

# More letters on Stephen Colbert and the American media

16 May 2006

*The following is a selection of letters sent to the World Socialist Web Site in response to “Following his attack on satirist Stephen Colbert columnist Richard Cohen denounces his critics”*

Kudos to David Walsh for his trenchant critique of *Washington Post* apparatchik Richard Cohen, surely one of the most loathsome of American “liberal” commentators. Cohen has every right to feel threatened by the “digital lynch mob,” as he calls it, as the burgeoning alternative sources of news and opinion available on the Internet is fatally undermining the exclusivity of his exalted perch as conduit of “received opinion.”

For my part, I most decidedly count myself as part of the growing demographic of people who have largely, if not entirely, forsaken the mainstream media in favor of a variety of sources on the Net. Your site, wsws.org, has in particular become a fixed part of my daily regime. I commend you for the outstanding commentary on current affairs by your fine stable of international writers. As others have noted, your analysis of the Katrina disaster last fall was among the finest on the web.

CB

Amsterdam, the Netherlands

11 May 2006

I suppose Richard Cohen laughed uproariously when George Bush went through the mock act of looking for the “missing” weapons of mass destruction. After all the death and destruction in Iraq, does Cohen still think a replay of that act would still be funny?

JN

Glen Mills, Pennsylvania, US

11 May 2006

I lived in Washington, DC, from July of 2001 through February of 2005. In my time there, I encountered a number of people, some of whom were journalists of

various sorts. When pressed, one of them told me that the reason a lot of obvious questions were left unasked was that journalists feared losing their press passes, especially the ones with White House access. He pointed to the abandoning of the tradition of Helen Thomas asking the first question as a warning sent to the rest of them that—no matter your credentials—you, too, are expendable if you step out of line.

Basically, they avoided asking questions to maintain the privilege of being in a position to...ask questions. Obviously, it has gone deeper than that, descending into the realm of becoming glorified stenographers, bound to take down and disseminate what the White House wishes to be known.

Colbert’s contribution to the dinner should be seen as a wake-up call to the journalists, if not to the rest of us.

CMS

Portland, Oregon, US

11 May 2006

Cohen cannot take refuge in his age, whatever it is. I am over 80 and I get my daily news from the Internet as I have found the TV news unreliable at times. For instance, there was nothing about the Colbert performance there. I have for a long time stayed up until 11:00 to catch “The Daily Show,” and now the “Colbert Report” immediately following. If Cohen believes evil should be confronted, then he had better take a closer look at the entire Bush administration. Example: What accomplishment has this war made—really? Nothing, except a lot of death and destruction, and loss of US treasure. Because of it and the insane tax cuts, we are close to being bankrupt. And what’s the answer to the latter? Cut all social problems, but keep dumping more money into the war and the super-rich. The media has had it so easy for such a long time, that it must be very disconcerting to it when it is attacked as the do-nothings it is comprised of. Obvious

exception to Helen Thomas, Molly Ivins, et al.

CS

11 May 2006

A well-done piece of writing disassembling Richard Cohen's eructations on Stephen Colbert's appearance at the Correspondents' Dinner. The incorporation of the quotation from the obituary of Nuremburg prosecutor Drexel Sprecher was exemplary poetic justice.

HC

12 May 2006

To those in the mainstream press whose last-line of defense is that Colbert "simply wasn't funny," how's this for funny? Does the mainstream press (Stephen Cohen, Dana Milbank, et al.) happen to recall back in 2004 George Bush's performance at the 60th annual black-tie dinner of the Radio and Television Correspondents Association? The one with George Bush as the main speaker. The one where *for laughs* Bush presented a slide show featuring him looking for weapons of mass destruction under his desk ("No, not there"), inside a closet ("Nope, not there"), under a rug ("No, not there").

Not only did the audience of mainstream media correspondents laugh at this sick humor, they applauded it as well! David Corn of *The Nation* noted that not one reporter he ran into in the after-parties complained or were in any way offended by Bush's sick attempt at humor.

Greg Mitchel in Editor& Publisher writes: "There is no record of whether Dana Milbank attended that dinner, but his paper (the *Washington Post*) the following day seemed to find this something of a howl.... The Associated Press review was equally jovial...."

What is one to make of Bush's attempt at humor at the 2004 Radio and Television Correspondents Association dinner, and the laughter and applause it drew from those notables so assembled? I'm reminded of something Erich Fromm once wrote: "Only the weak are cruel."

By the way, anyone who wants to thank Stephen Colbert can do so at <http://www.thankyoustephencolbert.org/>

Note: Here may be all I've learned in my life. Next to death, taxes, the fat lady singing at the opera and the sun setting slowly in the west, I know of no greater

truth than "sense of humor = sense of humanity." Put another way: George Bush has no sense of humor because he has no sense of humanity. I mean, think about the last time you met someone who lacks a sense of humor. Don't they give you the creeps? Don't you want to *flee* their company? More to the point: Is such a humorless person likely to have a social conscience, an understanding of history, a sense of humanity? I've *never* found that to be the case.

TF

13 May 2006



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