

Letters from our readers

30 November 2006

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

On "Milton Friedman 1912-2006: 'Free market' architect of social reaction"

It is critiques such as this that make the WSWS a unique web site. Beams has done a sterling job on the pretensions of Friedmanesque economics: "Freedom and Liberty," "Free Market"—shibboleths of capitalist elites in the US and elsewhere. I am reminded of what Dewey had to say about "liberty" in a capitalist system—viz., that it is a chief barrier to "effective liberty" by the population as a whole. Look at the stock market—what a celebration of liberty and freedom, when such a small percentage of the population owns such a large percentage of stocks. This is just what brought about the '30s depression—lack of effective demand or what some people referred to as "overproduction." Friedman never had anything to say about Military Keynesianism, a form of Keynesianism the Republicans (and some Democrats) buy into for salvaging an economy where so much wealth ends up in so few hands. If you want to read a fatuous endorsement of Friedman, see "A Charismatic Economist Who Loved to Argue" by Austan Goolsbee, a University of Chicago economist. The article was in the November 17 issue of the *New York Times*. I always like to quote Galbraith on Friedman: "Friedman knew the price of everything and the value of nothing."

RLB

Brandenton, Florida, US

21 November 2006

It was quite appropriate that Mr. Beams's welcome antidote to the corporate media's eulogies to Milton Friedman was published on the same day as Joe Kay's article about the Democrats' support for the draft, because—as noted on an NPR puff piece—Friedman's proudest "accomplishment" was convincing Nixon to end the draft. Friedman's rationale was that an all-volunteer military—i.e., a military composed of working class youth desperate enough to enlist in the hope of getting economic benefits—would be a more efficient and cheaper enforcement arm for imperialism (oops, I mean free markets and liberty). With the free market more and more discredited, and the reintroduction of the draft looming, perhaps Mr. Friedman got out when the getting was good.

LM

Long Beach, California, US

25 November 2006

On "Democrat Congressman calls for reinstating the draft"

I just wanted to congratulate and thank you for all your very good articles, this one included. And it's always nice to know people appreciate your efforts. In your piece, you uncover brilliantly the real motives behind the draft, and explain concisely why historically as well as logically the arguments put forward for it are incoherent. You write:

"The invasion of Iraq was never popular, and at this point a substantial majority of the American people favors the withdrawal of US troops from that country. This is the state of public opinion without the draft."

"If it were in fact necessary to have a draft to get the two parties to oppose the war, this is not an argument for the draft. Rather, it would demonstrate the urgent necessity of building a political movement in opposition to both political parties."

Socialistically yours,

FOD

21 November 2006

On "Democrats seek accommodation with Bush administration to continue Iraq occupation"

You write, "Over the weekend, leading Democrats pledged their eagerness to work closely with the Bush administration in forging a bipartisan policy to continue the occupation of Iraq, and voiced their support for a substantial increase in the military budget and the recruitment of more Army troops."

This made me so angry I immediately fired off e-mails to Dick Durbin and Nancy Pelosi to remind them that this is not what we voted for in this last election! (It took a while to even find e-mail addresses for them, as they no longer post them on their web sites.) What arrogance! Continuation of this illegal immoral war will only result in more deaths, both American and Iraqi, and the depletion of our treasury. Ninety percent of the population are living lives of quiet desperation—loss of jobs, low pay, inability to afford healthcare, lack of education, soaring food costs, etc.—while these so-called representatives of our welfare live privileged lives. Ignoring our votes should result in recriminations and most certainly in revenge in 2008. But we shouldn't have to wait that long.

CS

20 November 2006

On "The Kerry apology: Democrats cower before Bush and military"

You came close to getting it (or perhaps you did get it, and didn't want to expose Kerry), when you wrote: It is now "well established" that Kerry's comments were a somewhat labored attempt at a joke at the expense of President Bush. Kerry's statement turned out to have short-term politically incorrect overtones, so he lied to reverse that effect. It was not a "botched joke," as he subsequently claimed. His comment (judged in the short-term) turned out to be a politically incorrect statement, so he cut and ran from it.

Had Kerry explained his statement by putting forward the facts you wrote in your article, I would have greater respect for him. But as soon as he saw the short-term fallout from the statement, he contrived the "botched joke" political cover. And that puts his veracity into question as to anything and everything he ever said, or will say in the future.

RPB

21 November 2006

On "UN report documents huge October death toll in Iraq"

It can never be repeated too often what the true situation is in Iraq as a result of the illegal invasion and occupation of that benighted country by the US and its so-called "coalition of the willing." Oh, they were "willing," all right, so long as they believed that they would be able to rape the country of its natural resources, chiefly oil, and enrich themselves through bogus contracts and embezzlement of billions of dollars in the chaos created by the occupation.

An excellent report on the violent madhouse that Iraq has become since 2003 is available in Patrick Cockburn's new book, *The Occupation*. Cockburn delineates the power struggles now being engaged in by the Sunni, Shia and Kurdish factions that have resulted in insane levels of bloodshed and brutality, aided by forces controlled by the government

ministries and the police under the passive gaze of the American occupiers. It is a vision from hell. Hieronymus Bosch could be appointed “state painter” to depict what life is like in Iraq now.

Bush, Blair, Howard and their acolytes must all be called to account for their criminal actions in invading Iraq and be held responsible for everything that has happened since. It is questionable whether any return to “normal” life will be possible in Iraq for decades and, of course, the dead and dismembered can never be compensated for what they have lost. The bitterness and hatreds created in less than four years will carry long into the future of both the region and the world.

CZ

San Francisco, California, US

24 November 2006

On “An exchange on Stalinism with a South African reader”

I doubt this web site www.rwor.org (of the RCP in the US) can explain Stalinism to Barbara better than Trotsky. Still, it shows there are groups at work out there even today that think Stalin and Mao were genuinely “on the Leninist path,” and that several million deaths and a gulag here and there were indeed a high price to pay, but that the ends that justified the means. The “end” being the modern Stalinist state, the nomenclature, and bourgeois bureaucrats masquerading as reds. Bonus feature: the web site comes with its own “Cult of Personality.”

BR

St. Louis, Missouri, US

21 November 2006

On “California: UCLA student victim of police brutality”

I am struck by the similarity in reactions to last year’s killing of Rigoberto Alpizar and this year’s tasering of the student at UCLA. In both cases, despite the statements of every single non-police witness to the contrary, the victims were treated as if they posed immediate physical threats. The subsequent commentary in both cases has been similar as well—to wit; these are unfortunate but unavoidable situations. This is also followed in both cases by people saying that, “If you just do what you’re told and don’t act in a suspicious manner, none of this will happen to you.” Just obey authority and you will not be killed or assaulted.

CMS

Portland, Oregon, US

21 November 2006

On “Sofia Coppola’s Marie Antoinette: *Not even cake?*”

I am writing to thank you for your review of Coppola’s film *Marie Antoinette*. I found your review to be full of deep analysis that took me beyond the postmodern angst that seems to have inundated US films like *Miami Vice*, amongst others. I am also a second-generation transnational Haitian American. I am therefore appalled at this movie, which celebrates the lifestyle of Marie Antoinette and, as you wrote, was simply about her conspicuous consumption, akin to that of residents of 90210. I find it troubling and darn right disturbing that an American woman, albeit white, wealthy, and famous, would make a movie to celebrate the empty and superficial existence of someone like Marie Antoinette, whose lifestyle was supported by money which France stole, colonized and enslaved my ancestors to get. Please note that between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries, Hispaniola was the most prosperous colony in the Western hemisphere. It made France the richest Western European colonial empire. Slaves had a lifespan of seven years upon getting off the slave ship, and the field slaves had an 18-hour workday with two hours off for personal time. In addition to the harsh work conditions, the savagery and the violence of the slave life was unbelievable.

My ancestors fought for centuries until the fateful Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) in which ex-slaves defeated Napoleon Bonaparte’s army (the strongest in the world at the time). However, their right to freedom and their self-determination was not recognized by the white world. This made it impossible for them to survive, as trade was difficult without partners in

the hemisphere. Furthermore, France required them to pay a ransom, which now amounts to \$24 billion, in order for them to recognize Haiti’s right to exist (independently). The payment of this ransom left the country bankrupt and unable to take care of the social welfare needs of its needy and downtrodden. In the meantime, Marie Antoinette and her friends went on with their lifestyle, just like Paris Hilton and the other fortune heirs go on as if they have no clue what their wealth is built on and on whose backs these empires are built.

Recently, the ousted President Jean Bertrand Aristide and his administration asked France to repay the money that it forced the nation to pay for so-called lost property (slaves, and capital assets), and in my view this was the beginning of the end for him. That demand opened up an old sore in the French government and irritated or angered them so much that they temporarily put aside their differences with the US government and went along with them and Canada to plot and eventually dismantle a democratically elected administration and kidnap Mr. Aristide.

It is too bad that white feminists continue to advocate for their rights by salvaging unworthy figures from the past. Marie Antoinette is not a feminist from my view. She seemed to have been an empty-headed superficial opportunist who wasted away the wealth stolen by France while millions of people including the French poor went hungry. I find this situation to resound with Simone de Beauvoir’s statement that, in fact, the middle- and upper-class French women gave their wholehearted support to the state regardless of their actions or motivations, and this was at the detriment of the poor and wretched. The post-9/11 climate has highlighted the fact that the middle- and upper-class folks in the US are just the same. And Coppola’s film verifies this by the fact that she is trying to in essence “lay claim” to a “cultured” French past that would bring her kind in the US to the salons of the rich, wealthy and famous of the past.

MNP

Miami, Florida, US

25 November 2006



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