

Letters from our readers

27 February 2006

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

On "Zionists witch-hunt Australia's leading cartoonist"

I was very interested to learn of the campaign against Michael Leunig. Leunig's opposition to militarism is motivated by Christian pacifism. That he is under attack illustrates the increase in state repression more than any other recent example of attacks on cultural freedom.

The "war on terror" had a damaging effect on media workers. It was perhaps the event that showed us that the power of the bosses in the industry had increased to such a point that pretences at journalistic professionalism had worn threadbare. It is my impression that reporting on all topics has suffered as journalists have lost confidence in their ability to discover and report on the "truth." While reporters have long seen themselves as cynics, I suspect many have found with unwelcome surprise that they are cowards too.

But as news-writing fell into ruin, Leunig's somewhat insipid cartoons improved almost beyond recognition. Leunig is a small "c" conservative and a small "l" liberal. He is a conventional Christian, and a pacifist. One gets the strong impression from his cartoons that he, like John Howard, hankers after an idealised version of the 1950s, free of the adverts, videos, computers, junk food, and sexual promiscuity of the present.

None of these beliefs are remarkable. In many they mask a fear and hatred of social change. But Leunig, by honestly following through on these unremarkable beliefs in his cartoons, has created some powerful and disturbing images.

One can understand that the Australian ruling class, and the media bosses specifically, would dislike him. But it's testament to the limited options available to the ruling class that they see it necessary to rein him in. Throughout the Cold War, dissident artists such as Leunig were tolerated and even encouraged for the diplomatic kudos they gave the "free world" in contrast with the USSR. He poses no direct threat to the ruling class, and one cannot imagine him welcoming a revolution or any similar social upheaval.

If Leunig is beyond the pale then the cultural room for maneuver capitalism once enjoyed has shrunk.

MT

Denedin, New Zealand

24 February 2006

On "Sectarian violence engulfs Iraq following mosque bombing"

Great analysis James! I haven't seen the situation encapsulated so well and ringing truer anywhere else. Not that I'm on the ground there or anything (thank goodness). One can only hope that

our regime and the other players come to their senses before the entire situation explodes and the entire country implodes in bloody, widespread civil war. They've certainly mixed up all the ingredients just perfectly in a recipe for complete disaster. But of course that's what they (Straussian neocons) do, and it seems mostly intentional.

RC

Richmond, California

24 February 2006

On "Human Rights First report documents deaths of Iraqis and Afghans in US custody"

I plan to write my congressmen and demand that they make a public statement denouncing the administration's policies with regards to the torture, abuse and murder of Iraqis and Afghans. I was very disheartened recently by the lack of media coverage about the newly released photos and videos from Abu Ghraib. It makes no matter that we knew about the abuses a few years back and we didn't need to see more of the same. That was what I was reading as an excuse not to dredge up old wounds, so to speak and no pun intended. But the government originally didn't want them published, so they have only themselves to blame. Why does the American media continue to try and bury these atrocities? Again thank you for the work you do in bringing these important issues to our attention.

TV

Springfield, Oregon

23 February 2006

On "Financial Times columnist warns about social inequality in US"

Interesting article. There seem to be really two issues: inequality and growth (as a promise to justify temporary inequality). The inequality of the US of course is 'off the charts' in comparison to any other modern industrial democracy and matches only oil monarchies. Dramatically high social inequalities of both income and wealth are viewed by everyone from Harvard's Dani Rodrik to the CIA as good predictors of social instability. And the US Gini Index approaching 50 is in the CIA's danger zone. However, the issue of a promise of 'growth' (at least 'old economy' growth) as reason for the masses to overlook temporary inequalities is the much greater concern. The promise (of the 'old economy' entrenched elite) that "a rising tide lifts all boats" can now clearly be seen as a monumental class lie. The only thing that a 'rising tide' lifts, is that "a rising tide lifts all lies."

AM

Sanford, Maine

25 February 2006

On "Good Night, and Good Luck: A timely film on Murrow and

McCarthy”

Peter Daniels’ November 8, 2005 review of Clooney and Soderbergh’s look at the McCarthy-Murrow face-off was one of the best I’ve seen anywhere.

It is crucial to remember, as Daniels insists, Murrow’s limitations. I agree that the background to the Cold War deserved, maybe even required, greater emphasis to make the McCarthy episode more intelligible to a wide audience. Yet it is difficult to imagine doing so without effectively destroying the compactness and dramatic force of the film.

One of the key political words of the 1960s was “sellout” and for a short time it carried a potent emotional and political power. For a decade or more, few self-respecting students believed that making loads of money as an MBA was a worthwhile aim. Murrow, unfortunately, by then epitomized the sellout. During WW2, he was still close enough to his Southern and Western working class roots to reach a giant international audience with his quiet, straight-talking, poetic radio reporting from London during the blitz.

After the war, he returned to the states, where he was soon earning a salary at CBS larger than that of Frank Stanton, the President of the company. He was offered, and accepted for a time, a seat on the board of the corporation. What greater danger to an honest journalist?

Murrow’s sellout went far deeper than money. Although he was initially highly skeptical of the attack on Korea, Murrow was brought around by heavy ideological bait: he became a member in good standing of the Committee on the Present Danger, a secretive group drawing its members from positions near or at the very highest echelons of the US military-security complex. The US power/policy elite feared in Murrow a potentially dangerous enemy, and neutralized him by recruiting an ally with public opinion management skills second to none.

Although they were friendly in Europe during WW2, Eisenhower came to hate Murrow by the end of his second term in office. The normal revulsion of a heartland Republican for a member of the Eastern Liberal Establishment, right? But anyone reading Eisenhower’s departing speech on the dangers of the military industrial complex will understand in a trice that Ike was right (too late, when he no longer had anything to risk politically), and Murrow was dead wrong. Murrow went on to head the USIA, managing official US propaganda during the early years of the US invasion of Vietnam. The Kennedy liberals had picked up the Committee on the Present Danger’s chief bugaboo: “The Missile Gap,” and used it to get JFK into office and commence the biggest military expansion since the Korean War.

Hence Murrow, by the end of his life, was very much part of the power structure that smiled on McCarthy as a useful tool in advancing a specific expansionist agenda. As everyone familiar with the period knows, McCarthy’s downfall came with a rare piece of political lunacy: attacking the military establishment itself. Murrow’s principled journalism is rightly celebrated as having had a role in ending the Great Fear of the late 1940s and early 1950s. But let’s not forget that the anticommunist mania began under atom-bomb dropping Harry Truman, who took Senator Arthur Vandenberg’s advice to “scare hell out of the American people.”

These are the among the Chinese puzzles of US political history. Clooney and Soderbergh have done a great job of looking at one of the small peaks on the iceberg of US policy. It is up to us to help expose the entire floe, 90 percent of which has always been carefully hidden from public view.

For reading on the second incarnation of the Committee on the Public Danger see Jerry W. Sanders’ *Peddlers of Crisis: the Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment* (Boston: South End Press 1983).

RR New York, New York

22 February 2006

On “‘In Justice’ dramatizes reality of US criminal justice system”

I haven’t seen “In Justice,” but I agree completely with your assessment of the popular cop/criminal investigation shows and their unbearably smug protagonists. Yet many people I know lap them up eagerly, even watching two or three a week (as well as shows like “24,” which WSWS has also criticized for propagandizing on behalf of state-sponsored repression). While the police/detective shows are most offensive in their one-sidedness, I fault the legal and medical dramas as well. The overwhelming impression one gathers from these shows is that the professional contingent—whether comprised of lawyers, doctors, or other specialists—is smarter, funnier, better looking, more compassionate, and most of all emotionally healthier than the benighted individuals from the general public they come into contact with. The effect, as with the police dramas, is to enforce a hierarchical view of society that celebrates and fawns over a knowing ‘elite’ and encourages contempt for working class people.

AA

Mountain View, California

22 February 2006

Your review of “In Justice” and our legal system is a balm to those who see the other side as you do. It took a long time for my eyes to open, over 50 years before I even paid attention to ‘a problem.’ This show is wonderfully accurate and caring. I have been sickened by other reviewers who say things like: *only* so many were incarcerated yet innocent; *only* this many hundred died by the state. I wonder how important each of these writers would think ‘only one’ was if that one were any of them. Should we give it a try? Just choose one of them to see if his/her point changes.

VS

Gatesville, Texas

23 February 2006



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