

Film director Spielberg lines up with Bush war drive

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3 October 2002

At a September 26 press conference in Rome US film director Steven Spielberg, echoed by actor Tom Cruise, spoke out in support of the Bush administration's war drive against Iraq. The pair were in Italy to promote the release the following day of the Hollywood blockbuster *Minority Report*, directed by Spielberg and featuring Cruise.

In response to questions about his views on the impending assault on Iraq, Spielberg told Italian journalists, "Bush's politics has been solid, grounded in reality, willing to uproot terrorism wherever it may be found." He continued: "We don't receive daily reports from the CIA, we watch TV like you, we wait to see what happens. But if Bush, as I believe, has reliable information on the fact that Saddam is making 'weapons of mass destruction,' I cannot not support the policies of his government."

In addition to these conformist and subservient musings, Spielberg noted "some sinister coincidences" between the events of the past year and "the message in our film." In *Minority Report*, a science fiction work set in 2054, murder has been eliminated in Washington DC through the use of a team of psychics ["pre-cogs"] who infallibly foresee killings. The would-be murderers are apprehended before they commit their crimes and sent to cryogenic freezing units. It turns out, however, that the psychics do not always agree, that there are suppressed "minority reports," suggesting other possible outcomes to events.

The filmmakers, after painting a relatively benign picture of this dystopian future, come down against the sort of police-state dictatorship portrayed ... barely. The parallel between the police work carried out in *Minority Report* and the policies of "anticipatory" arrest of "terrorist suspects" and preemptive war against any and all potential threat to US interests, adopted by the Bush

administration, is striking.

At the press conference in Rome, Spielberg commented: "One of the main themes of the film is the willingness on the part of Americans to renounce their privacy in order to help the FBI defeat crime. One can ask how far we should go in pushing for prevention? How much privacy has to be sacrificed in the name of security? It is a strong theme that is dealt with in the film and is extremely topical."

In June, Spielberg was even more definite about his readiness to sacrifice basic rights, telling the *New York Times*: "Right now, people are willing to give away a lot of their freedoms in order to feel safe. They're willing to give the FBI and the CIA far-reaching powers to, as George W. Bush often says, root out those individuals who are a danger to our way of living. I am on the president's side in this instance. I am willing to give up some of my personal freedoms in order to stop 9/11 from ever happening again. But the question is, Where do you draw the line? How much freedom are you willing to give up? That is what this movie is about."

These comments provide a glimpse into the thinking of a layer of extremely wealthy Hollywood liberals or erstwhile liberals, whose commitment to democratic rights is increasingly tenuous. Spielberg, worth some \$2.2 billion, according to *Forbes Magazine*, is a leading Democratic Party supporter and fundraiser. Spielberg's remarks are also significant because they seek to revive within artistic or intellectual layers the attitude of "My country right or wrong," which became so discredited during the era of mass opposition to US intervention in Vietnam.

At the September 26 press conference in Rome, Cruise parroted Spielberg's blind faith in the president of the United States, adding: "Bush is facing a very

difficult and complex situation. We don't have the information that Bush and Blair have available to them. Still, I wouldn't speak of 'pre-crime' [another reference to the movie] in Saddam's case, but rather repeated crimes against humanity and his own people."

In Cruise's case, there may be a certain effort to "atone" for remarks he made in July at the British premiere of *Minority Report*. At that time, he was quoted as saying that the "US is terrifying," and that he was disturbed about corporate corruption, crime and terrorism. He was also reported to have said that he might remove his children from school in California and send them to Australia, where his ex-wife Nicole Kidman resides.

Cruise was immediately lambasted by the right-wing media in the US. For example, Fox television's Bill O'Reilly denounced Cruise on the July 2 edition of his program, *The O'Reilly Factor*: "People in a time of war expect Americans, particularly ones like Tom Cruise, who have been well rewarded by our society, to stand behind their government.... All over the world, people are going to say, oh, Tom Cruise doesn't like the United States. He, you know, is going to be used as propaganda against us."

Spielberg and Cruise are among the most prominent film industry figures to speak out in favor of war against Iraq. In London on September 18 a delegation of actors and artists delivered an open letter signed by more than 100 performers, writers, musicians and playwrights in Britain to Prime Minister Tony Blair stating that attacks on Iraq would be "unjustifiable" with "potentially horrific ramifications." Signatories included playwright Harold Pinter, film director Ken Loach, musician Brian Eno and actress Jemma Redgrave.

In Spain on September 25, actress Jessica Lange weighed in forcefully against the American government and its plans for Iraq. Lange was in Spain to receive the Donostia Award for career achievement at the San Sebastian film festival. The following is a translation from the Spanish press of her comments originally made in English.

"As far as the political situation in the US is concerned, we are facing a dangerous and extremely unfortunate administration. The way I see it, the presidential election was stolen by George W. Bush and ever since we have all been suffering the consequences.

I think that the most recent thing with Iraq is absolute insanity, and I cannot believe that there is not opposition to it on a more global scale and that there is not more opposition in the country on the part of the sane people, including politicians, but also students and artists.

"There has to be a movement to really oppose what Bush is proposing, because it is unconstitutional, immoral and basically illegal. I find it particularly reprehensible the way he acts like he was in a western, intimidating the rest of the world. What can I say? I hate Bush; I despise him and his entire administration, everything he represents and everything he has tried to do, not only internationally, which is horrific, but domestically as well.

"In my country the atmosphere is poisoned. Unbreathable for those of us who are not on the right. So thank you for inviting me to this festival and allowing me to leave there for a few days."



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