

Letters on The Dark Knight

31 July 2008

The following letters were sent to the World Socialist Web Site in response to the article, “The Dark Knight: Striving to be impressive, but essentially empty” and a subsequent letter sent to the WSWWS published in “Letters from our readers”

David,

Last week, I had a few extra dollars, and decided to go to the cinema for the first time in ages. (I would take issue that it is relatively inexpensive, I spent 40 dollars on two tickets, two sodas and two candy bars.) Upon perusing the listings, I let my son choose which film we would see, and he chose the *Dark Knight* because his friends had told him that it was great.

As a general rule, I have found that when the babbling heads in the media tell me something—anything—and they proceed to do so in a relentless manner, as they did in the build up to *Dark Knight* (or the build up to the Iraq War, for that matter) I can generally rest assured that the opposite is more likely the case. I was not to be disappointed.

I made the following criticisms after the film to my son and a few friends, and with a few exceptions, those criticisms fell on deaf ears. I was even labeled a “fun sucker,” though, I responded that the film was merely supposed to present the illusion of fun; in reality it did nothing of the sort. The issues and themes with which the film deals are very serious for everyone who works for a living, and the film deals with those issues in a thoroughly reactionary manner.

The Dark Knight is a huge pile of corporate crap with little if any redeeming qualities. But were that all, I would not feel obliged to write. The film also represents part of the continuing onslaught by reactionary forces to legitimize its fraudulent “war on terror” and all of the attendant dictatorial policies associated with it.

The whole ticking time bomb justification for torture is laid out in this insipid piece of filth, and not just once but a few times. Secrecy by the state, the assumption of

dictatorial powers, not just the gutting of civil liberties but the giving up of civil liberties by the people themselves (why we should give up our hard won rights willingly), eavesdropping and spying on the population, and lest we forget, the ever-present glorification of wealth: all of this—except the glorification of wealth—is portrayed as a necessary small evil which is justified in order to combat the greater evil of the terrorist threat.

This film is part and parcel of the entire offensive being waged by the ruling classes to confuse the population in order to continue to carry out their draconian attacks on democratic rights. And, as the WSWWS has pointed out on numerous occasions, these polices are directed not against some shadowy terrorist threat, but in order to more easily deal with the working class in the struggles that will be brought on by continuing decomposition of this rotting economic and political system.

Even if we were able to forget about politics for a second and put aside the fascistic overtones of the film, what are we left with here? A few of the actors perform well, but what else? The main character, Christian Bale, is horrible. My 14-year-old son could do a better job with a cold reading of the script. Bale is essentially playing two roles in the manner of a constipated drill sergeant.

The much touted action scenes, which are supposedly where they spent the tens or hundreds of millions of dollars in the production costs, are unoriginal and quite frankly, lame. The hand gliding through the Hong Kong skyline was done before, I think by Woo in one of the MI films, as well a few of the 90s Wire Fu films from Hong Kong. The martial arts scenes were ludicrous, reminiscent not of a big budget Hollywood film, but more akin to one of the recent Steven Seagal films, where everything is filmed with a super close-up, in the dark, or at odd angles so all one sees is a blur. In the few scenes where they actually did some choreography, we are treated to something that could

be better performed by a group of white-belt karate students who learn all their moves from still pictures. What's left, but a few big explosions and the gratuitous chase scenes. Again, things we have all seen perhaps 1,000 times too many.

The point of all of this sound and fury does signify something: that the assault against our democratic rights will not be abated by the ruling classes. The Hollywood studios, who in the recent period have managed to whip both writers and directors into line, and are in the process of getting the uppity actors comfortably back in their chains, are an integral part of that self same ruling class. This parasitic oligarchy whose greed is insatiable will not be stopped until they are dragged kicking and screaming from their positions of power and thrown into the dock. Until that time, the drivel that they pour forth will become ever more revolting until even they will begin to choke.

HR

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Dear WSWS,

If I have understood correctly, TE is denying David Walsh the right not to agree with those spectators and critics who love *The Dark Knight*. Perhaps Walsh should consider himself lucky not to have received some 300 emails of vile abuse like the film critic of the *Wall Street Journal*.

The implications of TE's email will not have escaped the notice of any reader of the WSWS. It is a call for self-censorship (until other forms of censorship can be mustered), for the culturally correct, the submission to popular opinion irrespective of the nature of this opinion and of the issue at stake. It is a denial of dissent, of the right to stand up and be counted, whatever one's opinions may be. It is akin to the response of the right-wing ideologues of Fox News to alternative ways of thought.

Personally, I have *never* been in complete agreement with any film review I have read on the WSWS site, my reaction ranging from mild disappointment to intense irritation. And as a professional film scholar, I understand the frustration of TE when all the plot details are revealed before one has seen a particular movie. In which case, why complain about this *now*, when it has always been the approach adopted by all those who review movies for the WSWS? Is it because *The Dark Knight*, like that other recent mega-hit

Hancock, is a justification of vigilante methods when justice has apparently failed? Has Bush's "war on terror" been completely assimilated by moviegoers to the point of being heralded as the only solution?

It will be a sad day for film and culture when someone like David Walsh cannot write against the grain. And it will be a far sadder day when people like TE have taken his place.

Yours,

RH

Paris, France

Dear David,

WELL! You certainly got up someone's nose! My favorite part of your review was actually your list of the current top 10 films in America at the moment. What a commentary on the cinema in our time! Pretty soon Oscars will be given only to cartoon characters—whether drawn or the human equivalent. It is a shame that this is Heath Ledger's final performance before his death. I thought he was becoming quite an interesting actor.

CZ



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