

Letters from our readers

29 September 2012

On “US military brands Assange, WikiLeaks as ‘the enemy’”

If WikiLeaks and Assange are “the enemy”, and the recipients of what it published “the enemy”, then all those who have read the published are “the enemy”.

America’s made enemies abound...

Michael S
28 September 2012

On “Obama uses UN speech to threaten war against Iran”

This reader, after having listened to president Obama’s speech last night, turned very frustrated and longed for a rational analysis to help concerned world citizens to understand what is happening around them. Thank you Mr. Bill Van Auken for accomplishing that serious task.

I am puzzled when imperialist leaders talk of democracy, individual freedom, human rights, etc., while contributing to the growth of all evils in our midst, namely poverty, unemployment, labour exploitation, genocides, malnutrition and foremost the wars.

They have wreaked havoc in human society in recent decades while helping the wealthy 1 percent to misappropriate to boost their wealth. What a democracy they are painting for suffering masses. Down with such a democracy.

These world leaders through their actions over the years, in my view, have invalidated the great principles enshrined in the American Constitution. Hope the American working class will convey the necessary message to the US bi-partisan political establishment in the coming election. Long live the American workers.

IVE
Sri Lanka
26 September 2012

On “A World Not Ours: Where do the Palestinians go from here?”

Wonderful article on Mahdi Fleifel and the film *A World Not Ours*. The standing propaganda robs an entire people of their face, while much of the reaction is merely nationalism. It reminds me a bit of a letter I read by the 4th International in the 1940s, that the only solution in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was for the Palestinian and Israeli workers to stop fighting each other for the interests of their kings and bourgeoisie.

Vance O
26 September 2012

On “Chicago Symphony musicians walk out”

Does the public want art, and is it willing to pay for it? Politicians say no. But the people say otherwise.

A headline article on the front page of Sunday’s edition of the *Houston Chronicle* puts to rest the question of whether the public supports the arts, and is willing to pay for them, with a resounding affirmative. The poll data is a direct challenge to the reactionary right-wing political system that says “there is no money” for the arts.

The Houston Arts Survey, “a systematic survey reaching 1,200 [Houston and Harris County] area residents” between November 21, 2011 and January 4, 2012, was conducted by the Kinder Institute for Urban Research of Rice University. It was funded by a grant from the Houston Endowment Inc. and headed by co-director Dr. Stephen Klineberg.

The survey question was “How important is it for Houston’s overall quality of life to have lots of music, theaters, museums, and other excellent arts venues in this city?”

The results put the lie to the dominant political

discourse, which is that the arts are of little or no interest to Americans. Americans themselves, at least a section of them in Houston, Texas—a state that has achieved a perhaps undeserved international reputation for political and religious backwardness—support arts and arts education to an astounding degree.

More than 70 percent say that having a “vibrant arts scene” is very important to their quality of life. And this attitude extends to everybody. Latinos, African-Americans and Asians are as supportive as the Anglos and are as likely to attend arts events.

Across gender lines, women support the arts to a slightly greater degree than men (75 versus 70 percent). As to educational background, those with a high school education answered in the affirmative at a 72 percent rate, while those with postgraduate degrees registered just over 80 percent—with intermediate educational levels showing intermediate results.

Dr. Klineberg said, “The survey shows the arts are not an elitist thing, that support is greater and more widespread than many would think. This sort of survey has never been done before, though there have been studies showing the arts’ substantial economic impact on Houston. But we’ve never had a fully representative look at Harris County. We may have suspected or hoped for this support. But now we have real objective data about the extent and depth of public support for the arts.”

Another survey question confirms the support overall for the arts, but also shows that economic circumstances play a definite role in who actually attends arts events. “During the past 12 months, did you attend any live performances in the arts, either professional or amateur, such as drama, dance, music, or any type of concert or performance?” A yes or no answer was sought. Among whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians, no sector answered under 54 percent “yes.”

However, there was a definite correlation of arts attendance with household income. Of those earning under \$37,500, 29 percent answered “yes” to the previous question. In the next tier, incomes between \$37,501 and \$62,500 the “yes” responses rose to 52 percent. From \$62,501 to \$100,000, 57 percent said yes; and over \$100,000, 58 percent said yes. (The figures above were visually interpolated from bar graphs published in the *Chronicle*. The actual numbers may vary slightly.)

The survey did not separate out groups with still higher incomes. It would have been interesting and instructive, for example, to split the uppermost income tier into two sub-tiers, say \$100,001 to \$200,000 and from \$200,001

up. However, the data published show clearly that the rate of attendance at arts events begins to level off at around 57 percent for incomes over \$62,501. In this, as in all things, the important discriminator is income, i.e. class, and not gender, ethnicity, or other false discriminants.

It is undeniable that Houston has a topnotch performing arts scene. The Alley Theater, Houston Ballet, Houston Grand Opera, and Houston Symphony are all world-class organizations, especially now that cities with strong arts traditions such as Detroit, Chicago, and Philadelphia are whittling away at theirs left and right.

The oil industry here is making money hand over fist, so some of the pinchpenny attitudes seen in other cities toward their arts organizations is not so evident, at least not yet.

Still, Houstonians, while they evidently enjoy and feel a certain pride in the vibrancy of the arts scene here, should not feel immune to the worldwide trend, which is also undeniable, and it is only a matter of time, in this historical period of capitalist degeneration, before Houston’s arts organizations begin to feel the knife. There is a hint of this already in the survey data relating to income levels in attendance at arts events.

Meanwhile, if similar surveys were carried out in Chicago and Detroit (to name two of the worst-hit cities), the results might be equally surprising.

CH

Houston, Texas USA

24 September 2012



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