

Letters from our readers

6 April 2005

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

On “Crisis of labor bureaucracy dominates US union summit”

Your article provides much-needed sharply critical analysis of the current (and historical) situation of the labor movement in this country. Although painful to read, I have been passing it around the building to discuss the merits of your arguments. I agree with a lot of what you have written.

LO

31 March 2005

On “‘Reality television’ and the American reality that produces it”

Noah Page’s article on “reality television” touches on an interesting phenomenon in contemporary US culture. What strikes me about shows like “Fear Factor” is the direct line from these network grotesqueries to Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and other US chambers of horrors tucked away in desolate corners of the world. Substitute Iraqis or Afghans for the buffed and beautiful contestants, and the “harmless” degradation takes on a disturbing, even sinister, aspect. What these unhappy displays—both soft and hard-core torture—speak to is the devaluation of, even revulsion towards, the human body and spirit in late-capitalist US culture—a self-loathing whose obverse is the narcissism of celebrity whose gilded allurements hold a dispirited population in thrall. The fact that contestants submit themselves to soft-core torture for money degrades their humanity even further. So many viewers getting off on this sickness reveals a breathtaking cultural emptiness and puerility! Worse is the cynicism and decadence of the money-grubbing corporate purveyors of this trash.

“The Swan” and shows of its ilk offer a cynical twist to the soft-core torture genre. Here, unfortunates who have already been “tortured” by life, either through material deprivation (the under class) or failing the culture’s impossible standards of beauty (mostly females, but increasingly males as well), are “rescued” by a munificent, god-like corporate power—an omnipotent force that has the ability to grant a new lease on life (“The Swan”), or to destroy it completely (Fallujah).

RW

Albuquerque, New Mexico

2 April 2005

This article contains many truths, but the main truth about reality television is that the networks need not hire writers or actors, who happen to be unionized.

PK

1 April 2005

On “Bush-appointed intelligence commission whitewashes war based on lies”

I saw George Bush on television presenting the findings of the intelligence organizations’ “failings.” You could tell by the look in his eyes darning this way and that before he started that the whole thing was going to be a pack of lies. His body language says it all.

Regards,

PA

1 April 2005

On “The dysfunctional society: US billionaires on the rise—roads, bridges in decay”

The decay of US passenger rail is another sign of the corrupt state of America’s economy. While conventional wisdom states that rail travel was “naturally” eclipsed and out-competed by air and auto transport, the truth is far different. The auto and airline industries, since after World War II, have received massive subsidies from the federal and state governments, which have been actively cutting off funding for the maintenance and innovation of the passenger rail system. While the state and federal governments spend billions on roads, highways, and airports, Amtrak has had to stretch ever-dwindling funding to maintain thousands of miles of track. At the same time, entrepreneurs who have tried to introduce innovative rail schemes have been sabotaged by auto and airline fat cats and their bought government lackeys. I encourage *World Socialist Web Site* readers to do more research on this subject, and on the motives behind the planned destruction of America’s once-healthy infrastructure.

MJ

31 March 2005

News is rarely, if ever, good for the “average” American. Our days are long and hard as we produce the steam that keeps these billionaires rolling in money. We are forced into paying the highest price the market will allow for the simplest necessities, making it hopeless for the average American to ever rise above their financial level. We are victims of the corporate giants and our leaders, here in the land of opportunity. No one cares about the infrastructure of the American Family. Americans are an emotional nation; they will reach out to any less-fortunate people, anywhere. I believe our leaders and these corporate giants know this, and capitalize on that also. The rich, well they are for sure getting richer, while the average American is picking up the tab, again.

SM

Hanover Park, Illinois

30 March 2005

On “The absence of democratic sensibility in American filmmaking”

After reading your review of *Million Dollar Baby* and of Clint Eastwood as a filmmaker, I was struck by the realization that most Americans want to connect to the world around them, but are too afraid to do so. Movies provide a safe outlet for us to feel, and a chance to view stories that take us to worlds that are unlike our own. We get to see our fantasies come to a realization on screen. We transfer our fantasies onto the actors who star in these films, and we create the other multibillion-dollar industry called entertainment news. Why is the entertainment industry so big? Because it makes us feel, and we as humans will pay money to feel certain emotions, to escape from some, and to be able to connect with characters without any

danger to us—danger of criticism, of rejection, of vulnerability.

As I am getting older I find myself wanting more out of what I see on screen. I find myself wanting to analyze film into what does this film say about me or the world in which I live in. Do I feel inspired or moved in any way? Does this film make me want to change my life or the lives around me? What truths am I seeing? I find films lacking. I enjoy the story, but I don't get the message. I believe that film is an art form. I believe that art exists to move us emotionally, helping us to reflect on the world in which we live in, not only to help us escape from the world in which we find ourselves. I want film to help me become conscious, not attribute to my unconsciousness.

Your review was a joy to read. It took me a couple of times to ingest it, and I don't know if I totally got all you were trying to say. What you did say made me write this letter. Your responses to film made me think of my own.

LB

30 March 2005

On "New details of Australian involvement in the torture of Mamdouh Habib"

Here we have another instance of morality being stood on its head in times of crisis for political expediency: the case of Schapelle Corby. Here we have a woman who has been apprehended with an illegal substance (whether she is guilty or not is not the issue. That is to be determined by the courts), where the Australian government is doing all within its power to facilitate her release.

Conversely, we have had two Australian citizens held incommunicado and fraudulently as illegal combatants, subjected to the most nadir torture and violation of their human rights, without charges being laid against them. The Australian government, however, considers them to be the "worst of the worst," yet cannot provide any empirical evidence against them. Governmental lies and deception once again underscore that the lives of those the government is entrusted to protect are expendable to political objectives and expediency.

DD

Melbourne, Australia

28 March 2005

On "Bush critics barred from 'town hall' meetings on Social Security"

In general, thanks for your article. I wanted to point out a few questions/possible improvements:

1. End of paragraph two speaks of Social Security as "the government benefits system for senior citizens." By saying that, you omit the many benefits for (many non-senior) disabled people, survivors, children, burial, etc., that the Social Security system provides. Reinforcing the limited "senior-only" concept plays into the hands of the Bushites, who would like people to think only of the retirement part of the system. I have many friends on disability, not seniors, who need the support provided by the system at this time, and who would never have had such support if they had only relied on some "private account" that they may or may not have put any money into in the past (had the Bushites' program been in effect in the past).

2. At the end of paragraph eight, you quote someone as saying that the town-hall meeting is "a private event." Yet, at the end of paragraph 14, another person is quoted as saying it "was paid for with taxpayers' dollars." It is not clear what is actually true about these White House-sponsored events. Are they private (paid for by Republicans, for them only), or is there public funding (other than Secret Service protection for Dumbly)? Public funding should *not* be

going to party propaganda operations. I wish the article stated more clearly just what, if any, public funding was going into these. Are there any Senators or Representatives investigating the legality of any public funds going for these pro-Bush events? Time to call Rep. Henry Waxman?

RG

2 April 2005

On the Minuteman fiasco on the Mexican border

For the entire month of April, minuteman volunteers will be manning designated posts along the eastern border of Arizona (near Douglas)—in hopes of bringing to light the number of illegal immigrants coming north into the states. Some of these volunteers are armed, raising many concerns with human rights groups who claim that unnecessary harm could be inflicted on the innocent border crossers.

The Bush administration has said that the "loose Mexican border" is a haven for terrorist activity. Furthermore, the administration continues to portray individuals illegally crossing the border as terrorists. With this faulty premise forever being crammed into the mainstream media, along with armed neo-bounty hunters on the Mexican border—the inaccurate perception of a terrorist (and ultimately the target of violence) lies on the innocent.

This is just another misuse of power by an administration that continually guards its homeland security tactics. Recently, homeland security documents released by the US government have placed both animal activists and environmental activists on the homeland security threat list as terrorists. Both groups tend to lean towards a liberal ideology. Both largely oppose the Bush administration's policies. Both are innocent.

MH

Montana

3 April 2005

On the WWSWS

I always read everything on your site! Everything! It just helps, as fascism raises its ever-ugly head here in the USA, to read all that your wonderful staff of writers has to say. Thank you so very much. Having gotten disconnected from your site somehow, I am just so happy to have it back! Thank you so very much for all that you let us know!

MJR

2 April 2005



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