

A letter from Roger Ebert on Leni Riefenstahl

9 October 2003

We are posting below a letter from film critic Robert Ebert of the Chicago Sun-Times responding to a letter from a WSWs reader published on October 4.

Reader RG wrote regarding the September 15 WSWs article “Leni Riefenstahl—propagandist for the Third Reich”.

Below is the comment from Mr. Ebert, as well as a link to his article “Riefenstahl dies at 101; tainted by link to Hitler,” published September 10 in the Chicago Sun-Times[<http://www.suntimes.com/output/eb-feature/cst-ctr-xrief10.html>].

Your correspondent RG writes,

“A final and telling piece of fluff came from Roger Ebert, who wrote that ‘Nazism was not only a political movement but an exercise in mass hypnotism drawing on fetishistic imagery.’ Presumably, another ‘exercise’ could be conducted in which another villain simply ‘hypnotizes’ everybody.”

Cheap shot. What I actually wrote was:

“By 1934 she was a favorite of the Nazis, and was chosen by Goebbels, the propaganda minister, to film the party’s rally at Nuremberg. Given many cameras and unlimited film, she also benefited because much of the rally was deliberately staged with the film in mind. The result, ‘Triumph of the Will,’ is one of the most important documentaries ever made, and by general consent one of the best—important at the time for the way it painted Hitler and his followers as idealized supermen, important now because it helps explain how Nazism was not only a political movement but an exercise in mass hypnotism drawing on fetishistic imagery.”

I also wrote, “But being in great shape at a very old age, while admirable, does not erase the stain of her association with the Nazi movement.”

And, referring to a documentary about her, “there are candid moments, when she is not aware of the camera, when she shares quiet little asides with her old comrades, which, while not damning, subtly suggest a

dimension she is not willing to have seen.”

All of this is not fluff, but true.

Roger Ebert



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