

Letters from our readers

11 July 2007

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

On “An exchange of letters on school integration and affirmative action”

Barry Grey makes some excellent points about the qualitative difference between the call for integration and the promotion of affirmative action. I would like to share some reflections on affirmative action, as it is practised in South Africa.

Under the ANC government, affirmative action is one of the administration’s flagship policies. As an example, all government departments are required to bring the composition of their staff in line with the national racial demography. Broadly speaking, this means that a certain percentage of posts are reserved for what is termed “historically disadvantaged individuals.” In this framework, “historical disadvantage” is determined by the race of an individual.

This has necessitated the retention of the old Apartheid racial classification system. Although the Population Registration Act (which racially classified South African Citizens) has been rescinded, government employees are still required to declare their race. If you refuse to declare your race, then that decision is made by others. In the end, no matter what your objections, you will be classified as a member of one of the four racial groups as defined under the Apartheid system. Affirmative action, as practiced in South Africa, is essentially a quota system. Besides the government service, this system is being implemented in various spheres of life, from business to sport.

The most obvious beneficiaries of affirmative action are the members of the growing black middle class. Naturally, they are also the most vociferous proponents of affirmative action, standing to gain from promotions in academic institutions and industrial corporations, as well as paving the path to self-enrichment. Black Economic Empowerment is perhaps one of the better-known affirmative action policies. Besides the black middle class, affirmative action is also supported by big business in South Africa, particularly the large mining houses. They clearly recognize that the interests of capitalism will be served by the emergence of a black bourgeoisie.

While masses of South Africans remain mired in poverty, a thin echelon of blacks has amassed enormous wealth through affirmative action. Many of these individuals are senior members of the ANC and trade union bureaucracy. They are driven around in luxury automobiles; they wear the most fashionable clothing; they are ostentatious; they flaunt their wealth. Their banal opinions fill the airwaves and pages of newspapers.

The ANC has also firmly rejected the notion that the most significant differences in South African society are those

delineated by class and, instead, substitute race. Thus citizens are encouraged to support those who purport to promote racial interests rather than class interests. Affirmative action maintains the schisms created by Apartheid, and obscures the real workings of society. Rather than bringing about equality, it perpetuates inequality.

EG

South Africa

2 July 2007

On “Australian government takeover of Aboriginal communities: the real content of the ‘Children are Sacred’ report”

I am writing from the Northern Territory. What a well-researched article! Thanks for taking the time to read the background material and clearly explain the situation. Outstanding.

ML

Northern Territory, Australia

3 July 2007

On “The freeing of Lewis Libby: Government criminality and the class nature of American ‘justice’”

The outcry over the Libby commutation underscores that another outcry is strangely missing: the outcry over Bush’s alleged declassification of Plame’s identity. If Bush and Cheney are lying, they should be impeached. But, if truthful, then they remained silent while Miller went to jail and Libby needlessly fell on his sword for them—and they still should be impeached.

PC

5 July 2007

I am 72 years old and hold a Ph.D. from a university in London. Many states have found Bush, Cheney, Rove, et al guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and now Libby, and Bush/Cheney have committed *treason* according to my studies. Why have these criminals not being punished? The crime of which Libby is guilty—as are Bush, Cheney and others in the military and political establishment—is the same one which formed the principal charge against the Nazi defendants at Nuremberg 60 years ago: conspiracy to wage a war of aggression.

PW

Miami, Florida, USA

6 July 2007

On “Michael Moore’s Sicko: very limited conceptions, very limited results”

Once again, David Walsh, you have written a good, calm, educated response. Your conclusion is that (generally...) Mr. Moore, while he seems to be headed in the right direction and has good intentions, has fallen far short of a complete analysis and full criticism of our current healthcare disaster. My friend and I, after having seen it, both agreed that *Sicko*, while being quite

entertaining and including some fine points, failed to educate us. Neither of us learned anything new. On the other hand, your review, which included the insightful bit on the AFL (who, I'm sure, were sitting in Nixon's palm through the Eisenhower years as well), was much more informative. Thank you.

By the way, I hope you (or somebody with the WWS) are going to give us the skinny on this "Live Earth" thing.

RV

Athens, Georgia, USA

7 July 2007

Michael Moore has produced some valuable work, but it appears that Moore's films are intended to put pressure on the ruling elites by exposing the worst excesses of capitalism, in a bid to restore workers' concessions, and thereby preserve the capitalist profit system that has afforded him a most comfortable existence.

It is certainly most disingenuous of Moore to advocate a vote for the Democrats, whose leaders hail from amongst the wealthiest layers of American society, and whose political orientation fully supports the subjection of the working class to the dictates of big business, and who also support the war in Iraq—precisely the things he finds so egregious about the Republicans.

DD

Melbourne, Australia

7 July 2007

You refer to "Tony Benn, the former British Labour Party cabinet minister and veteran 'left' faker." I remember when the (so-called) great socialist Tony Benn was the man who decided to go all-out to give us nuclear power and had the wool pulled over his eyes by the nuclear industry's *lies* (and other things that had gone on) about the need to have these buildings of death and destruction. When it was found out what had been done, his response was, "Well it's done and nothing can be done about it now." They even had the pictures of those responsible for what were really criminal acts in the papers of the time. Of course they walked away scot-free and carrying *great* wads of cash with them.

GD

Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

7 July 2007

After reading your critical review and just coming back from seeing this film, I would like to dissent from your critique of *Sicko*. David Walsh writes, "Aside from a number of genuinely moving encounters with casualties of the American health insurance industry, the film offers little that is truly revealing."

To you and the regular readers of WWS, perhaps this film is not "truly revealing" and may in truth be inaccurate and out of date. But to the average American, perhaps motivated to see *Sicko* because of his or her own bitter experiences, there are several points that the film makes that are stunning:

1. Individual Americans have been indoctrinated to think that providing healthcare is a personal economic problem. Being unable to pay for expensive healthcare is often viewed as a personal character flaw. The film shows that providing universal healthcare to every one makes it a social problem, not an individual problem.

1. The US privatized health "system" is not Number One, not the best in the world, etc. Canada, England, France and even

"communist" Cuba have done a better healthcare job than the US.

2. Privatized healthcare is profit driven and thus barbaric, corrupt, antidemocratic and inhuman. The US privatized system will no longer be sustainable when masses of people realize that the "free enterprise" system of healthcare is bankrupting and killing them.

3. People will hopefully become educated enough, with films like *Sicko* and other educational media, to ask exactly what the politicians running in November 2008 are proposing to do to solve this national crisis. The politicians, receiving millions in campaign money from the entire healthcare "industry," will be pressed to explain who and what do they support.

4. The mass media for generations have carried pro-business "anti-government" propaganda. In our local daily paper in Santa Monica, California, we are bombarded with articles like "Get the Government off our Backs." For some it will be a revelation to hear that, in fact, the "government" is not the problem.

5. For many Americans it will be a revelation that human beings, no matter race, nationality, ethnicity, class, age, employment, wealth, etc.—all people should have access to medical care when needed.

One scene in *Sicko* was filmed in Los Angeles. When patients in several local for-profit hospitals were determined to be financially impoverished patients, they have been taken by cab to the downtown "skid row" area, and dumped still wearing thin hospital gowns and no shoes!

Perhaps WWS and supporters can start producing some DVD movies or regular daily radio programs to provide an on-going education much needed by most working class Americans on these topics. Perhaps then the WWS perspective would become common knowledge and the limitations of *Sicko* as described by David Walsh would become more understandable.

JW

7 July 2007

I have not seen the film so that puts me in a very vulnerable position (although my parents have, enjoyed it, and I very much respect their opinions). I still think this author puts way too much effort into criticizing than trying to be constructive and positive about any effort to improve healthcare in America. Moore is generally successful in raising public consciousness and discussion. That is a crucial and necessary task and attacking him is a typical pseudo-intellectual position that the far-left too often takes. Every move towards bettering healthcare, whether by baby steps or giant leaps, deserves to be commended. In short, I do not like your review, but I love you anyway.

TB

Phoenix, Arizona, USA

8 July 2007



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