

Letters from our readers

31 January 2007

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

On “A warning from Senator Webb: Democrat cites danger of deepening ‘class lines’ in America”

Patrick Martin writes about Webb’s speech, “He praised the example of a Republican president, Theodore Roosevelt, who struck a public posture of opposition to the excesses of the wealthy (‘trust-busting’), in order to safeguard the profit system from the attacks of what Webb, quoting Roosevelt, described as ‘demagogy and mob rule,’ i.e., socialism.”

When I heard this passage in the speech televised on CNN, I was reminded of (a) Webb’s evident distaste for “mob rule,” and (b) a claim I have heard about the reality of Theodore Roosevelt’s “trust-busting.” It is said that Roosevelt’s effort was encouraged by the J.P. Morgan trusts at the expense of the Rockefeller trusts. If that was the case then, far from being a benefit for the “common man,” the measure was actually a competitive step favoring one monopoly over a rival. So, if that is true, even this myth of a T. Roosevelt saving the day is a cruel deception toward the working class of his day and today.

Roosevelt’s statement and actions were as demagogic or more demagogic than any other that can be defined for that period. Perhaps with Webb’s busy life and schedule, he doesn’t know this point about the reality of “trust-busting.” But, if he does, then maybe he is taking after his hero and employing demagogy too.

JB

26 January 2007

On “Bush’s State of the Union speech highlights crisis of US ruling elite”

While waiting for the beginning of the State of the Union speech last night, I was prepared to see a huge outpouring of cheers at the words “Madame Speaker” and I was not disappointed. It was sickening to see the results of identity politics override the fact that “Madame Speaker” was not leading the House in a call for impeachment of Bush and his partners in crime, nor for a withholding of funds for the illegal war in Iraq. No, everyone was just thrilled that at last there was a woman speaker, forgetting that the British Parliament had a woman speaker for years—Betty Boothroyd—in the 1990s, that they had a woman prime minister—Margaret Thatcher—in the 1980s, and that other countries around the world, including India and the Philippines, had had women heads of state before this. So—a combination of identity politics and backwardness. Not a good start.

I nearly fell out of my chair when Bush announced balancing the budget without raising taxes. “There goes the rest of the safety net,” I said to myself. The fact that the audience in the chamber jumped up and down applauding each of Bush’s lame, lying pronouncements lent a surreal quality to the event. What has really changed? A woman in a suit sitting behind the president?

I, too, noticed, in the Democratic reaction to the speech, that Webb slipped and said that the American people were against the war. Even though he immediately corrected himself, it was obviously a revealing slip of the tongue, the statement of a truth that could not be suppressed, even in his subconscious! And despite his modifying that slip and continuing to state the bland tactical opposition to the methods of redeployment in the

Middle East, the commentators on the Lehrer Newshour described it as a “strong statement”! Good grief!

More of the same booga-booga about September 11 in Bush’s speech about Iraq and the “war on terror”; more junk about “No Child Left Behind” and some sop to the liberals about oil dependence and global climate change, and voila! The news commentators fell for it and jabbered about “change.” When will these people stop drinking the Kool-Aid? And when will the American people kick the butts of Congress and make them take responsibility?

Never. All the kicking in the world won’t leave the slightest imprint on the behinds of those who govern in the name of the corporations and the military-industrial complex.

CZ

San Francisco, California, US

25 January 2007

On “The war in Iraq and American democracy”

I wonder if it’s ever occurred to Dick Cheney why the “Coalition of the Willing” has fewer and fewer members as the Iraq war drags on. It’s largely due to the democratic institutions of our erstwhile and former partners. Even Tony Blair has had to promise to step down—lest the Labourites suffer a no confidence vote in Parliament and a fall of the current British government.

But the malignancy that is Cheney has more respect for a country run as a corporate board meeting than one where national elections guide the course of foreign policy. It’s no wonder why Cheney lives in a permanent state of denial about the limits of American power. We’ve never really seen this in American history. And it is nearly as rare in the course of our chief partner in the Iraq conflict—the UK.

Any American over the age of 50 knows Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon could not escape popular opinion during the Vietnam War. Harry Truman also could not escape popular opinion, which prevented him from introducing nuclear weapons into the Korean conflict. And after almost three years of war in Korea, Truman left office as one of the most unpopular presidents since the Civil War. More so than even Herbert Hoover.

Most of all—and this is almost never mentioned in the history books—is that “popular wars” like World War II were never conducted above the will of the American or British people. Stalin could afford the loss of a million Soviet troops in a single campaign like the Battle of Stalingrad. Roosevelt and Churchill could not; their governments would fall and either figure probably removed from office. This fact postponed the Normandy invasion until 1944 despite enormous pressure by Stalin to have the Allies open a real second front in the west.

The gargantuan US war effort showed signs of fatigue in late 1944. War bond sales decreased. The Battle of the Bulge was costing thousands of killed, wounded, and captured to an Army that once looked like it’d be home by Christmas. Many in Congress wanted an investigation of what had gone wrong. And—despite the end of the European War in May 1945—there was considerable opposition within the US Army who’d fought in Europe to then be used to finish the War in the Pacific. (Stalin had no such problems overrunning Manchuria at the end of the war.)

Admiral Nimitz’s 7th Fleet sailed into a typhoon off Okinawa. Adding

to his woes was the enormous loss of troops and sailors in taking Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Popular opinion did not bode well for the invasion of Japan later in the year. This was even reflected in popular opinion at home as the Republicans swept both Houses of Congress the following year—despite Truman’s use of nuclear weapons to hasten the end of the War.

Britain had seen popular opposition to the Boer War once the atrocities committed by British forces became known in the UK press. Similarly, the performance of the “Black and Tans” in Ireland led to the call by the British public for a settlement of the Irish “troubles” and the establishment of the Irish Free State. And, of course, Churchill was rewarded for his outstanding service by being voted out of office in favor of the Labourites.

Years of appearing only in front of carefully vetted audiences, pressing the flesh of fat cats, and profiting from “cost plus” contracts and corruption by Halliburton and Kellogg, Brown, and Root have not been healthy for the vice president. And as long as he cashes the paychecks, it won’t be healthy for young Americans, either.

BR

20 January 2007

On “For an international mobilization of workers and youth against the war in Iraq”

I think the International should in its protest address the role of Christianity—and the Vatican especially—in its support of the war, its Hiberno-Anglo-American connections, and its previous antecedents, at least as far back as East Timor, if not South America and Vietnam. But, however done, I believe it only puts off to another day the necessary identification of the war in Iraq. Failing all this, shouldn’t such a protest identify Benedict XVI’s Regensburg Lecture as encouraging and supporting racial hatred and advancing the justification of war crimes?

SB

Dublin, Ireland

22 January 2007

On “The Gates Foundation and the rise of ‘free market’ philanthropy”

I read or browse your articles everyday. I am a great fan of your analysis. In respect of the above article, I do believe that the foundation’s approach to investment could be more ethical. However, I take issue with the idea of the focus on AIDS. No other disease has devastated sub-Saharan Africa in that way. I do admit that there should be integration amongst philanthropic and state agencies, but I see this as an important next stage in evolution, not a reason to decry admirable efforts. Besides, so many of the states are corrupt and have failed their people.

JL

22 January 2007

Marx and Engels succinctly described the type of philanthropy practiced by the Gates foundation and similar free market philanthropists:

“A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society.... The Socialistic bourgeois want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom. They desire the existing state of society, minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat. The bourgeoisie naturally conceives the world in which it is supreme to be the best; and bourgeois Socialism develops this comfortable conception into various more or less complete systems. In requiring the proletariat to carry out such a system, and thereby to march straightway into the social New Jerusalem, it but requires in reality, that the proletariat should remain within the bounds of existing society, but should cast away all its hateful ideas concerning the bourgeoisie.

“It is summed up in the phrase: the bourgeois is a bourgeois...for the benefit of the working class.”

EG

22 January 2007

On “Global poll condemns Bush administration on Iraq war and global militarism”

I was intrigued to learn that Nigeria (and also Kenya) had a relatively favourable view of the US policies on a range of issues—such a contrast to the rest of the world. My experience is limited to a recent visit to Nigeria, but I wondered if the explanation lies in the political culture of the country. I picked up on the local press, knowing that an election is due. Coverage of international issues seemed limited, and local politics is dominated by regional and tribal issues. These are difficult to follow unless you know the personalities and their history. No one seems to speak for the great majority of the people. Most people will be in the dark about international issues.

Nigeria is a rich country, but most people have benefited little. Politics there do not reflect their interests. There are enormous tensions in the country, which do not find expression as class issues. Instead, we are more likely to learn that a row has broken out within one of the main parties over who will get a share of the spoils; these are factions around tribal interests or dominant personalities. Corruption on the grand scale is normal.

Crime is widespread, but this often has links to political thuggery, and pressure to redress regional grievances. The imminent election is likely to aggravate this. Kidnapping of foreign oil workers is on the rise. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta abducted seven Pilipino seamen, 17 Chinese oil workers, and two other expatriates (in Port Harcourt), and recently an explosion at a Shell facility caused the company to send home expatriate dependents.

Most people live with poverty and shortages of fuel even as the wealth flows out of the country (literally), but they are not mobilised in their own interests. They are not politicised and take comfort in religion. Perhaps this is why there is relatively little questioning of the wider issues.

MM

27 January 2007

On “US: Threadbare ‘college affordability’ bill passes in the House”

Thank you so much for exposing the sheer hypocrisy of the Democrats’ recent bill. The US ruling class’s “new” policy towards students is: “We’ve sucked a gallon of blood out of you, now you should grovel to us for letting you have two drops back.” It’s very similar to the wealthy countries’ debt policies towards the underdeveloped countries. In many ways, this posturing by the Democrats is a blatant insult to all the students and their families who are forced to pile up and begin their adult lives mired in massive debt for a human right like education. Many have to go through college with at least two jobs. I look forward to the day when revolution sweeps the two bastards, the Democrats and Republicans, into the dustbin of history.

PG

Minnesota, US

27 January 2007

On “Australia: Aboriginal death in custody triggers Palm Island riot”

Tasmanians know and feel for our indigenous brothers in this shameful parody of Queensland “justice.” I’m sorry as hell. Good luck.

RH

Launceston, Tasmania

27 January 2007

On “The Archive Project and Beyond Hatred—two documentaries”

Actually, what was more interesting about the documentary were contemporaneous parallels in Australia. One *absolutely crucial* thing you did not mention in your review was the youth carnival for peace and friendship and the effect and importance that it had for the indigenous communities, as was stressed in this documentary. I think it is also too harsh to judge these people when they say they did not know. I wonder if you have yourself experienced the heartache of being internally crushed by something you knew deep down was more ethical than the status quo

(or at least appeared to be so), by the political entity you firmly believed in and trusted. These people went through one of the worst existential crises in the twentieth century! Had Stalin not implemented his methods, the world would definitely be different than it is now, at least in the West, where people would have maintained their faith in the communist ideals. And what about all the European intellectuals like Sartre? They were devastated, too. I was blown away by the documentary. It's a shame you couldn't say anything more positive about it.

DR

Melbourne, Australia

25 January 2007



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