

Letters from our readers

11 July 2009

On “Pentagon chief during Vietnam War escalation dead at 93”

Thank you, Patrick Martin, for this right-on obituary of Robert McNamara. I am among that cohort who came of age during the Vietnam War. The protests against the war were the beginning of my political education. I attended the demonstrations and worked with a group who smuggled draftees into Canada. McNamara was as hated as Johnson.

Many young men in my high school graduating class (1966) were dead in Vietnam within a year of graduation. These were the youths who did not attend university and thus did not obtain an educational deferment. Even then I was aware that it was a class-based system—those who could afford college got a break, while those who could not, did not.

The lack of a true political perspective, though, allowed the powerful feelings of unity against the war to disperse during the 1970s. We were protesting the war without protesting the economic system that made war inevitable. Some of us knew that the system was rotten, but I have to admit that I was one of those who “dropped out” and sought an alternative universe. Unfortunately, a truly alternative universe cannot exist as long as a corrupt and decaying world society survives, and this we learned in spades during the 1980s.

Lessons learned the hard way are the ones that stick, however. Upon my return to political activism I have learned much about the mistakes of the protest past. We must not make the same mistakes again. That’s why I support the SEP.

Thanks again for the article.

Carolyn

San Francisco, USA

On “Karl Malden : a serious actor”

Again, as with the Michael Jackson obituary, this is a very judicious and well-balanced review that will never be found in mainstream journalism. I’d like to add something about Malden’s only film as director, *Time Limit* (1957). His completion of Delmer Dave’s *The Hanging Tree* belongs to that category of film in which the actors take over when the director falls ill or dies, and therefore does not really qualify as his film.

Why is this the only film he directed? It is based on a courtroom drama that ran on Broadway and is a complex argument for understanding the privations suffered by Korean POWs, especially those who were demonized by society if they

succumbed to brainwashing or temporarily went over to the enemy. Malden does not appear in this film, but he directs strong performances from his friend Richard Widmark and Richard Basehart as the accused that are reminiscent of the best traditions of theatrical performances rather than the uncomplicated movie acting that they were often forced to deliver. This is a film dealing with the complexities of imprisonment and the fact that certain aspects of life contain much more than a simple moralistic “good vs. evil” dichotomy. *Time Limit* is an indirect plea to understand issues that go beyond the simple ideology of the Cold War, and the film deserves more attention. Perhaps this is what attracted Malden to directing this one film in his career?

As for Malden’s support of Kazan’s Oscar, the late Kim Hunter also took the same attitude. Far more blameworthy are the roles of more influential figures such as Martin Scorsese and Robert DeNiro, who openly championed this informer at the time. I’ve just heard that Scorsese is going to direct a documentary on Kazan. On the basis of *The Aviator* and *The Departed*, one can only dread the result.

Tony W

3 July 2009

A thoughtful and thought-provoking article, David. Particularly suggestive is your remark about “authority figures” in the Cold War era.

In this context, your analysis of *One-eyed Jacks* is most pertinent. If you are right to state that, by 1961, the radical Brando had understood the full extent of the perfidy of Elia Kazan, then we can perhaps also interpret the film, via the character played by Malden, as a settling of scores on Brando’s part with the father-figure, Kazan himself.

It is one of those delightful ironies of History that it was not until nearly 40 years later, in 1999, that Malden revealed his true “liberal” face by supporting the Academy’s disreputable decision to give Kazan a “Lifetime Achievement” Oscar, an Oscar never granted to more deserving figures. However, as we know only too well, liberals always consider art as “above politics”, except when it comes to betraying or abandoning to their collective fate—in the name of an authoritarian consensus—militants, trade unionists, the working class and all those who have a more noble and historical vision of artistic endeavor.

Reynold H

Paris, France

4 July 2009

On “Australia: West Gate Bridge construction workers charged with criminal offences”

This is yet another outrageous attack on the working class by the government and its state apparatus. I experienced similar attacks by the then Thatcher administration during the British miners strike of ‘84-85. As the world political and economic crisis deepens, so will the attacks on the world’s working class. The minor offences that those men have supposed to have committed are used as an excuse to justify these charges waged against them. Whilst policemen can commit any crime they like, which is seen as in the line of duty—from murder (for example Jean Charles de Menezes in Britain), to the beatings of the public in the London street demonstrations. During the ‘84-85 miners strike, horses and baton-charging policemen waded in, attacking defenseless hard working people. These are just a few of thousands of attacks upon working people who fight for their lives and in the interest of their families, not the interest of “Duty.” It is clear that the wealth the working class create is used back against them by the ruling elite, and to smash any resistance workers make against any employer. This can only be achieved, as consistently stated by the SEP and the Fourth International, by the cowardly role being played by trade union leaders in isolating these disputes. It is clear that the entire working class are criminals in the eyes of the ruling elite, and that elite will administer any criminal action it can get away with.

Malcolm B

UK

4 July 2009

On “Australia: Jury acquits truck driver over rail crossing disaster”

Even in the Indian Railways, there are thousands of unmanned level crossings, without gates or warning systems. The vehicle drivers and pedestrians used to road traffic are expected to watch out for speeding trains, irrespective of the lighting condition, and take care of their own safety. The government and the Railway Board with support from their officials do not treat manned or automatic gates as priority, arguing that it is the road users’ responsibility, quoting the Motor Vehicles Act in their support. They blame the victims for being rash and irresponsible. I tried to debate in some railway discussions on the web, but that was the response I got.

Prahakar

India

7 July 2009

On “Australian governments downplay mounting swine flu cases”

Significantly, the journalist here falls into the same trap that he criticizes in the mainstream media and their initial over-reaction to “swine flu”: overstatement. The Kiwirrkurra (not

Kirrikurra) was not the first Australian fatal casualty of swine flu: he actually died of other causes, and happened to pick up the flu along the way. However, his death did serve to remind us of “the vulnerability of many indigenous people to the disease because of their shocking poverty, chronic ill-health and lack of access to basic health and social services.”

Bob D

Australia

6 July 2009

On “Democrat Al Franken wins Minnesota Senate seat”

At least now the Democrats’ excuses will be funnier...

Lary M

5 July 2009

On “A desperate attempt at reassurance”

Very interesting article. The forms of claims to wealth are capable of infinite expansion. The wealth itself is not. Finance capital meets the ideological needs of capitalism as well.

The finance capitalist proper creates wealth with a signature. Surely this is the signature of those that subscribe to the theory of the leisured class. Still there is one connection that has to be made. The operations of the capitalist system call the working class onto the stage of world history. It’s an alarm call. Humans may tolerate a quasi-infinite cycle of boom, bust and social collapse; the earth will not. The techniques of production that capitalists employ are increasingly capable of extinguishing the human race—without the use of nuclear, biological, genetic or nano weapons. The longer the overthrow of the capitalist order is delayed, the less likely we are to survive it.

Chris

Galway, Ireland

4 July 2009



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