

Letters from our readers

9 February 2006

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

On “US Budget slashes social spending to fund war and tax cuts for the rich”

Your article accurately describes the outrage being perpetrated by the Bush administration against anyone who is not a millionaire or billionaire. What with the decimation of manufacturing jobs in the US over the past several years and the holding hostage of the remaining workers by threats of further downsizing and/or outsourcing, what can ordinary people look forward to? No jobs, no health care, no child care, no training, unaffordable education—these people’s lives have hit a wall at a hundred miles an hour.

In the meantime, there is the obscenity of the super-rich, eloquently attested to by an article on Tuesday, January 31, that made the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle. It describes the “woes” of multibillionaire Larry Ellison of Oracle, who is having difficulty living on \$1 billion a year! It seems his accountant has been trying valiantly to curb Mr. Ellison’s out-of-control spending habits, which include his new yacht, his America’s Cup team, his new 23-acre Japanese-style estate in Woodside, the airplanes, the Armani suits, etc. This and other details were contained in e-mails from Ellison’s accountant that came to light as part of the unsealing of documents related to a recent lawsuit by shareholders against Oracle. It seems that the suffering billionaire is borrowing against his Oracle stock to finance his excesses and his accountant is now worried that he will end up like Bernie Ebbers of WorldCom notoriety.

When a major metropolitan newspaper like the *Chronicle* deems a story such as this to be front-page material and the tone of the article is one of implied sympathy for a man who was suspected of insider trading when he sold 29 million Oracle shares in January 2001, just weeks before Oracle issued a disappointing earnings statement and the stock plummeted, one has to wonder anew about the values of American society. During a week filled with stories about Bush attempting to gloss his spying on American citizens, the closing of major auto plants and the laying off of thousands of workers, the new Medicare drug plan falling apart even as it deprives people of their medication—one could go on for several paragraphs—this story is on the front page!

How much longer can democracy continue to exist with such an enormous disparity of wealth in this country? While people like Mr. Ellison and his mates Ebbers, Ken Lay and their ilk are trying to “budget” their billions, the victims of Hurricane Katrina are still trying to scrounge house and food money while their neighborhood—and probably a few of their neighbors—are rotting away in the swamp that has become New Orleans. How long can this go on?

CZ

San Francisco, California

3 February 2006

On “The State of the Union speech: Bush repeats litany of lies on Iraq war”

The State of the Union address revealed, though not so obviously, another feature of the capitalist ruling elite. In finishing up his speech, Bush listed a few of what he evidently thought to be the most important historical achievements of the American bourgeoisie, and he posed the

question, “Will we turn back, or finish well?” The use of the word “finish” here seems to be a kind of Freudian slip of the bourgeoisie, and for that reason it is more revealing than most of the rest of the speech. It seems that the American bourgeoisie, “having come far in [its] own historical journey,” has, to put in bluntly, no faith in its own place in the future. This can only be the result of a deep-going demoralization of the ruling classes; to borrow an expression of Trotsky’s, the revolution is casting its shadow before it. The politicians are wilting in that shadow.

DW

3 February 2006

You people do a wonderful job of laying matters out for understanding. This article is just one example. I can’t think of anything its match historically—particularly on a daily basis.

GW

2 February 2006

On “With the help of the Democrats, Alito to be confirmed as US Supreme Court Justice”

Kerry and his handlers timed his call for a filibuster the same way they staged his last week of September 2004 announcement that he was really going to get down to brass tacks and start running for president. Two empty gestures perfectly timed: too late to do any good, but just in time to save him from charges he did nothing at all. What a despicable man. Alito is in and Kerry can claim his hands are clean.

TN

31 January 2006

On “Oregon Democrats, GOP join forces against independent candidates”

Your article fails to point out that I testified against the bill in the Oregon Legislature, both in person and in writing. I also issued two press releases denouncing it. Those press releases each went to several reporters at the *Oregonian*.

Dan Meek

Pacific Green Party of Oregon

1 February 2006

On “Two recent films: Brokeback Mountain and Walk the Line”

As a gay person, I really was moved by the portrayal of the sexual oppression in this movie and the damage to so many lives as a result of it. Yet I couldn’t help thinking, if the two main characters couldn’t develop a deeper bond and understanding of their lives while alone in the wilderness, then get thee to San Francisco. I was pleased to find that Joanne Laurier’s review noted that “the years between 1963 and 1983 saw many changes that would inevitably have worked upon the protagonists with consequences not envisioned by the filmmakers.” The film could have at least hinted at different outcomes in so far as the sexual liberation movement of the 1970s was being fought as a result of the earlier gains of the working class. As such, it described the symptom, but without an understanding of the cause, we are again left in the dark hoping that the world will somehow change for the better on its own.

BT

San Diego, California

4 February 2006

On “Punishment Park—1970s radical protest film released on DVD”

I read Clare Hurley's review of Peter Watkins's film *Punishment Park* with great interest. While I greatly appreciated the historical perspective the author puts forward, I found myself having to part ways halfway into the review. Hurley writes: "*Punishment Park* quite correctly points to the danger of police-state measures in the US. Ignoring the real causes of this danger, however, leads both to political pessimism and to an orientation toward pressuring the ruling elite and particularly the Democratic Party." I think it's a misinterpretation to view *Punishment Park* as simply forewarning of the dangers of government curtailment of civil liberties. *Punishment Park* is not just the presentation of a possible alternative future reality but a depiction of American society's oppression as it is—then and now.

Ms. Hurley's review leaves out a few plot points which I think are relevant in that they give the film a greater complexity than suggested. The young radicals are given the opportunity to free themselves by reaching the American flag in three days. Early on they split into two groups: one group that has no desire to reach the American flag and plans to ambush the police, and another that decides to proceed with the game. Upon being attacked by the police, the latter group again splits into two factions: a semi-militant and a pacifist faction. Back in the tents, one of the activists, Allison Michener, tells the tribunal, "Violence is inherent in this society, you don't seem to understand that....You are trying to put radicals on trial as scapegoats for the problems that stem from your own system." She goes on to contrast the Enlightenment ideals found in the preamble to the Constitution with the unwillingness of a government built upon those ideals to fulfill basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter. By intercutting this speech with shots of a group of exhausted, thirsty and increasingly violent activists attempting to make it through the desert heat, a real statement is being made. Likewise, the subtle reminders and recreations of scenes from the Kent State massacre, the 1968 Democratic Convention, the gagging of Bobby Seale, the references to Vietnam, are all in place to remind the audience that *Punishment Park* is a metaphor for contemporary America, and the attempt to reach the American flag an attempt to achieve those ideals. Alternately, the fact that the camera focuses on the fluttering American flag while we hear a group of activists being killed and beaten by the police reminds the audience of the dual (and equally valid) nature of that symbol.

While I think that the review overlooks many of the outstanding elements in Watkins's film, I think it accurately points out some of the flaws that mar not only this film but much of Mr. Watkins's oeuvre (especially *La Commune* and *The Trap*). With the exception of Allison Michener (played wonderfully by Mary Ellen Kleinhall), very few of the activists say anything of any value. On the contrary, their spiels tend to be, at their worst, embarrassing. The right-wing platitudes of the tribunal are trite but appropriately so, considering their roles, but much would have been gained if Watkins had been able to intercut the scenes in the tent with those in the desert, with one serving as incisive choral commentaries to enlarge, highlight and alter the context of the other (as is done by the actress playing Allison Michener).

Sincerely,

RLV

31 January 2006

On the recent police shooting of Iraq veteran

I just watched the evening news and was shocked to see a police officer with a fully compliant prisoner gunned down as the man identified himself as a military member and begged the officer not to shoot him! The subject was a passenger in a vehicle failing to yield to police. The officer in his rage shot the man even after he had complied with the officer's orders. This officer is a menace to society and should be punished to the extent of the law.

JVV

Poway, California

1 February 2006

Park

On "Illinois governor outlines continued assault on working class"

Both the author and the WSWS deserve congratulations for bringing these issues to local and international attention. The article is well-researched and reveals that the Democratic Party has lost its traditional roots and is now as corrupt and reactionary as New Labour is in England.

However, other facts should be revealed. For the last two years, the governor has forced all state employees to undergo an "ethics" test which is little different from the submissive forms of behavior promoted during the McCarthy era. This test is not only irrelevant to the majority of employees forced to take it, but is another waste of money to the Illinois taxpayer. It is a deliberately planned "knee-jerk" reaction to certain activities which occurred much higher up the scale under the previous gubernatorial regime.

Those outside Illinois might be interested in the information that failure to comply with this test means not only instant dismissal but a \$2,000 fine. This also applies to faculty who may be overseas on sabbaticals and may not have access to the Internet, especially if they are on archaeological excavations in rural landscapes. One such person on sabbatical last semester only learned that she might lose her job and be fined on the last day that it was possible for her to take this test without facing these penalties for which there is no appeal. At present, she is undergoing treatment for cancer, and one can only wonder what other negative things might have happened had not her department contacted her in time. Also, several graduate students have refused to comply, so they have been informed that they will lose their assistantships necessary to help them during an era of rising tuition costs.

Furthermore, the former head of the local ACLU at a state university down south refused to support any faculty two years ago who did not want to do this test on moral and ethical grounds. The person concerned stated that the ACLU "might" intervene only *after* the affected faculty member lost his or her job.

The ACLU and their Democratic supporters thus toe the line, "My party, right or wrong" in the same manner as knee-jerk patriots follow the axiom, "My country, right or wrong." The only contradiction is that it is no longer their party since they still live in the past, engage in denial, and hope that the democratic ideals of the 30s and the New Deal will return. They will not, as those voting for Blair in 1997 found out. The same thing is true for the Democratic Party, as your editorials have constantly pointed out. It is now dead, and its position is now occupied by figures such as the present governor of Illinois.

TW

2 February 2006



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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