

Letters from our readers

30 July 2007

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

On “Leon Trotsky and the post-Soviet school of historical falsification: A review of two Trotsky biographies by Geoffrey Swain and Ian Thatcher”

Your review is extremely well argued and a review that needed to be written and should be read. As a professor of political science, I am teaching a course on 19th and 20th century Russia and the revolutionary movement this summer. I will recommend that my students read your reviews. Please keep them on this site.

EJ

Salaya, Nakorn Pathom, Thailand

22 June 2007

On “A further exchange: Sicko and American politics and cinema”

I disagree with readers who are sending in comments about the latest Michael Moore film, saying the American public is not ready for “thought-provoking intellectual films.” In my experience, the American public has been ready for such films for a very long time. I was employed for many years in one of the largest university film centers in the Midwest, serving a nationwide clientele through the non-theatrical market. What I observed was an insatiable hunger for high-quality, meaningful films that stimulated discussion.

Our customer base included academic and school libraries, businesses, community organizations, professional associations, government agencies, etc., all wanting to sponsor film programs. The library rented educational films, documentaries, features, shorts, animated films, independent productions, etc. The best films were always in demand. I developed a healthy respect for the many people from all walks of life who would spend countless hours in the screening rooms, trying to make discriminating choices among the available films, preparing notes in advance for their classes or discussion programs, often sharing their insights with the film library staff. People also gave intelligent feedback through letters or evaluation forms. The Hollywood box office is not the only one that counts.

It was the “Great Director” himself, D.W. Griffith, who was the first to recognize the enormous educational potential of the film medium in the early 20th century. In this context I think David Walsh is entirely correct in his response to another reader: “If no one tells the public the truth ... then how is it to learn anything?” The key word here is “learn.” People do learn; they want to be challenged and involved in the viewing experience. It is not the didactic, pedantic films made for the “educational market” that accomplish this. It is the more creative films made by talented directors which have the most impact in every subject from

politics to music to sports to art, science, biography, etc. Griffith’s prediction—that someday you would be able to press a button and retrieve a film—is coming true in the digital age. With the greater accessibility and affordability of film on DVD, I think filmmakers have an enormous social responsibility.

And nobody should ever judge a film without viewing it first!

LJ

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

27 July 2007

Your interlocutor makes great play about “dumbing down,” but by focusing only on demand in the form of box office statistics and not on supply/distribution misses the point. Box office statistics tell us what people watch, but they don’t tell us what was available to watch in the first place.

If mindless rubbish is all that makes it to the vast majority of US cinemas, then that is what the vast majority of the US public are going to watch if they want a “night at the movies.” They may go, see what’s on, not like it much, but think, “well any film’s better than no film,” watch a movie that they don’t think much of, and come out feeling vaguely dissatisfied and empty in a way that they can’t quite put their finger on. If good movies were available, they might think “hey, that looks different, I’ll give that a try,” and then, if what they see is truly a great work that impacts them, then they’ll pass on the word to their friends that there is this really great movie out there that they just have to go and see.

Blaming the US public as itself “dumbed down” is itself harsh and cruel, and serves to divert attention from the urgent task of destroying the system within which that public is trapped, and which cuts them off from truly challenging art (even when such art is being created, which is itself a further aspect of the problem). But that’s too difficult, and poses questions to everyone: Far easier to wallow in Pelagian/voluntarist self-righteousness about supposedly ignorant burger-quaffing trash willfully collaborating in their own oppression, who if only they tried a bit harder to improve themselves would solve all their problems.

The WSW is taking a truly revolutionary line to products like *Sicko* and people like Michael Moore: defending them against attacks from the right, but subjecting them to ruthless analysis from the left. It is precisely because even vaguely subversive cultural products are so rare these days that such products when they appear must be carefully discussed so that they do not become vehicles for illusions and become bulwarks of the status quo in spite of themselves. By subjecting *Sicko* to a careful critique David Walsh is ultimately serving to advance the desire for change that lay behind the making of the movie in the first place by clarifying its confusions, so that the yearning for justice in the realm of healthcare can link up with the program that will satisfy that

yearning, which is nothing less than the program of international socialism brought into being by the international working class itself.

AG

25 July 2007

On "Bush administration releases report on terror threat"

Good analysis—seems we can just invade anybody now after ginning up some concocted pretext. I get up every morning wondering when somebody will call these people to account. You can bet there are people in the intel community who disagree with the Bush administration, even though they had to weasel-word it for the report. Also, the word "homeland"—I hate to keep comparing things to Orwell, but this truly is ominous. As Randolph Bourne reminds us, "war is the health of the state," but even Dwight Eisenhower foresaw the threat the uncontrolled military-industrial complex posed to our republic.

RM

20 July 2007

On "'Executive privilege' claim in US attorneys' case: White House asserts sweeping power to defy the law"

Thanks for the article; I appreciated it because it is to the point of a number of issues, particularly that the president claims to be above the law and that the firings were based upon investigations of voter fraud. The article presents facts like "what prompted the firings," and highlights the shroud of secrecy surrounding the executive branch of government. It develops the fraudulent concept of "unitary executive," and it has a good ending: it carries an ominous warning.

You write like no one else on the Internet—you get to the point, provide the facts and have a thoughtful conclusion.

JA

22 June 2007

On "Democrats' 'censure' plan—another cynical diversion of fight against war and reaction"

Sen. Russ Feingold seems not to view the defense of the Constitution as part of Congress's "normal work." What, I wonder, does he consider to be more important than defending the Constitution and ridding the country of a criminal administration that has illegally declared aggressive war against Iraq and has shredded the Constitutional rights of American citizens by illegally spying on them?

Feingold and the Democrats are of no use except to bolster the aims of the corporate oligarchy and their bought-and-paid-for shills in the Bush administration and the media.

Future generations, if the species still exists in the future, far from seeing a "co-equal branch of government" stand up and hold the criminals to account for their crimes, will wonder what in the world the Congress was doing that was so important that they allowed the monstrous crimes of the Bush administration to destroy democracy in the name of greed and power lust. Most likely, they will view the position of Feingold and the rest of the Democrats in Congress as one of collaborators.

CZ

San Francisco, California, USA

24 July 2007

On "Bush orders freeze on assets of those threatening Iraq

'stabilization efforts'"

The new executive order regarding asset forfeiture for political dissidents (those who oppose the Iraq war and the war on terror) is extremely ominous. One comment I read on a political blog today called it the formal declaration of dictatorship. Combined with Chertoff's recent prediction of a new domestic terrorist attack, and two days prior to that, former Sen. Rick Santorum's prediction of the same in the next few months, I fear a false flag terrorist attack is in the works. It may be the only way this regime sees itself able to survive politically. See Paul Craig Robert's comments on "something is in the works," also. If this happens, I fear we will be an outright military/presidential dictatorship and at war with Iran in the near future.

RR

Kihei, Hawaii, USA

25 July 2007

On "Iraq war opponent Cindy Sheehan arrested at Democratic Congressman's office"

I just read your article about Cindy Sheehan. I have been following and supporting Cindy for a couple of years, both as an academic (I'm writing about her) and an activist. Your essay is, in my estimation, right on target. Great analysis, thorough understanding of the various forces at work. I just ended her cross-country trip with her and a band of supporters, who traveled from Crawford, Texas, to New York City. She is calling out Conyers, Pelosi, and any others, Dems and Republicans, for their failure to end the war and move on impeaching Bush and Cheney. Her vision and tenacity have been impressive. Thanks for your excellent essay about her.

LP

28 July 2007

On "Charges dropped against New Orleans doctor in Katrina hospital deaths"

It is disgraceful that this doctor and the staff serving with her have been subjected to accusations of murder when the officials—federal, local, and Army Corps of Engineers—have been given a pass for their direct parts in exacerbating the tragedy of Katrina.

Here we have people who stayed and worked through inconceivable hardship to do right by people who were in fragile condition, being cast as villains. Disgusting. The grand jury did the right thing.

CMS

Portland, Oregon, USA

26 July 2007



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