

# Letters from our readers

17 February 2007

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

*On "Australia: the socialist alternative in the New South Wales state election"*

I will certainly be supporting every aspect of the SEP campaign. Regarding the environment policies, although likely implicit (along with the drought strategies), I wish to make a statement regarding (once again) the Howard administration's inaction in the appalling severity of this year's bush fires. It is a case of "Howard fiddled while Australia was (and still is) burning." Although the worst case fire scenarios have been in Victoria, it is not just a state government's responsibility to find solutions. Once again it concerns the whole of Australia, because Victoria is a part of Australia and contains some of the most beautiful forests in our land. The experts (to whom Howard is turning a blind eye/deaf ear) are saying (to the effect) "it is too late once a bush fire has started, it is imperative to fight it at the source, otherwise containment is the only solution," which means vast areas of our beautiful national parks are devastated if not destroyed altogether, not to mention wildlife species' numbers are compromised in time to the extent of extinction.

The prevention of illness in medical terms is early detection. The prevention of devastating bushfires that threaten the viability of Australian wilderness and landscapes, thus its eco-system, is also "early detection"—which means heaps of money and equivalent resources put into prevention at this level. Howard has not even mentioned the utter seriousness of this situation. Once a fire takes hold, then we have the utter devastation of people and their homes being at risk at the least, not to mention lives lost and homes destroyed. It has been said by at least one expert that we are not listening to the Aboriginal people who are the real experts in managing bushfires, some millions of years experience is not to be "sneezed at"! It is hoped that effective management of the drought conditions (although at the 11th hour), will provide some protection against bush fires, but that is only a hope, as at this stage they are two separate disasters that could have been prevented with some of the billions that have gone to the hands of the "tiny majority" in our society.

MG

Stockton, Newcastle, Australia

10 February 2007

*On "A political bombshell from Zbigniew Brzezinski: Ex-national security adviser warns that Bush is seeking a pretext to attack Iran"*

Why did you say Democratic senators were particularly silent? Were they more silent than the Republicans? Were they as silent as the Republicans, but unforgivably so? You seem to use adjectives like the Fox "News" channel uses them. If you make such statements you should be backing them up.

LS

11 February 2007

*On "US Army court martial against war resister lieutenant ends in mistrial"*

My thanks for your coverage of this trial. As a drafted combat veteran of the Korean War, I'm very interested in terror, and especially its effects on our military.

MW

Indianapolis, IN, US

2 February 2007

*On "Blaming the Iraqis: A new cover-up for American militarism"*

Quoting Charles Krauthammer in the article: "Did Britain 'give' India the Hindu-Muslim war of 1947-48 that killed a million souls and ethnically cleansed 12 million more? The Jewish-Arab wars in Palestine? The tribal wars of post-colonial Uganda?"

To this one should add the Irish Civil War that followed the institution of the Irish Free State in 1921 (but not of a unified Ireland). Krauthammer might have scored a few more points with that one since many Americans are descendants of Irish immigrants and are supposedly more educated about the long history of sectarian violence between Protestant and Catholic than they are of Hindu and Muslim, or even Palestinian and Jew. (Bitter African tribal differences—and the wars they've sprung—are something few Americans care about. Oddly, in many ways, Uganda is more reflective of the troubles in Iraq than the other wars the British didn't 'give'.)

Even Krauthammer's overlooking the aftermath of our own Civil War is inexcusable. Here we often say "it was

sometimes brother against brother”—or point to Mary Todd Lincoln—who had relatives fighting for the Confederacy while also being the wife of a Union president. What is often overlooked by American history books is the fact that violence continued in some form over much of the land during Reconstruction and beyond. Quantrill’s Raiders attacked trains in Missouri and Kansas, Confederate guerillas attacked Union forces in Texas, and there were the Knight Riders of the KKK. Racism was still a key issue—but not the only issue—for continuation of war by other means. The South on the whole doggedly fought Reconstruction until Federal troops were removed from the South in a deal to broker the Tilden-Hayes presidential election of 1876.

What if we’d had other issues after our own Civil War? Protestant against Catholic, Baptist versus Anglican, even theocracy versus secular rule. Clan (with a “c”) versus clan? Many in the Confederate Army leadership thought Lee had “sold out” the South at Appomattox and wanted to take to the hills to continue the war for as long as it took. Think if they had had other “compelling” reasons like the ones we can quite easily see in present-day Iraq.

BR

10 February 2007

On “It’s lonely out in space: The desperate astronaut and the unreality of official American life”

This is another valuable article from WSWs dealing with the overall complexity of a particular situation that the media deliberately chooses to ignore. Who knows what was also involved in the training that she had to undergo in addition to balancing other responsibilities as wife and mother? Did NASA institute a particular type of mental “Boot Camp” training that brought about eventual disintegration as happened to the unfortunate Pyle in Kubrick’s “Full Metal Jacket”? This whole issue needs deeper interrogation and it is to the credit of WSWs that questions have been raised. Like the Michael Jackson affair, this particular episode is no joke. Rather than gloat about the “National Enquirer” aspects that the media is indulging in, the whole socio-cultural context needs examination in terms of yet another unfortunate victim of the system.

TW

12 February 2007

On “Dixie Chicks sweep Grammy Awards”

I was very disappointed to read Tom Carter’s starry-eyed interpretation of the music industry’s pallid heroines of free speech, the Dixie Chicks. A far more intelligent and unsentimental view of the proceedings was to be found in the *Globe and Mail* of all places. I refer you to Robert Everett-Green’s sharp-eyed piece online aptly titled “Celebrating the Pabulum Protest.” He treats the story with the type of x-ray analysis I have come to expect from the

WSWS.

BJ

13 February 2007

On “The flawed legacy of Scottish popular historian John Prebble”

The Highland Clearances, although very real in themselves, are often focused on as though that was all that was going on in the Highlands in these times. I feel History often misses the ordinary social and cultural history of the people in favour of these facts. The Clearances began before the Battle of Culloden. From the late 18th century and continuing throughout the 1800s, village after village was built to try and build a new industry: the fishing industry. Thousands of workers, including thousands of women, threw themselves into the fishing side of the industrial revolution, and followed the so-called “Silver Darlings” all the year round. Thomas Telford, who couldn’t build the roads, bridges and harbours needed quick enough, tried to as fast as he could, and even he mentioned how the Highland Men from the glens, who worked with him, were, for the first time ever, becoming working class in the way we today know it, and were taking their new found skills home with them to use in agriculture, etc.

The planned villages, the dream of John Knox and Sir Wm. Pulteney, began a movement. Some of them failed, but many of them employed a lot of people, thousands and thousands of them, and history seems to have forgotten all about them as they beavered away—fishing, landing, curing, making boats, ropes, nets, growing what they needed even for sails. Brora, in 1818, was the only place at that time with a coal mine, and produced 400 tons of salt annually meeting the needs of the herring, by burning pans of sea water on the beach, thereby getting around the problem and the expense of the salt issue. These people and thousands of others worked hard, and were the backbone of Scotland, yet they are hidden in the constant shadow of the Highland Clearance issue. John Prebble should be recognized for the work he did as a writer whose work was inspired by aspects of history, but certainly not the whole picture.

MR

Newtonmore, Scotland, UK

6 February 2007



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