Letters from our readers

6 January 2011

On "The Nation joins the campaign against Julian Assange"

I've visited Politt's online article at the *Nation* on the afternoon of December 31.

None of the comments (50 total at the time) mention the David Walsh article of the 30th. Then I noticed that no comments were listed after the 30th.

I logged on to the *Nation* site and tried to submit a comment, offering the web address for the Walsh analysis and the note from John Pilger praising it.

I made two attempts to submit my chat; both failed.

I'd be delighted to know that the *Nation* was blocking such comments deluging their site.

Does Ms. Politt dare to respond publicly to Mr. Walsh on this matter? Or perhaps her contract with the *Nation* conveniently prohibits her from doing so.

Randy R
Arizona, USA
31 December 2010

***

Vis-a-vis the *Nation*'s smearing of Assange, what about *Nation* readers voting him *Nation* Readers' Person of the Year? Debate is important.

Brian N
Glasgow, UK
31 December 2010

***

That is an absolutely great article! This is why I read the *World Socialist Web Site*! Thanks!

Greg
3 January 2011

***

David, How right you are in your concluding sentences. You expose identity politics for the fraud it really is, namely enriching a small segment of those formerly outside the mainstream at the expense of the majority struggling to survive on all levels.

In my blighted institution, a female Chancellor (also a woman of color) is trying to impose furloughs on all staff (including those only making $24,000 p.a. and others even less). Some workers have been sold out by their unions while others question "budget problems" where money is openly available for new sports stadiums and administrative buildings in a place where 100 administrators make six-figure salaries. Naturally, we are vilified by the local newspaper and reactionary bloggers who do not look at the whole picture. However, this " little ol' farm girl" from Wisconsin expresses amazement that restaurant prices are the same as those in her previous residence, yet instead seeks to inflict economic hardship on those earning less rather than others fortunate enough to have six-figure salaries.

Is it no wonder that tuition fees have risen in England so that only the rich will be able to benefit from higher education and the rest, perhaps forced to be cannon fodder in this Orwellian New World Order of constant wars? Is it coincidental that in the current administrative university negotiations here the Board of Trustees seeks "the exclusive right to determine the course offerings that shall be offered in an academic unit"? The worlds of McCarthyism and anti-Assange criticism are not too far distant.

Certainly, this situation here confirms everything wsws.org has said about identity politics that rewards the compliant and discriminates against the economically disadvantaged who can neither afford rocketing tuition fees nor try to make a living in essential clerical and blue collar jobs here. Here's wishing wsws.org a positive New Year in exposing stories the mainstream media is relutcant to examine.

Tony W
31 December 2010

On "Sweeping cuts in UK Local Authority spending"

Working people, the poor and the most vulnerable people in society are going to be enormously burdened by these massive spending cuts to the Local Authorities as the author points out.

Two days ago, Bournemouth's *Daily Echo* revealed that some of Poole's most vulnerable residents faced giving up valuable day care after being told charges were to rocket.

Elderly people using the Poole Day Centre have been told the cost would rise by almost 500 percent in some cases. A 92-year-old registered blind person who was paying £21 for two three-hour stays a week has been told that he would be expected to stump up £117 from January.

Provision of social care, which to a certain level contributed to promote independence and the quality of life of susceptible people, are going to be dismantled along with other social welfare programmes under the Big Society of Lib Dem-Conservative government.

There can't be any doubt that there will be massive class battles ahead against these drastic measures, despite the efforts of the trade unions to sabotage them.

© World Socialist Web Site

Ajitha G
Dorset, UK
1 January 2011
On "The Artificial Ape: How humans invented themselves"

Dear Philip Guelpa,

Thanks for your interesting review of *The Artificial Ape: How Technology Changed the Course of Human Evolution*. I agree on most of your comments and on some limits of Timothy Taylor's book you emphasize on.

You stress that "Increasing brain and thus skull size present a biological dilemma of extreme evolutionary import (…). The biological adaptation to this paradox was that humans evolved what in comparison to other apes is premature birth." I agree with you, but it would have been important to tell the WSWS readers that are new to this subject that this theory is not from Timothy Taylor himself and that it is quite popular in anthropology and psychoanalysis since the 1960s and that the theory of fetalization itself comes from Louis Bolk (in 1926), a Dutch anatomist and biologist. Fetalization is a better word to describe this phenomenon than "premature birth" you are using as human gestation is not shorter but a bit longer in human than in great apes.

As you tell it very well "Although Taylor does not raise this, the invention of effective carrying technology would also have permitted the transportation of quantities of food and raw materials from source locations to residential or use areas." Your developments on this subject are excellent.

You also raise among other things an interesting problem: "Furthermore, there are other factors, not necessarily excluding the baby sling hypothesis, which are likely to have played important roles in compensating for the birth of helpless infants. Among these are increasing parental and even grand-parental investments in child care." On this subject there are valuable connections to be made with the book *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* from Sarah Blaffer Hrdy that develops the idea that humans have evolved through cooperative breeding. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy explains convincingly how deeply different humans are from great apes in cooperative breeding.

This cooperative breeding is a prerequisite of the fetalized evolutionary path because otherwise human mother and children do not get enough calories to survive until children can collect their own food. In humans even small children can easily pass from the mother to another adult for care and feeding, a behavior that is unthinkable among our chimpanzee cousins.

The cooperative breeding model must have been of great help to promote such innovations as the baby sling. It reinforces the idea that baby sling probably came quickly after what you call "the invention of effective carrying technology."

There is an interesting review of Sarah Blaffer Hrdy book by Peter T. Ellison: [PDF]

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy book underestimates the question of technology and of the division of labour in early humans but her 2009 book is also a must read.

Best regards,

Jacques
3 January 2011

On "German steel boss calls for 'German raw materials corporation'"

Using Marx's scientific method one begins to see glaring contradictions in bourgeois political economy. Take the wish list of the European economists as an example: "Fair competitive rules and a consistent approach towards commodity cartels" seems rational to the extreme when taken by itself, yet when "Securing the future of industrial Europe and maintaining our jobs" is coupled with the previous statement... in a global economy ... the European enterprise suddenly projects itself like a giant cyst on the body politic.

Heinz S
California, USA
1 January 2011

On "Fire kills five family members in the Seattle, Washington area"

"The apartments in the 96-unit, eight-building complex—each of which, according to the complex's web site, has two bedrooms and rents for between $1090 and $1290 a month—lack fire sprinklers because they were constructed in the mid-1980s, before sprinklers were mandated. The lack of such a simple and effective fire-suppression device results in many tragic deaths."

I was a very long time resident of Redmond, WA. The changes, during my years of residence, had a direct impact on me. I and many others, who lack neither education nor experience, did not "fit in" with the new social order. The Fremont area was once considered impoverished or marginal. Currently, the Fremont area is very yup-scale. The contrasts between the two social orders is dramatic.

The "average" American family has an annual income of around $60,000. This makes the rent described above affordable. It's standard for the Seattle area. Of course there is a significant difference in income and housing between the service sector sublings of Redmond or Seattle and those of higher social/economic status.

Jerry H
Washington, USA
3 January 2011

On "Best films of 2010"

Happy New Year, David. May the muse inspire you to even higher artistic heights. I loved *Winter's Bone*, what a work. Miss Lawrence touches the viewer deeply with her enduring struggle. The movie manages to end happily, but in a bittersweet way, and we think about it way after we finished watching it.

I had almost given up on American movies. I loved watching "5th circuit" movies in Sri Lanka, where I grew up. They all showed us the plight of the common man/woman. I re watched a DVD yesterday called

© World Socialist Web Site

“Aswasuma”, it is set from the date SL got “independence” from the British. It depicts the upper middle class layer that replaces the British in such a revealing light, I again started remembering what movies were really like.

In one telling scene, this poor family visits a politically connected doctor in the middle of the night to get some medicine for their dying child. It is the eve of independence. The doctor is having sex with a white woman and cannot be disturbed. They are having a big party, and the watchman tells the poor family that “don’t you know what a great day this is, we got independence from the whites”. The poor family and the villagers are obviously clueless what this means and after the watchman leaves, one asks another what it may mean, to which he replies “I don’t know, seems like the white man gave them something”.

Imagine the cutting sarcasm, delivered in the utter innocence of a village mind. These things move me in a way I can’t explain, and isn’t that what art is supposed to do?

Thanks,
Thushara
3 January 2011

On “Oil tycoon Khodorkovsky convicted in Moscow trial”

WSWS’s article provides an insightful view into the difference between the appearance and reality of the US justice system as it pertains to the prosecution of financial crimes. The contrast with the Russian court system through which Khodorkovsky was prosecuted is telling. There is, I contend a significant social and economic justice issue involved as well as a purely legal issue.

The Khodorkovsky matter illustrates the fundamentally different approaches the US political system and that of Putin’s United Russia party place on the role of the state. For over 30 years politicians in the US have denounced the state as the enemy of the people in the most vituperative of terms. Grover Norquist, one of the ideological godfathers of the Reagan revolution wanted to shrink the government to the point where it could be “strangled and killed”. Reagan famously said “government is the problem”. Bill Clinton said government is not the answer to various socioeconomic issues.

Contrast these statements with a speech by then Russian president Vladimir Putin on February 8, 2008 entitled Russia’s Development Strategy to 2020. It is worth quoting in some detail: “The transition to an innovative development path calls above all for large scale investment in human capital. Human development is the main goal and essential condition for progress in modern society. This is our absolute national priority now and in the future. Russia’s future and our success depend on people’s education and health and their desire to improve themselves and make use of their skills and talents. ...This is vital for our country’s development. Russia’s future depends on our citizens’ enthusiasm for innovation and *on the fruit of the labors of each and every individual* (emphasis added). Political parties must not forget their immense responsibility for Russia’s future, for the nation’s unity and for our country’s stable development. No matter how fierce the political battles and no matter how irreconcilable the differences between parties might be, they are never worth so much as to bring the country to the brink of chaos. Irresponsible demagogy and attempts to divide society and use foreign help or intervention in domestic political struggles are not only immoral but illegal.”

Quoting John Stanton’s excellent February 15, 2008 blog “Beyond Nation State to Flex-State: Putin’s Disciplined , Flexible 21st Century State Model”: “Putin recognizes that only The State has the authority to wield power to protect the national interest, play referee when financial markets convulse, and ensure that a nation’s infrastructure, its culture, its people and its security come first.” None of this should serve to romanticize or sentimentalize Putin; he remains today what he has probably been most of his adult life: a highly intelligent, tough-minded and nationalistic believer in his country’s primacy on the world stage. Nonetheless the contrast in the approaches to the role of The State is worth noting.

Sincerely,

Peter L
Connecticut, USA
3 January 2011

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site