

Letters from our readers

22 March 2004

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

On "The media, the entertainment industry and Michael Jackson"

Dear David Walsh,

I read your entire article on Michael Jackson and the ongoing child molestation case. It is truly rare to find a well-written article that pays attention to detail as well as remains fair. But your article went further than that and illuminated several other aspects of the American culture and society and the media's role. On the other end of the spectrum are writers who start with titles "Jacko..." such as one I saw recently from ABC news online. And it seems quite a few journalists these days use such low tactics to grab attention.

Keep up the good work,

AA

17 March 2005

Dear David,

An insightful expose of the underlying issues surrounding the trial of Michael Jackson.

As Trotsky noted in *Their Morals and Ours*, "During the epoch of capitalistic upsurge the relations between the classes softened, at least outwardly. Thus certain elementary moral precepts in social relations were established along with the norms of democracy and the habits of class collaboration. The impression was created of an ever more free, more just, and more humane society. The rising line of progress seemed infinite to common sense.

"Instead, however, war broke out with a train of convulsions, crises, catastrophes, epidemics, and bestiality. The economic life of mankind landed in an impasse. The class antagonisms became sharp and naked. The safety valves of democracy began to explode one after the other. The elementary moral precepts seemed even more fragile than the democratic institutions and reformist illusions. Mendacity, slander, bribery, venality, coercion, murder grew to unprecedented dimensions. To a stunned simpleton all these vexations seem a temporary result of war. Actually they are manifestations of imperialist decline. The decay of capitalism denotes the decay of contemporary society with its right and its morals."

Certainly, I believe Michael Jackson is a severely confused individual, for all the reasons you have mentioned; his father was an unrelenting taskmaster as well. My personal belief is Michael Jackson finds solace and pleasure in the company and sincerity of children, where he can be himself, away from the demands of those who manipulate and exploit him relentlessly.

I hardly find it logical that he would go to the expense and trouble of building Neverland and also openly (and naively) admit in past interviews that he does sleep with children that stay over, as he finds it a most beautiful experience, if he is a child predator. He would certainly have a more clandestine approach if that was his intention.

My fondest memories are those when my children would hop into my bed for a chat about all sorts of things and we would end up falling

asleep together. It still happens on occasion, and they are 18 and 19 years of age. They still find it a good time to talk over their ups and downs without any distractions, and it is certainly part of keeping a strong bond between us. This is only my opinion, of course.

Best regards, and thank you for the great article.

DD

Australia

17 March 2005

David—such a brilliant essay. Like a naturopath taking a strand of hair and doing a complete cellular, system breakdown you have taken this tawdry, endless, episode and have done a fair and complete diagnosis. It is at the same time poetic and accurate—stinging and gracious—evenhanded and devastating. You're such a good writer, both scientific and artistic in your comprehension.

BCD

17 March 2005

On "To 'hold the world but as the world...' *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare, directed by Michael Redford"

Joanne Laurier's recent piece on *The Merchant of Venice* presents a good starting point to reconsider the longstanding misconception of anti-Semitism attached to this significant play. While I have not seen Michael Radford's recent film adaptation, I once attended a live performance at the Public Theatre (NYC), have read the play, and also perused Harold Bloom's struggling analysis thereof in the pretentious *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. Strictly speaking, nothing about *The Merchant of Venice* has ever struck me as being profoundly or even politically anti-Jewish.

What Shakespeare apparently did, and very successfully, was complexly embody and critique the Italian (maybe the English) bourgeoisie in his antagonistic characterizations of Shylock and Antonio. As the Soviet literary scholar Aleksandr A. Smirnov explains:

"The conflict [in the play] is not racial, as many critics contend, but social.... Shylock does not represent the entire bourgeoisie, but only one of its elements; he is a money-lender. Usury was but one aspect of capital, and met with moral and legal disapprobation. The lawmakers tried to regulate money-lending; the moralists inveighed against it. Even if Shakespeare did not differentiate between the two forms of capital, still, in Shylock, he depicted a representative of the least productive and most rapacious section of the bourgeoisie. In creating Shylock, Shakespeare was attacking the enemies of humanism, the Puritans....

"Even more significant is his approach to the race problem, so striking in the profundity of its humanism. The Jewish usurer was a character from the Italian novella [*Il Pecorone* by Giovanni Fiorentino], which served as Shakespeare's source for *The Merchant of Venice*. The racial and religious motivations of the mutual hatred between Antonio and Shylock are replaced by the only true motivation, the social. As if to leave no doubt about his own view on

the matter, Shakespeare introduces Shylock's famous monologue (III, 1)—as fiery a plea for racial equality as can be found in literature" (Shakespeare: A Marxist Interpretation)

Moreover, Joanne Laurier's reference to Abram Leon's *The Jewish Question* casts thought-provoking light on Shylock's situation as bound up with socioeconomic changes in a preceding era and in his time period. Jews had dominated commercial life in the pre-capitalist feudal world. But with the advent of Medieval and Renaissance capitalism, class struggle more and more confined the Jews to the usurious profession. Against this, one sees Shylock's nuanced literary existence enmeshed in certain contradictory social forces that bring him in collision with exchange economy and the Christian bourgeoisie—the merchant Antonio being their personification.

In all of this, to be sure, the characters of *The Merchant of Venice* are not mere economic categories. They are living participants with conflicting social-class interests in the changing, challenging, and tumultuous times of the late sixteenth century.

Sincerely yours,

ADW

20 March 2005

On "Report documents poverty and social misery in Afghanistan"

Nobody denies the high prevalence of mental disorders in Afghanistan after more than two decades of war and destruction. I think the figures about mental disorders/problems in Afghanistan are exaggerated, and no reliable source has been quoted. Even WHO may not confirm the 95 percent rate for mental disorders among Afghans, but certainly large numbers of people have psychological problems.

But the problem is this: That even if the rate of mental disorders in Afghanistan is very low, the people do not have access to mental health services. There is only one mental hospital in the country with 60 beds in Kabul. There are no services in regional or provincial hospitals for patients. People must travel days to reach Kabul for some pills that can be prescribed by a general practitioner (GP) in their district if the Ministry of Health trains the GPs. There are very limited mental health human resources available, and the worst of all is that the ministry does not have a department to address the mental health issue at the national level.

While the country is flooded with funds from big donors (most of them are not interested in health in general and in mental health in particular) even less than 1 percent has not been spent for the mental health of whole population. The problem in Afghanistan is not only the poverty of not getting food but the poverty of health services, especially mental health services.

AJ

Mazar, Afghanistan

16 March 2005

On "Report highlights costs of occupation for Israeli society"

Dear Mr. Kelly,

I absolutely support the existence of the State of Israel. But I absolutely oppose the Occupation of the Palestinian Territories by Israel. I was in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza during the spring of 2004, and saw with my own eyes the devastation to the Palestinian society and economy caused by the Occupation.

My parents emigrated from Eastern Europe in the 1920s. My older brother and I were raised in a Labor Zionist family, and participated in Labor Zionist Organization of America activities in Detroit, Michigan.

When the State of Israel was declared in May 1948, my family attended a public rally in Detroit along with 100,000 Jewish residents of Detroit. I was 10 years old at the time. We were elated. My brother

lived in Israel from 1954 to 1959, spending four of those years on a collective settlement, Kibbutz Urim, 21 miles south of city of Beersheva.

Over the years, while continuing to believe in the existence of a viable Jewish state, I have reevaluated much of my own thinking and, in particular, the policies of the State of Israel towards its own Israeli-Palestinian citizens, and those living in the Occupied Territories.

What Israel is doing, with the unbridled support of countless American governments, is absolutely unconscionable. I arrived at that conclusion primarily because I became better informed by reading about the issue in a broader and more inclusive manner, and meeting with and discussing the issue with Palestinians whom I have met over the years.

Having worked in the public and social services fields for 45 years, I have come to appreciate the need for a more balanced and informed approach to such issues.

I congratulate you on a very informative and insightful article about the effects of the Occupation on Israeli society, particularly in economic terms. Keep up the excellent work!

HS

Berkeley, California

16 March 2005

On "A New York City parable: Pale Male, the red-tailed hawk"

I have never heard such a story. I live in the mountains of Virginia where I enjoy sightings of these beautiful birds. Who was there first, the rich and famous or Pale Male?

What is wrong with the world that you have to worry about something of nature, a bird's nest? Have they really lost sight of who they are, or should I say where they came from?

I have to say I am glad I do not live in New York; I am glad I am not rich and famous. If you want to send the bird to Virginia, please know I will welcome it and let it take my breath away every time I see it in the sky. Have you ever heard one of them?

PM

Bland, Virginia

19 March 2005



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