

# Letters from our readers

4 January 2006

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

*On “Liberal philistinism revisited: Richard Cohen on Syria”*

One has to wonder: Who is Richard Cohen talking to? Who in this country any longer believes what he is saying? The millions who marched against the invasion of Iraq in February 2003 didn’t believe it at the time and have been confirmed in their convictions by subsequent events. An intelligent five-year-old could easily figure out that the war in Iraq is for oil. And if Cohen really believes that the invasion of Iraq was “a just cause” it’s not surprising that he is intellectually unqualified to understand the film *Syria*. Philistinism is just one of his attributes. Infantilism is the underlying debility. He insults the people of the United States—and the rest of the world—by assuming that they are as stupid and venal as he is. It would be amusing to watch a man parading his faults with such bravado if it were not for the fact that he is doing it in a major newspaper, with the apparent approval of the publishers, and expecting his readers to take him seriously as a knowledgeable commentator on world events.

CZ

San Francisco

28 December 2005

Typical good analysis punctuated with a great last line. But it’s sad, isn’t it? This country hardly knows where to go and what to do anymore without its “naive and good” violence. So this regime marches on clothed in righteous banners—remember 9/11—with the henchmen, like Cohen, to remind us of self-deceits. Is creation of fear a twin of “altruistic” power?

WB

Fresno, California

28 December 2005

I agree with your assessment of Cohen, however, the movie itself wasn’t a very good movie for several reasons. It was unclear who was involved in what conspiracy and why. Also, it had such a brutal cynical tone to it that it almost seemed to be saying something about human nature rather than capitalism—that the corrupt and violent rule and since this is somehow the order of things, there is nothing that can

be done to undermine their rule. Although Cohen’s criticism of the film that the United States would engage in such a thing is ridiculous—the assassination of Mossadegh in Iran is a perfect historical example—his criticism that the film was disconnected was correct.

MD

28 December 2005

Thanks for so effectively eviscerating that numbskull from the *Washington Post*, Richard Cohen. His vileness and ignorance come only second to the inimitable Thomas Friedman. May they both rot in Hell.

EG

28 December 2005

*On “Harold Pinter’s artistic achievement”*

Congratulations for such an informative article showing the playwright’s relevance to both his artistic and political concerns. The BBC did show extracts from his speech which appeared on its web site, but would not devote an entire programme to showing it in full. Times have now changed since the BBC and its Blair controllers are now fully devoted to the market rather than the educational and historical mission it once performed years ago.

Certainly, many of Pinter’s contemporaries did sell out. John Osborne is one example. But others like Arnold Wesker did fall by the wayside, more due to neglect than anything else. Wesker’s trilogy “Chicken Soup with Barley Roots” and “I’m Talking About Jerusalem” are still important working-class dramas, as well as “Chips with Everything.” Your tribute to Harold Pinter is excellent and well-deserved. But we should also remember that others were also active in the ’50s and ’60s who did not sell out and have become conveniently forgotten in an era where slavish support of the status quo and non-critical forms of entertainment still attempt to deny activist voices in the past, as well as the present.

TW

29 December 2005

*On “British court rules Guantánamo detainee David Hicks entitled to UK citizenship”*

Read with great interest your article on David Hicks. There are some Australians who are appalled by our federal government and its support of Bush, illegal internments,

show trials and all other sorts of fascist behaviour. I have a show on local community radio station in the Barossa Valley and will read out your article, with full credit to you, in the continuing attempt to let people know that what is happening to David and others at Guantánamo Bay is not right, just, fair or legal. Hopefully at the next federal election we might see John Howard and his government out of power.

MC

Greenock, Australia

31 December 2005

*On “Eyewitnesses refute official story in fatal shooting of passenger at Miami airport”*

I am a flight attendant with a major airline. When I first heard this story on CNN, even before I knew if the man had been shot dead, I felt he might have been a man who had a psychiatric crisis (and I was right). I had some ideas on how it might have happened, and that Rigoberto Alpizar would be alive today had the situation been handled better by flight attendants and federal air marshals. After reading various accounts (*USA Today* and *Newsweek*), I feel more certain of my original feelings for the following reasons.

*USA Today* said that a flight attendant blocked Mr. Alpizar’s exit when he panicked and ran to the airplane door. Later I read that he didn’t want to fly, and his wife convinced him to board the plane. Apparently he had a manic episode (or severe anxiety or panic attack) since he was off his medications. Perhaps they had been in the knapsack that was stolen. If the flight attendant blocked his exit, it was an appalling act on her/his part! I don’t think Mr. Alpizar had said anything about a bomb at that point. No flight attendant has the right to block someone’s exit under those circumstances (i.e., a passenger must deplane for health or emergency reasons). Had she let the poor man off the plane (I believe he was obviously having a panic attack), this incident would likely never have happened. Perhaps Mr. Alpizar did mention a bomb at that point to try to get her out of his way, a very unfortunate choice of words that sealed his fate. But I am not sure that he mentioned the bomb even at that point, or it is my understanding that the federal air marshal is the only person to hear the bomb threat. As stated, the flight attendant had no right to block his way, and it makes no sense that (s)he would have done so had Mr. Alpizar been running up the aisle yelling that he had a bomb. I wouldn’t do so—I’d let the passenger deplane with his bomb for sure.

I defend the flight attendant’s action in notifying the air marshals that an unusual situation with a passenger was in progress. (S)he had to do so. However, as I said above, I wonder if Mr. Alpizar ever mentioned a bomb, as my understanding was that he did not mention it until confronted by the marshal on the jetway (out of earshot of passengers

who might have been witnesses). Did the air marshal overreact and shoot and then realize his error? Perhaps at that point the air marshal realized he had made a horrible mistake and might even face some sort of criminal charges (and certainly a lawsuit), if he didn’t “hear” Mr. Alpizar at least mention a bomb. I guess that is something we will never know unless there were other people on the jetway other than Mr. Alpizar and the marshal, and I doubt there were.

*Newsweek* said something about Mr. Alpizar exhibiting odd behavior on his flight from South America to Miami, in which he rang the call button a lot and annoyed the flight attendants. Big deal! People do a lot of things some flight attendants consider annoying. The rest of us consider it part of the job. Also, he refused to give up a plastic drink cup when the flight attendant made her final walk-through to pick up refuse and service items. The flight attendant was heard to demand the cup, even after poor Mr. Alpizar told her he needed to keep it (for whatever reason), and supposedly, according to witnesses (other passengers), she said she had to take it because, “It’s the law,” (what law, for God’s sakes?) and, “Don’t you know what a law is?” I am appalled at the flight attendant’s behavior! Service items, such as a simple plastic cup, are left in passengers’ hands every day, every hour, every minute, on aircraft all over the world. We try to pick them up, but sometimes can’t. I’ll bet she was already upset with Mr. Alpizar because he rang his call button more than (s)he liked. So, it sounds as if (s)he antagonized his already faltering mental health and tenuous hold on reality.

I know that the air marshals are there to protect us and think they do a good job, but I think, from what I can read and understand, that Mr. Alpizar was the victim of some dictatorial airline personnel and some overzealous federal air marshals. What a shame! I am so sorry for him and for his family. I wish I could communicate this to the Alpizars (and maybe their lawyer).

NP

30 December 2005



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