

4 March 2005

We post below several letters from readers in response to David Walsh's "Reply to reader's letters on 'The new McCarthyism: The witch-hunting of Ward Churchill'". Ward Churchill is a University of Colorado professor who has been targeted by the ultra-right. In a response to the September 11 terrorist attacks he enumerated the crimes of US imperialism and added that the "most that can honestly be said about those [suicide bombers] involved in September 11 is that they finally responded in kind to some of what this country has dispensed to their people as a matter of course."

Dear Mr. Walsh,

Thank you for your compassionate response to the letters you received in reply to "The New McCarthyism." As a computer programmer who was employed at the World Trade Center on September 11, I am squarely within Churchill's "technocratic corps." Your balanced and sensible viewpoint on this matter means a lot to me.

Like many who came of age during the Reagan years, I was politically unaware well into adulthood. My thinking has undergone drastic changes in the last three years, and your web site has been an important part of my political education. While there are many places to find information, and perhaps even accurate information, it is the underlying kindness in your work that has made it my primary news source. Thank you, and keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

AC

The response of the WSWs to Ward Churchill is perfect. While acknowledging the witch-hunt and legitimate points made by Churchill, you have also pointed out the serious flaws in his ranting—particularly his painting of ordinary Americans, working class and otherwise, as "Eichmanns."

I think the revelation that sticks best in my mind, and one we should pay special attention to, is that it is the

economic system (and its political tail) that should be the focus of our scorn—not individuals. Even the worst members of our American elite, while repugnant and criminal, are acting rationally according to the tenets of system they were born to. Material and historical conditions—let's not forget, Marxists!—are the basis for ideologies regarding what is normal behavior. We are all victims of, and contributors to, the maintenance of the capitalist system. Though I minimize my participation in consumerism, consume I must.

We must focus on culture, power structures, established institutions—not individuals. A good Marxist recognizes this, while at the same time acknowledging the possibility for change—if we will it.

BB

Oklahoma

I am surprised that you did not include anything about how only infantile opposition is allowed on the corporate media. Churchill skirts along the edge of saying the 9/11 victims deserved what they got and it is a national story. Yet those with reasonable arguments about why 9/11 happened and against the military-industrial complex don't get to be heard.

Their message is clear: Only nut jobs can oppose the "official" ideology.

TA

I agree with everything you wrote in your last article. It is rather what you didn't write that bothers me. What I mean is that even if you correctly assert that the majority of Americans are misled by the media and the Bush administration about US foreign policy, there are *still many* who are aware of and, for individualistic reasons, choose to look the other way. And yes, that's cowardice and, in a moral sense, complicity.

I think you would and could have reached a better dialogue with your readers had you acknowledged that fact. From my point of view, you are 100 percent right,

and your critics are 20 percent right also. It is untrue to say that *all* Americans are complicit in US foreign policy, but it is equally untrue to say that *all* of Americans are unaware of what's going on. You did not say that, but you did not refute it either. So, instead of barricading your argument in strict materialism focused almost exclusively on objectivity in determining class consciousness, you would have been better off exploring the dialectical contradiction that emerges in the subjectivity of the upper-working-class: Despite their objective position in the economical structure in theory, the occidental working class has been put in practice, by 70 years of the Welfare State, in a temporarily different objective position in the economical structure, that is, one where the hope of climbing social hierarchy was possible, where relatively high wages made it hard to understand in a Marxist way the term "exploitation," and where relative redistribution of the social wealth was enough to put aside the theoretical class consciousness.

FF

France

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The Carmine Cervi video "Axis of Evil" contains a speaker who draws an interesting analogy. He likens the United States to a runaway bus, speeding around the world. Every time the driver swerves, a few hundred pedestrians are killed. The passengers in the bus aren't paying any attention to what the driver is doing. They're too busy partying. Eventually the pedestrians decide that in self defense they have to stop the bus, for example by blowing it up. "But wait," says one of the pedestrians, "what about the innocent people on board?"

Obviously, one possible response is, "They should have been paying more attention to what the driver was doing."

There are counterarguments. One is that they weren't paying attention not because they were partying, but because they were working hard, trying to support themselves and their families. Therefore they are not to blame. Another rebuttal is that they were paying attention, but their leaders and the corporate media systematically lied to them about what the bus driver was doing.

I find that this analogy makes it difficult for me to take an extreme position either for or against Ward

Churchill's comments. The 9/11 attacks do contain an element of collective self defense. There are several good reasons why Americans don't know what their leaders are doing, but I'm not sure any of them totally justify our ignorance and complacency.

LS

Indiana, Pennsylvania



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