

Letters from our readers

31 May 2007

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

On “The Nation magazine offers an alibi for Democrats’ support of Iraq war”

The run-up to the 2006 elections was rife with people expecting the Democrats to “do something” once they got into power. Any talk of third-party or independent candidates was met with an element of derision—based on the false hope of a Democratic majority finally taking action to end the Iraq War.

In the wake of the dropped timeline, I have seen a number of columnists try to pass this off as the Democrat’s “strategy” to come out swinging “next time.” There is an increasing desperation to such comments. Going by the letters to the editors columns in various papers (*Oregonian*, *New York Times*, among others), many people are not buying it this time.

CMS

Portland, Oregon, USA

26 May 2007

Excellent article. Once again, you have stated the situation clearly and concisely. You write,

“The Democratic Party—no less than the Republicans—is controlled by and defends the interests of a financial elite. That is the basic reason why it supported and continues to support a war that was launched to further the global interests of the US banks and corporations by establishing American hegemony over the strategic oil supplies of the Middle East.”

That paragraph could be the opening line of “American Politics 101.” But until the “left” apologists for the invertebrates in Congress get it, we will be subjected to more idiot defenses of the Democratic Party by publications such as the *Nation* and more kowtowing to the Bush criminals by their aiders and abettors in the Congress.

CZ

San Francisco, California, USA

26 May 2007

This will amuse you, I think. My husband and I received a postcard inviting us to join the *Nation* magazine people and others (Ralph Nader) on a cruise ship to Alaska. My husband said, “Can you imagine being trapped on a boat with these people?”

JR

27 May 2007

On a Los Angeles bus fare increase

Yesterday, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) voted 9-4 for a dramatic increase of bus and train fares. The hike in fares will fall squarely on the backs of working people. It may also lead some people to abandon riding transit altogether and shift to driving, further exacerbating Los Angeles’ notorious traffic congestion.

Under the increase, the popular Day Pass will rise from \$3 to \$5 in July and to \$6 two years later. The monthly pass would increase from \$52 to \$62 and then \$75 over the same period.

Incredibly, the fare increase that passed was still less than what Metro had originally proposed. That proposal would have [raised] the monthly pass to a whopping \$120 and the Day Pass to \$8. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who sits on the Board along with his three appointees, had a counterproposal that would have raised fares much less; however, that plan did not have enough support from the other members.

Despite overwhelming opposition from the public at the hearing, the Board went ahead anyway with the increase.

The rise in fares is all the more offensive given the billions spent on the Iraq War. This is just another example of critical social needs being sidetracked while politicians talk of there being “no money” to fund these programs.

AC

Los Angeles, California, USA

25 May 2007

On “Inquiry shows Canadian state was forewarned of

Air India bombings”

I can believe what you write in your article. I worked for 20 years as a consular program officer with the Canadian consulate general in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Nothing of the lies, manipulation, deception and cover-up by Canada surprises me. It is unfortunate but it is the truth.

LZ

La Crescenta, California, USA

29 May 2007

On “US Supreme Court weakens church/state separation in Ten Commandments rulings”

You write that Antonin “Scalia cherry picks sundry facts from US history—George Washington added ‘so help me God’ to the presidential oath...”

What Scalia doesn’t realize is that this “cherry” was picked from the same legendary tree that was already chopped down by George Washington.

In spite of the widespread notion to the contrary, there is no contemporary historical evidence showing that George Washington added anything to his oath of office as prescribed by the Constitution. There, as frequently proposed, can be no such tradition for adding the words, “So help me God,” that was initiated by George Washington. The fact is that all historical accounts describe the first 20 presidents as swearing to their oath of office exactly as prescribed by the Constitution, which means that none of Washington’s successors over the next 92 years recognized adding “So help me God” as an inaugural tradition.

The first president who is known to have added those words to his presidential oath is Chester Allen Arthur. He appended the phrase to his oath when he was sworn into office on September 22, 1881. Later on, several other presidents during the first third of the twentieth century adopted this practice. The last president who did not use those words was Herbert Hoover. One may say that a president can choose to add these words to the presidential oath, but it is a clear violation of the Constitution, and surely not a good idea for a judicial official to prompt the president to succumb to a religious test of office. This, unfortunately, has been the unbroken practice since FDR’s inaugural ceremony in 1933.

The practice of adding “So help me God” to federal oaths outside of the courtroom began in 1862 with the Iron-clad Test Oath during the Civil War. It was

supposed to keep Confederate sympathizers from participating in the federal government. It may well have been a countermeasure designed to offset the psychological impact that followed when Jefferson Davis repeated “So help me God” as he took his oath of office for the Confederacy. It wasn’t until President Arthur’s administration that the federal oath was restored to a degree of normalcy, and stripped of its designed Civil War anti-Confederate hostilities. As you are probably well aware, Congress preferred to retain the “So help me God” anomaly.

Outside of the inaugural ceremony, it seems that both President Franklin Pierce and President Theodore Roosevelt had legitimate religious qualms about employing God’s name in the government regulated public sphere. Pierce is reported to have recognized the significance of Mt. 5:34: “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne.” And Roosevelt, though overruled, certainly thought it sacrilegious to place God’s name on coins.

The notion that George Washington, as the president of the Constitutional Convention, would, at any subsequent time, disregard the concerted effort of the convention delegates and spatchcock the presidential oath is an unsubstantiated Orwellian legend.

RS

Duluth, Georgia, USA

29 May 2007

On “Possible habitable planet discovered: Extending the horizons of humanity”

I would like to thank Rob Stevens for his article on recent discovery of Gliese 581 c, by an international team of astronomers using HARPS equipment. I was moved by the enthusiasm of the author whose interest, and humanity, found clear expression in an extremely insightful article.

I look forward to future commentaries on the subject.

DG

Aix-en-Provence, France

30 May 2007



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