragedy. Hollywood can congratulate

itself on nominating *City of God*...but such token examples (not a very good film anyway...and another example of sentimentality) don't really mean much when one looks at the business of entertainment. Studio bosses want returns...they think in terms of film as a business...and so it is. The business of not making waves ... of apologies for a growing police state and the erosion of civil liberties...of an addiction to violence and the stereotyping of the poor and marginalized.

I haven't watched an Oscar broadcast in 15 years...and this year will make it 16.

JS

28 January 2004

Dear John Braddock, the *World Socialist Web Site*,

The deductions of your January 20 article "*New Zealand Herald* covers up reasons for sacking anti-Zionist cartoonist" are very much welcomed. Thanks for clarifying the boundaries between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

Evan's case is not isolated. The international community must be stirred to be steadfast in the face of the anti-truth and anti-human Israeli campaign. The voice of truth is targeted. Jews who disagree with the Israeli atrocities are on the blacklist. Arik Ascherman, the head of the Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel, is on trial for trying to block an Israeli bulldozer from demolishing a Palestinian house.

28 January 2004

On "Germany: New education standards—perfecting the system of social selection"

As a primary teacher in Britain, I would like to congratulate Dietmar Henning on his excellent article on the developments taking place in the German education system and particularly his accurate references to the recent changes in the English education system.

In addition to the effects of publishing national league tables based on the SAT tests mentioned in the article—i.e., polarization of children of poor and middle class families, lower funding to lower achieving schools, massive stress and pressure on children and teachers—together with the demands of the National Curriculum and Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, the effect has been a return to streaming in many schools.

Teachers are expected to seat children in tables during the Literacy and Numeracy hour according to ability. In my probationary year, I was criticized for seating children in mixed ability groups, even though the children were working with material differentiated to support those who needed it. In one school I was placed in, children were divided into separate classes for math according to their "ability" from the age of six (something which severely disadvantages children born in the summer months who are almost a whole year younger than the oldest children in the year group). In another, children were placed in ability sets across two-year groups.

There is a wealth of research, to say nothing of my own personal experience, which proves that when children are placed in mixed ability groups they learn and gain from each other, whereas when they are separated the gap between them grows. One of the arguments against mixing abilities is that the "higher ability" children are held back. However, when I have encouraged children to explain, for example, math concepts to peers who are having difficulty understanding, this has led to a greater and deeper understanding by both children—one child because he/she receives information at their age level and the other because in order to explain a concept he/she has to consider and clarify their own understanding.

Another effect of the SATs and the danger schools face if they have low results—which is obviously particularly likely to happen in a poor area where children often enter school at a lower academic level, due to their social situation or due to the fact that many are refugees with English as a second language and severe trauma—is that schools disallow children who are likely to achieve low results so as not to decrease their average. These

children's education then ceases to be a priority as teachers scramble to train the remaining children to the test.

At one school I found an 18-year-old teaching assistant "teaching" six children in year 6 (10 years old) who had been disallowed from the test because of their varying learning difficulties. I asked her if she planned with a trained teacher how best to teach these children with severe learning needs and behavioral difficulties. She told me that she had been given a "pack" to work from and that she had been working constantly with these children (who represented 10 percent of the year group) throughout the year.

The real reason for separating children into "ability" groups is, as you so clearly put it, to select, to encourage a small layer of children to think that they are special and therefore deserve management positions and attached perks; to educate them to a level where they can be an asset to a corporation or government body; and to make sure that the majority feel themselves to be failures who deserve low wages and bad conditions and have no opportunity to develop their abilities.

Children in England are described as having "special needs" and are given different levels of extra help depending on the organization and funds of the school they happen to be in, but there is no sense in which this support is aimed at closing the gap between them and other children in their year group. The lower groups are given lower-level education in the same way as fetuses in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* have oxygen withheld so they will develop into unquestioning Epsilons who carry out cleaning and dirty work.

Regards,

DT

30 January 2004

On 3 January 2003 at 10.30 p.m., Yorkshire Television broadcast the first episode of a "fly on the wall" called "Crime Fighters."

The programme focussed upon Leeds Police's "Rough Sleeper's Initiative," led by DC Neil Thompson.

In the words of DC Neil Thompson, while talking of the homeless:

"We never give them five minutes, wherever they are we'll stop them, we'll see what they're up to. We'll use the law as much as we can...if we can annoy them enough, so they get so fed up of being woke by us..."

In the programme the homeless were stopped and searched at every opportunity. DC Thompson also claimed that most of the homeless were criminals and heroin addicts.

I wrote a letter of complaint. Clare Morrow, YTV's "director of programmes," in her reply claimed that Mr. Thompson was "compassionate" in his treatment of the homeless and that there was "camaraderie," "friendship" and "mutual respect" between DC Thompson and the homeless.

I would say this programme is a clear demonstration not only of how Leeds Police are treating the homeless, but also of how YTV are portraying the homeless.

29 January 2004



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