

Letters from our readers

28 December 2006

The following is a selection of recent letters sent to the World Socialist Web Site.

On “Britain: Youth prison accused of abuses”

I have a son on remand in Stoke Heath who has been in the segregation unit for over a week. It is Christmas Day now as I am writing this, and he has not been allowed even a phone call all week. I think your article does highlight the fact that most children do need to be rehabilitated, not left to go mental in such cells, with no windows and no communication. My son suffers from severe ADHD and is currently on medication. He is on remand for a charge of handling stolen property, which, yes, is criminal but is also not worth locking him up like some murderer. I think this is why there is so much overcrowding in these detention centres. If the Government spent more money rehabilitating, and less with punishment, the prisons would not be as full.

YK

25 December 2006

On “Pianist Jay McShann, last Kansas City’s jazz giants, dies at 90”

Your article on the death of our dear friend Jay McShann contains this sentence: “He never developed the more modern sound of his Kansas City contemporary, Mary Lou Williams, however, and sounded increasingly dated as the years rolled on.” This couldn’t be more wrong. You apparently didn’t listen to much of Jay’s playing. Jay developed a very modern sound with advanced harmonic conception, his own, not like anybody else’s. He might have not recorded a lot of that type of playing because he was always ready to play what he thought people wanted to hear, but check out “Jay McShann Live at Cafe des Copains” on Sackville (SKCD2-2024), in which he plays solo. When he sat down at our piano and just played for himself, he played very modern and exploratory music. It is truly a shame more of it wasn’t recorded. Jay did not promote himself and didn’t protest when he was wrongly labeled. He didn’t take steps to lock in his

legacy, but those who knew him and heard him play in various situations, not just where he was typecast as a boogie-woogie player, such as in Clint Eastwood’s film, know that he was a sophisticated player of modern jazz. And what made us treasure him most was his rare ability to communicate his personality through his playing, light-hearted, and hard swinging, overflowing with love of life.

Sincerely,

DB

25 December 2006

On “Democrats vow to continue funding Iraq war”

It’s become somewhat of a maxim—at least to those of living in Washington, D.C., ground zero of all things political—that the side controlling definition of terms and aphorisms of a debate over an issue will ultimately emerge victorious. One such aphorism is “We have to show support for the troops.”

I’ve been waiting, on the edge of my seat, for someone—anyone—to blow this argument to smithereens: How does keeping our troops in the Iraqi version of Mogadishu equate to supporting our troops? The troops have families who want them home; I’m sure the troops mirror their families’ desires. To continue to peddle that sound bite will yield a similar result to “stay the course” sloganeering.

I’m not a socialist by any means, but I find myself in agreement with much of what you’ve written—if anything, I’m a Constitutional purist who supports social programs made necessary because of the debris left in the wake of the unholy marriage of Big Business and federal government whores. Regardless of my stripe, keep it up. I’ll support you all the way!

NG

Laurel, Maryland, US

26 December 2006

On racial profiling at airlines

Banning certain individuals from airlines is immoral. I may be American, but I do know that many Islamic

individuals are not terrorists any more than some Americans who fuel flames. Some of my best friends are Islamic, and none of them are terrorists. There are those who would like me to not have anything to do with Muslims because of their own white-supremacist natures. I am not a part of that and never will be. As far as instigating wars and then calling someone else a terrorist, it is wrong. It's been wrong since Beirut and Libya. It's still wrong. Beirut and Libya were both instigated by the US Navy. I work with those who were in the Navy and Army who admit to dumping garbage from ships in Libya's waters just to make them angry. To me that is not only against environmental policies but it's quite disrespectful.

AC

Clearfield, Utah, US

24 December 2006

On "The films of Francois Truffaut"

I'm very satisfied with this article. Anyway, I would like to add some nuances. It's absolutely true that Truffaut excludes political issues from his films. He omits the social dimension of politics in his movies, at least in an explicit way. Yet, he shows a human contradiction that we can often find in artists and thinkers. That's the contradiction between human freedom and culture (especially official culture, what means contradiction between human freedom and social law and order in a repressive society like ours).

One of the most moving moments in Truffaut's works is that of *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (400 Blows), when Antoine Doinel is unjustly punished for having copied a paragraph from Balzac in a school assignment. The teacher, who is blinded by official culture, can't understand that Antoine Doinel hasn't plagiarized Balzac, but has interpreted the writer in his own way. This contradiction between official culture and subject (or social order and subject) is constantly in Truffaut's films. The protagonist of *La femme d'à Côté* (*The Woman Next Door*) rebels against social rules when he goes crazy with love and wants to love in sight of everybody his secret lover. We can also think of the bomber in *Fahrenheit 451* who rebels against a dictatorship that prohibits reading books.

In a certain way, Truffaut reminds us of American and anarchist dreams of individual freedom. Yet, in opposition to the American individual hero, Truffaut's characters assume the position imposed by society.

Whether this is positive or negative depends on spectator's viewpoint. The last shot of *Mississippi Mermaid* shows the solitary couple fleeing from police in a mountain covered with snow, and the look of the wild child at the end of the film with the same title is an indeterminate look that seems to both reproach and thank us for having integrated a wild creature in our society.

Truffaut was a great filmmaker, film critic and writer. He had a talent to analyze social relationships in very moving films. Despite the lack of politics in his movies, he was a genius who showed us in his films the contradiction between the human subject and the social system. We must estimate his work correctly, with both its limitations and its values.

JG

Valencia, Spain

26 December 2006



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