

Letters from our readers

11 July 2008

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

On “Tim Russert and the decay of the American media”

I consider myself a left-wing Democrat, as embarrassing as it that is these days, and I really haven't read your site all that much. However your article on Tim Russert is absolutely *brilliant*. Your site seems to have some great articles and is well put together, but why is it that not one “liberal” op-eder had the courage to write an analysis of Russert's career like yours?

Ever since Russert died there was story after story of how he was such a “hard hitting journalist” who “asked all of the tough questions” and was “equally tough on both Democrats and Republicans.” What a bunch of crap! I watched the guy countless times on Sunday morning and I can't remember once when he asked an intelligent-hard hitting question. To me he always seemed like a political gossip columnist. I remember being so annoyed at him at one of the debates when he spent 10 minutes interrogating Obama about whether he denounces Louis Farrakhan, since his preacher said that Farrakhan was a “good guy”! No wonder people are so uninformed about the real issues. Another thing that annoys me is that any time someone of fame dies everyone always embellishes that person's accomplishments. This guy flat out sucked and maybe if he had asked Cheney, Bush and the Republicans (and Democrats) the tough questions in 2002 this Iraq war would have never happened!

The only time I ever remembered Russert doing anything remotely “courageous” was when he had Michael Chertoff on after Hurricane Katrina, and he asked him if he had any plans to resign for the shameful job he did. However, this was after about five days of the American public seeing the shameful job the administration did. Yet isn't it funny that I can't remember ever hearing Russert saying a single thing about the state of New Orleans in 2008 or mentioning Katrina in any of the debates he moderated this year?

AM

6 July 2008

On “Racist, reactionary and defender of dictatorships: Former Senator Jesse Helms dead at 86”

I woke up on the fourth to the news that Helms had died. The NPR news crew rapidly proceeded to hail him as a man who always stuck to his principles—as if that were a good thing, considering what an unprincipled, racist, hate-spewing creature

he was. I suppose I should expect no less from an outlet which chose to venerate Reagan on his death—to the point of not allowing an air traffic controller from that era to speak “ill of the dead” on air. (Diane Rehm show.)

Indeed, as the day progressed, Helms was described as “polarizing,” he was lauded for “never flip-flopping” and being “true to his ideals,” and his views described as being “racially charged.” “Racist!” I said out loud, “he was a racist. That is the word you're looking for—or away from.”

It is amazing to me that such a person—someone who felt no compunction about denying the rights of others—would die and be so uncritically examined by a major news network. So I thank you for the accurate and unflinching view of this man. The man who would go out of his way to try to make an elected representative cry by harassing them in the halls of Congress. The man who worked hard against equality, against human rights, and against the working class. This is the man who died. No, he never deviated from his ideology of hate and oppression. Not a record to be proud of.

CMS

Portland, Oregon, USA

7 July 2008

On “Mounting questions about Colombian hostage operation”

The Uribe government in Colombia is one of the most repressive in South America today. The “have-nots” live in a state of hopelessness—for themselves and for future generations. Bands of thugs operate under color of government authority, and people are “disappeared” on a regular basis.

However, the guerrillas do an extremely poor job of fighting for equality and justice in Colombia or of educating the world to plight of the Colombian people and recruiting international allies. Kidnapping as a tactic gives the right-wing government a powerful public relations tool that it easily exploits. Targeting foreigners rather than legitimate political targets, and making claims that the right-wing government does it too, doesn't help. Kidnapping as a tactic alienates rather than recruits potential allies, making even intolerant right-wing religious extremists like those imprisoned by the US military in Guantánamo Bay look sympathetic. Some members of the Colombian guerrillas movement are not truly dedicated to socialist reforms, and will sell out their compatriots for money, as did the bodyguard who was assigned to protect Raul Reyes.

All leftist movements in the world, by their very nature,

represent the vast majority of people and if they are doing a good job of educating the people and winning popular support—which must come before any revolution can be successful—they will not need to rely on kidnapping as a tactic, but can overcome with their numbers. I suspect the FARC leadership is more interested in making money from kidnapping than making any political gains.

MC

7 July 2008

On “1968: The general strike and student revolt in France”

The articles proved of great help to me. In reading Focault, I came across the students’ strike in France. The information was sketchy. These articles will correct the perspective. Thanks,

SJ

Udaipur, India

7 July 2008

On “Britain: SATs school tests criticised by official report”

Thompson and Slattery’s article on British schools being overwhelmed by the testing industry is another example of how in education the testing medium has become the message. In New York City, Mayor Bloomberg, who bills himself as the “education mayor,” is crowing over the latest increases in test scores. Of course he ignores that while this should be expected given the incredible time and effort now devoted to teaching specifically for the tests, dropout rates remain horrifically high.

Given the facts in your article, it is not coincidental that the New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, who like Bloomberg had had no educational experience, had hired Sir Michael Barber of McKinsey & Company, an efficiency expert who advised former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The testing serves to further the agenda for a corporate elite of which Bloomberg and Klein are in the top ranks. They want to introduce as much privatization as they can to weaken the public school system by way of outsourcing, consultants, charter schools and vouchers for private schooling.

Like the No Child Left Behind Act for the United States, they have put the focus on excessive testing and teaching to the test that takes away the creativity and fun of learning and teaching. This only serves to continue the high dropout rate, which they cover up with manipulated test scores that do not even show any changes for most students that are of real significance for critical thinking.

At the same time they cover themselves by giving school principals more control so they can put the blame on individual schools and administrators, as they take away funding with one hand that they claim to be increasing with the other.

They destroyed the community school boards and left parents greatly distanced. When they introduced leaving students behind in third (and later fifth and eighth) grade and two representatives on the advisory panel appointed by the Mayor voted against this plan, he fired them and replaced them with less independent-minded lackeys. Last year the parent

organizations refused to go to jointly lobby the New York State legislature with the Mayor and organized their own on another date to be able to raise their own concerns, such as for smaller class sizes.

Bloomberg/Klein have undermined education, and basic rights won by teachers—with the help of the teachers’ union. This points the way to the need for a socialist leadership.

HL

New York

7 July 2008

On “US: Mentally ill woman left to die in hospital waiting room”

This kind of event occurs every day, not only in the US, but wherever the poor are denied the dignity of decent health care. And, as you point out, staff in (not only) public health care facilities are demoralized by the conditions they have to work under. The author also brings up the fact that the public is now conditioned to be non-empathetic (television plays a big role here) and to view sufferers as being responsible for their own suffering. It goes together with an atrophy of understanding of the role environment, upbringing and economic conditions play in influencing a person’s mental health, including the workers who behaved so callously. I think it will probably take real economic catastrophe to bring people out of their present state of denial (although some health care workers do whisper to each other). On the other hand, police-state repression may be perfected by then to the point that people do not speak to each other out of fear, rather than denial.

KV

British Columbia, Canada

6 July 2008



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