

Letters on “In defense of Bill Ayers,” and a reply by David Walsh

23 October 2008

The following letters were sent to the World Socialist Web Site in response to the article, "In Defense of Bill Ayers". The first letter is followed by a reply from David Walsh.

This commentary is not entirely satisfying. You deserve thanks for reminding people of the barbaric business McCain was up to when he was heroically shot down. He has much more to answer for than Ayers. But I'm confounded as to what you would have Obama say about it. You want him to say he supported setting bombs to protest the war? I don't think that's consistent with your own values. Ironically, you end up simply parroting McCain's smear that Obama was buddies with Ayers until it was politically inconvenient. The suggestion implies that Obama once shared Ayers's views, to his discredit or not, or that they were allies or confidants. In any event, as you clearly set out, by the time Obama met him, Ayers had long since sold out to mainstream politics.

Sometimes the zeal to separate the US Democratic Party from true progressive ideas leads to repeating salacious and fact-free right wing attacks. Some thought needs to be put into why and how this happens. It indicates bad faith, a misunderstanding of socialist values as promoted in these pages.

DW

Dear DW,

You miss the point rather badly, and attempt to tar us with a right-wing brush. It's obviously incorrect to suggest we're repeating the Republican attack when the article prominently denounces and repudiates McCain's effort. Your own political zeal to defend Obama is getting in your way. However, to the extent that Obama is a rank opportunist, which he is, it's not our fault if he's guilty of one crime the Republicans accuse him of, dumping Ayers when it became inexpedient. This is clearly what happened.

What would I have Obama say about it? I don't expect him to say anything other than what he did say, given who

and what he is, a conventional politician, carefully vetted by the establishment. However, what would a politician with some sense of honor and some sense of responsibility to set the historical record straight have said?

Something like this: "Mr. Ayers is a supporter of mine in the Chicago area. I don't agree with the actions he and his co-thinkers carried out in the 1970s, in their desperation to oppose the Vietnam War. Mr. Ayers doesn't agree with them now either. However, the real issue here is the nature of that war and the ongoing effort to delegitimize the mass opposition that existed to it in the US.

"The war in Vietnam was a monstrous crime, which led to the deaths of 3-4 million Vietnamese and 50,000 Americans and horrifying consequences for generations in Southeast Asia and the US. In fact, neither population has recovered yet.

"My opponent enthusiastically dropped bombs on innocent men, women and children in Vietnam. He's not a hero, but someone who should spend his life regretting what he did and attempting to recompense for it. The 'crimes' of Mr. Ayers, a private citizen who was never tried and convicted of anything, and my opponent do not even belong on the same scale, although all of official American society demonizes one and lionizes the other."

But there is no one in the leadership of the Democratic Party capable of making such a statement.

Sincerely,

David Walsh

Swinishness indeed. All this fuss about the provocations of the Weather Underground two generations ago is from destitution. More interesting and far more relevant are the numerous studies Ayers has contributed to the literature on early childhood education in urban centers, but of course none of that stuff will come to the fore—not even during Obama's comments on education the other night, which were party-line and bankrupt. He didn't even have

the courage to challenge McCain's assertion that the success of Charter schools is "proven," which they most certainly are not, and especially not in the two cities McCain mentioned, New York and New Orleans. Disgusting. But, then, it certainly all attests to something black elders used to say in the neighborhoods where I grew up, which is that by the time the racist power structure was interested in yielding up anything—in this instance, the US presidency—it doesn't amount to anything but chump change to begin with. And Obama is certainly a chump.

MH

17 October 2008

If Mahatma Gandhi was right about anything, it was the revolution must not resort to violence but instead to peaceful non-compliance. Nothing damns a person or a movement more than violence except that perpetrated by the elite through sheer propaganda; Ayers had neither the media nor the money on his side, and that having been said, we must never adopt the values of the enemy we are trying to combat.

SN

Powell River, BC, Canada

17 October 2008

Given the changeling's rejection and dismissal of his church pastor's assessment of racism in America, Obama's utter lack of perspective and character in regard to Ayers is true to form. The form is as his contributors want him to behave when sitting on their knee, a hollow dummy for the plutocracy. He has locked on to the grand phrases and tone of voice of a reformer. But it has the sound and word only.

The relentless propaganda put forth by these two, and the whole apparatus of promotion of the kept press/media, will be able to lead America wherever it wants. I regard Ayers's recognition of the imperialist war on Vietnam, the frustration of attempting to affect foreign policy and domestic entrenchment as honorable.

Almost everything about this Obama conformity to platform politics—from slavish adherence to the Zionist/APAC policy, to the unexamined caving in to finance capital's plundering of the citizenry's tax for bankers, the abandonment of directing resources to social improvements to finance and military, et cetera—is so predicable, to boilerplate rhetoric that he is just a figurehead. He could be replaced by someone who lacks the emotive power. That emotive power is itself a danger

in a man who is not to be trusted because he is not to be believed. What is believable is the swinish tone and words. Again, my name will be abbreviated to initials if published in letters, and I therefore so respect David Walsh's analysis since his name will go with it. But add mine in agreement.

MS

Santa Rosa, California, USA

17 October 2008

You said it all at the end of your article, David, "What swinishness."

Citizen Obama was recently the subject of an NPR series dealing with his early roots. While defended by Illinois ex-Senator Emil Jones (who recently blocked a recall motion to go on November's ballot concerning the illegal activities of the Democratic Governor), an Afro-American community worker was very forthright in her condemnation of Obama's community organizer days as sheer opportunism. Obama neither remained long enough to make a difference, nor did he achieve anything long-lasting. He has also remained silent about the corrupt Illinois political machine that has devastated the economy of the state in many ways—to say nothing about its condoning of McCarthy-era "ethics tests" as well as the present activities of an ex-Democratic politician seeking to use vaguely defined sexual harassment policies against inquiring faculty members in a university he now presides over.

Obviously, the next stage in his opportunism will be demanding a slot on "Saturday Night Live" after Palin's performance last night to show he has a sense of humor.

McCain also bombed innocent civilians, and his record in contrast to Ayers's is appalling. Obama and his cronies dare not mention these ugly issues. If only there were an SEP candidate standing in the area I live in, since I can not stomach any thought of voting for Obama, who will probably continue state Democratic corrupt policies in the White House if he gets in

TW

19 October 2008



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