

Letters from our readers

28 October 2006

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

On “Bill Keller at the University of Michigan: New York Times editor touts role of establishment press in ‘war on terror’”

Thanks for Barry Grey’s very valuable article on the speech of *New York Times* Managing Editor Bill Keller.

Mr. Keller is very distant in his social origins from *Times* reporters like the late, and much missed, John Hess, who came from an unsophisticated background in the American West and who, after enlisting in the merchant marine, escorting wartime convoys as a sailor in World War II, rose to be the *Times* Paris correspondent, as well as, for a while in the 1970s, one of its most interesting writers on food and cuisine—and beyond that, a thorn in the *Times*’s side for over a decade as a columnist and a radio commentator for Pacifica’s WBAI.

No, Bill Keller is, as they say “from money”—and from the power elite. His father George M. Keller was the CEO of Chevron Oil and was also associated with the Council on Foreign Relations.

It should scarcely surprise us then, that Bill Keller, dauphin-like in his insulation throughout most of his life from the world in which 90 percent of Americans dwell, should utter such out-of-touch and politically retrograde comments as he did in his Michigan speech.

What an invaluable thing it is to have the *World Socialist Web Site* to see through the half-truths and fabrications offered up so often to paying readers, in such a parodic version of newspaper journalism as the *New York Times* has become in the year 2006.

LM

Jersey City, New Jersey, US

21 October 2006

Nice article on Bill Keller at the University of Michigan. I suggest that you read the *New York* magazine article on the *Times* from a month or two ago. That article, like yours, makes clear that the *Times* and Keller have barely learnt anything in the last couple years.

JW

21 October 2006

On “Why is the New York Times silent on massive Iraq death toll?”

You blew it: (1) The University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research (ISR) is one of the world’s largest survey research organizations; (2) the ISR is generally supportive of the methodology used in the research supporting the higher death toll. While your focus is clearly on the media and its failures, you have missed an important opportunity, given the venue of the speech, to ask Mr. Keller why the organization that is supporting his lecture, and that has supported the methodology, isn’t getting more ink on the topic in his publication.

In other words, why don’t you connect the dots in the most obvious way possible? Is it possible that Mr. Keller will refer to the ISR comments? Are you being disingenuous about his posture, albeit potentially accurate with regard to the *New York Times*? In sum, if you are going to make these allegations, why not make them via the most

obvious modality?

RW

16 October 2006

On “Home foreclosures soar in US”

Thank you very much for writing about this alarming situation. I am angered and appalled by these events, especially since the US government is not constructing new housing developments for low-income people, nor are they providing subsidies for these folks. I live in Miami where there are a lot of new developments and high rises under construction. This situation is paradoxical in light of the fact that home foreclosures are high and so are evictions and unemployment. This construction or development boom was supposed to lift members of various communities in the city, but it has not. While some of the construction work is outsourced to various immigrant and “undocumented” workers, many of these folks have to put up with discrimination because of their status. In addition, these new lofty high-rise apartments are not being rented to low-income folks, but to high earners from the Northeast, high-profile artists and other “professionals.”

Moreover, while there seems to have been a boom in real estate a few years ago when the cost of homes was overpriced and inflated to give a wide profit margin to the agent and owner, this situation is about to come to a climax and crash. Many of the people whose homes were foreclosed often end up homeless and being evicted from place to place. Most alarming is the fact that the foreclosure processing business has also boomed and has become a big source of income for various sectors in the area. There are so many foreclosure experts who are nothing but well armed predators. They charge outrageous sums in the thousands to help prevent foreclosures and often they are not successful.

These foreclosures depend on the ability of the owner(s) to keep up with payment plans that are often much higher than the regular monthly mortgage. And if the payments are not kept up then a bankruptcy must be declared. For a bankruptcy to be granted the owner or person making the demand has to have a fair credit rating and no prior bankruptcies in the past 6-12 months. This is very difficult because people who cannot pay their rent or mortgage often have poor financial histories and may often have declared bankruptcies in the past.

Lastly, there is a lot of discrimination in housing in Miami. Some folks are not likely to get a place to rent based solely on their outer appearance, race, color and dress. As such, the hotels and motels are profiting from people who cannot find permanent affordable housing (with a decent monthly rent) and have to stay at these expensive spaces for indefinite amounts of time.

This situation is only benefiting the big corporations and the developers as well as their political cronies. In Miami, the mayor has been accused of having the interest of these folks to the downfall of the poor renters or homeowners. There is also a demographic issue at

work here whereby folks of certain ethnicities and hues are systematically being moved out of certain choice areas to make room and space for others. Meanwhile the ones who have been moved out have nowhere to go. It is a sad situation indeed when one has to be forcefully evicted by overzealous state troopers who want to flex their well-toned muscles.

Thank you again for writing about this issue. It is so relevant and so in tune with the conditions that poor people are facing today in the US.

Sincerely,

MNP

Miami, Florida, US

15 October 2006

On "Putin and the murder of Anna Politkovskaya"

Vladimir Putin is no neophyte on the subject of governing. If his people were involved in the murder of a prominent critic of his administration this would demonstrate a high degree of incompetence and public relations insensibility on their part, because the Western press would immediately disseminate the conclusion that his people were responsible—which is exactly what they did. And the WWS seems to agree.

Putin's followers would certainly be aware that they would stand to lose much more by such an act than they would stand to gain. As Putin himself tells us: "(her) murder harms the Russian and, in particular, the Chechen leadership much more than any newspaper article could do." Of course he's right. Thus it is much more likely that this act was perpetrated by the enemies of Putin, rather than his friends, precisely in order to embarrass him.

LL

24 October 2006

You write, "A crowd of 2,500 attended the burial of Politkovskaya on October 10, but the only official representative attending was the government's human rights ambassador, Vladimir Lukin." On what basis would the government be expected to send any kind of representative? As Patrick Martin stated "Politkovskaya wrote for the bi-monthly *Novaya Gazeta*, a bourgeois-democratic magazine critical of the Putin regime." Of course what he didn't say is that the magazine is/has been also sponsored by the American bourgeoisie. That is to say, she was in the service of the enemies of the Russian state.

I don't mean to defend the Putin regime (although I have no sympathy for any bourgeois journalist, especially one sponsored by the American regime), but Patrick Richter's statement seems somewhat disingenuous to me.

PF

19 October 2006

On "The death of crocodile hunter Steve Irwin and the promotion of an Australian mythology"

How timely and appropriate your comments on the politics around Steve Irwin have been. You answer very clearly why it was that the Irwin tragedy was not left to his family and friends to mourn, and how Howard and Beazley have elevated Irwin to Australian icon status in order to promote militarism.

What was there in Irwin's values that the political establishment found so appealing? I think part of the answer can be found in certain historical features that occurred in Australia's development. The start of mass transportation of convict labour from Britain to Australia in 1788 was driven by intensified inter-imperialist global rivalry, particularly between Britain and France. All of Australia was seen as a

giant and formidable prison by convicts and gaolers alike, and this cultural mindset even permeated into the free settlers.

The bush was seen as a hostile and dangerous environment. Even my generation was told by their parents not to roll a log over because there was probably a snake there. Steve Irwin's alarm when he calls "crikey!" reminds me of the continuation of this backward colonial culture.

Of course natural historians do not have a passive attitude to the study of the bush. The difference being that they will carefully roll a log over to observe the different animal and insect species and then make sure that the log is returned to exactly its original position. Many great natural historians who have carried out very important research have had minimal educational backgrounds. However unlike Irwin they have painstakingly carried out recorded research for many years without any hint of commercial self-promotion.

Germaine Greer's tame criticism of Irwin did not go to the heart of the matter. Greer mentions the distress of the animals with Irwin but does not talk about his exploitative attitude towards "animals and humans." For Greer, exposing exploitation would have been too close to the bone given her shocking history as a landlord in London. Capitalism is responsible for the crisis in our environment and the extinction of many species, and Irwin was exploiting this with his commercial entertainment.

The media frenzy against Greer did indicate how important myth and iconic figures are in promoting the drive towards imperialist war.

RR

Melbourne, Australia

17 October 2006

I happen to agree with you that the reaction to Steve Irwin's death has been nothing short of sickening. It was certainly a sad occasion, but for political leaders and b-grade news anchors to milk it for political reasons and for ratings-grabbing is a sad reflection of how our society operates.

However, as I read further into the article, you actually attempted to downplay the man's credibility, for reasons I couldn't quite ascertain. To actually defend Germaine Greer for saying her spiteful rant does you no justice. Sure, she is entitled to her opinion (which is what I think you were getting at) and should not have been attacked the way she was, but let's be honest; she disrespected a man who had just passed away. And ridiculing the dead does one's karma no favours. Of course the man had flaws, who doesn't? But he was no monster and deserves to be treated with respect in his death, neither being exploited or criticized. By doing what you have done, isn't it as bad as those who are talking up his credibility? Are you not doing the exact same thing, just in a mirrored way?

I guess that is what bugs me about 'Left' and 'Right.' There is no middle.

MC

13 October 2006



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