

Letters from our readers

17 April 2007

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

On “US: Investigation exposes extensive corruption in student loan dealings”

Those of us who are having their meager pay checks garnished for student loans already knew that there had to be corruption involved. First of all, many of us were unable to get jobs in the field for which we studied. We still had to hold low paying unskilled jobs. Out of that low salary, we are compelled to repay the student loans to private companies. These companies would probably shout praises for the free market, but the market is not really free in as much as the government removes the risk to the note holder and creates laws that in fact compel the borrower to repay the loan in full. Many of these firms are run by politically well connected insiders, and the poor such as myself are suckered into huge debt in the hope that we can improve our condition. To me this is just another way to redistribute the wealth upwardly.

WA

Pembroke Pines, Florida, USA

12 April 2007

On “History cut off at the pass: Zach Snyder’s 300”

Your review of the film *300* calls attention to the polemical purposes behind the film and the book on which it was based. I am especially pleased by the call to place the battle of Thermopylae and the heroism of Leonidas and his 300 Spartans in some historical context beyond the simplistic praise of the West and its culture against a barbaric, “subhuman” Asia, as Persia is represented in the film. Clearly, Iran, which a mighty American fleet and the Israeli air force are threatening, is the film’s target, as your reviewer noticed. To get a clear picture of the events behind the film, though, we should look beyond Sparta, down the road a little to Sparta’s ally, Athens, which is noticeable in the film mainly for its absence.

I find it especially ironic in this context that the heroic defeat of the Spartans is the focus of the film, not the great Athenian naval victory at Battle of Salamis that followed. After all, generations from America’s Founding Fathers to the rabid right-wing theorists of today have consistently pointed to Athens and its freedoms as the foundation of the

West, while militaristic Sparta was identified with fascism. Things have changed, but that’s history.

It seems that the failure of the shock and awe tactics of four years ago and of the Baghdad surge right now have turned the propagandists to a less democratic and more militaristic society of Sparta, and from the triumph of the West against the barbaric Orient, to the heroic defeat of brave soldiers betrayed by a lack of support at home, abandoned by allies, the old story of heroes “stabbed in the back” that Adolf Hitler peddled at the end of the First and Second World Wars.

A closer look at the events in which the 300 Spartans played a role might be recommended as a way of understanding historical events taking place right now. In many ways, actually, it was Persia under Xerxes that resembles the United States governed by Bush, while Sparta and Athens are much like the rogue states. There was in Persia a father and son team of Darius and Xerxes like the elder and younger Bush, all ruling like oriental potentates through the most narrow circle of corrupt advisers and court eunuchs. At stake were riches; the mines of Europe for the Persians and for the US the oil of the Middle East. Contrary to the film, Athens and Sparta were the only two states not offered terms as the “rogue states” of their times. They faced trade barriers at first, then total destruction.

The Persian monarchs organized a mighty coalition of the willing, raising a huge army of allies, displayed technological might, for example by building a bridge of ships to have the soldiers from many nations cross the Hellespont, and did a little shock-and-awe, destroying Athens, turning its citizens into refugees. Fighting in an unconventional manner, the Athenians scored a victory against Darius at the Battle of Marathon in 390 BCE, and ten years later destroyed Xerxes’ far superior navy at the Battle of Salamis. Xerxes watched in horror from a hill, a sight that Bush the younger and his cabal are sure to witness—destruction of that great army on which imperial hopes rested by asymmetrical warfare.

As a teacher, I am distressed by how inadequately history is taught, when it is taught at all. I recommend to the younger readers to study history to avoid the film images that convey the past to youth quite falsely as *300* and similar

films do.

AL

Toronto, Canada

12 April 2007

On “Civilian compensation claims: a glimpse into US crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan”

One thing not mentioned in this report is the number of “private contractors”—i.e., mercenaries—deployed in both Afghanistan and Iraq. There are over 100,000 private security “soldiers” in Iraq alone, according to Jeremy Scahill’s book, *Blackwater*, a history of the rise of the mercenary firm from North Carolina that began as a private security and training firm in 1996 and has grown into a massive mercenary corporation. It got its foot in the ladder by being given a contract to provide security for J. Paul Bremer, American “proconsul” during the reign of the Coalition Provisional Authority. Bremer was responsible for issuing, before he hightailed it out of the country in 2004, the infamous “Order 17” that absolved all private mercenaries of any accountability whatsoever for crimes committed against the Iraqi people.

There are other private armies operating in the country as well, although Blackwater is the largest and has the ear of the Bush administration and its Christian fundamentalists, who believe that they are fighting a “holy war” in the Muslim countries. Blackwater took on hundreds of former special forces from Chile, who worked for Augusto Pinochet during his reign of terror and who lost their jobs when he was deposed. Also participating in the Middle East conflicts are mercenary soldiers from South Africa, where mercenaries were banned by law at the end of the apartheid regime. These unemployed and virulent racists are now tormenting Muslims in Iraq and elsewhere.

It is no surprise that there will be no compensation for the victims of these unaccountable forces, whose crimes—and even existence, in many cases—will remain unacknowledged. There is no doubt that these private “contractors” are making possible the continuation of the Iraq Occupation and the threat of further aggressive war against Iran and other countries who challenge the hegemony of the United States. With all the difficulties the US is having in recruiting more cannon fodder for its wars, and the stretching of existing forces by “stop loss” extensions of tours of duty and the extensive use of National Guard troops in the Middle East, the slaughter could not continue without the use of these corporate armies.

CZ

San Francisco, California, US

14 April 2007

On “Atheism in the service of political reaction: A comment on author Sam Harris”

Thank you for the article. I ~~have~~ the book and when reading it had difficulty with it to put things in the right place. Your article is very much along the same lines I had difficulty with. Keep up the good work.

As always,

FBR

Thailand

16 April 2007

On “After racial slur against women athletes: US talk show host Don Imus taken off the air”

Thank you for your recent article on Imus, the American “shock jock” being fired. He is but a symptom of the larger problem of the “public” airwaves being used by a form of American racism that panders to this nation’s historic and embryonic fascistic tendencies. You are on target in pointing out Imus’ subservience and allegiance to American corporate policy and interests. Though Imus is now fired, little attention is paid to the fact that his same sponsors and radio station owners are supporting a multitude of other shows just like Imus’ all across the country.

The trajectory these shock-jocks take leads simply to their rabid allegiance at every turn to capitalist policy nationally and internationally with a consequent demonization and jugular attack on the disempowered, from minorities to women to labor to peace groups and the environment. The seeds these radio hosts sow and those they cultivate fester in the historic residue of slavery, sexism and militarism that dominates the capitalist experience in these United States.

DM

Benicia, California, USA

13 April 2007



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