

# Letters from our readers

16 December 2006

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

On “Mourning for Pinochet—US establishment shows its affinity for fascism”

I’d just like to thank you for writing the article “Mourning for Pinochet—US establishment shows its affinity for fascism.” My father was a political prisoner beneath the Pinochet regime, and my family and I are only saddened that Pinochet was not convicted before his death.

JA

12 December 2006

Your article about the rule of Pinochet made for a chilling read. But what I found incredulous was the way in which various US commentators looked happily back at Pinochet’s reign with the notion that he “did what needed to be done.”

I can only hope that the same mentality doesn’t reach the West. Indeed it very much makes me really think about various calls for full ‘free market’ market reforms now. I’d hate to think such commentators were preparing the same thing here.

SG

Australia

13 December 2006

On “Pinochet, Chile’s former US-backed dictator, dead 91”

There is absolutely no limit to the hypocrisy of the Washington clique. Washington helped the killer in overthrowing the elected government, and now, as you write, “The Bush White House issued a statement describing Pinochet’s dictatorship as ‘one of the most difficult periods in that nation’s history’ and declaring that “our thoughts today are with the victims of his reign and their families.”

As always,

FBR

Thailand

11 December 2006

On “Jeane Kirkpatrick: from ‘social democrat’ to champion of death squads”

You’d think that Kirkpatrick was on the track to be declared a saint in the Catholic Church from the obituaries in the mainstream media. Thanks for your analysis from a Trotskyist view of the lady’s life and works.

I now see how she could support General Pinochet’s coup and bloody dictatorship, which bled Chile dry. The anticommunist ploy was a pathetic farce before the USSR died that supporters of dictators used to brutalize nations. The irony is that one of the nations which was brutalized by the tactics used by ‘anticommunists’ is the USA.

LL

12 December 2006

On “Blair’s Washington summit: What next for Britain in Iraq?”

I deeply appreciate the incisive analysis the WSWS offers. I have no doubt you are correct about the UK-US relationship at this time. But as to the change of tone in the *Guardian* editorials, there may be a simple explanation. Perhaps between one and the next, they actually read the report. It does not take long to recognize that the Baker-Hamilton recommendations largely demand that the Middle East accept American and Israeli terms for a regional settlement. And it assumes, as it must, the most important point at issue, namely, the legitimacy of the Iraqi government. Nor does it actually lay out a plan for withdrawal. In all likelihood, it merely reiterates the plan the Pentagon had hoped to implement all along, dressing it up as a major change of course. No doubt, the *Guardian*’s editors, having read the report, realized their mistake. Not wanting to admit as much, they tried to change the subject to Blair’s influence.

JB

Lubbock, Texas, US

11 December 2006

On “Dennett’s dangerous idea”

Excellent review of Dennett’s book. I too was left with the sense that Dennett failed to do more than give a nod toward the role played by actual historical social institutions in influencing/preserving the religion/god meme. After all, if the organized religions are adaptive responses to environmental constraints, one wants to know what those constraints are.

It was also disappointing that, rather than giving a materialistic ontology for the meme itself, Dennett mostly defends it as an apt analogue to the gene, which does have a materialistic ontology. I suspect this might be a problem with memetics itself. At its present stage of development, meme theory seeks to reduce the impulse to engage in magical thinking, in this case, to a “culturally acquired easily replicated information packet.”

This move replaces what should be a material object of scientific scrutiny (the persistence of religion) with yet another mysterious explication—shifting the burden of proof from priests to the burden of disproof by psychologists. The focus remains on the individual psyche and his/her brain without fully examining the causal forces operating in his/her society.

Dennett does spend some time on ethnically acquired “memes” but stops short of looking with the same scientific eye at how “parasitic” memes are enforced by institutional policy. Instead he leaves it to the meme itself to defend itself against obsolescence.

Despite these lesser-developed aspects of the book, Dennett’s work is commendable for succeeding at its primary goal, which is to pierce the veil between sacrosanct ideologies and rational/scientific scrutiny. Hopefully there will be forthcoming works by historical materialists who will pick up the work of Kautsky, Marx and Engels into the repeated agreements (even if implicitly made) among ruling societal factions to placate the have-nots with promises of heaven, and shame them as a class for being out of sync with the gods simply because they fail as individuals to rise above their economic fetters.

PT

5 December 2006

On “US income figures show staggering rise in social inequality”

It should be noted that these figures only represent taxable income. Extremely rich people often hire highly

skilled CPAs and tax attorneys to shelter their money from tax rates. This could possibly, although probably not necessarily, make the stated incomes of the superrich based on taxes appear to be *smaller* than they actually are.

WB

14 December 2006

On a letter on “Massive US prison population continues to grow”

DJ’s claim that “The breakdown of the family is the primary cause of incarceration rates, not wealth inequality” is argument by assertion and not by logic and empirical evidence. My question for DJ is, What has caused the breakdown of the family? My supposition is the lack of investment in jobs for unskilled men, which could be solved by taking wealth from the wealthy by progressive taxation and the government investing those tax revenues into infrastructure projects that many unskilled men would be able to qualify for, such as found in the Norris Dam project in Tennessee and the Boulder Dam. Steady work at living wages, which the government could provide, will reduce greatly the problem of the breakdown of the family.

RLB

Bradenton, Florida, US

11 December 2006

On “New York State commission demands hospital closings”

Perhaps Mayor Bloomberg’s statement may as well as read, ‘Why should we spend money and resources on those who have the least impact on the economy?’ Is the neglect of medical services maybe going to help reduce the problem of the ‘ageing population’ via poor people not getting any medical treatment when they enter the danger age zone for heart disease, stroke, cancer, type-2 diabetes, etc.? Makes you wonder if the ruling elite is thinking about it, doesn’t it?

SG

Australia

14 December 2006



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