

Letters from our readers

28 May 2011

On "One year since the BP oil spill: Obama 'claims czar' provides no relief for the people of the Gulf"

Thank you for this series of articles, which I read with more than usual interest.

The state of Ohio has brought a consolidated securities class action lawsuit against BP on behalf of several Ohio public pension funds, which directly affects my co-workers and myself and thousands of other state employees who are hoping to retire with a decent pension. The 182-page complaint was filed with the US District Court, Southern District of Texas on February 14.

As stated in the complaint: "In the wake of the BP Deepwater Horizon spill, in addition to the tragic loss of life and environmental damage, pension systems providing retirement benefits for current and future retirees who invested in BP in good faith were adversely affected when stock prices plummeted." That's us.

According to a press release from the Ohio attorney general's office: The complaint alleges that BP "issued materially false and misleading statements regarding the company's safety protocols and record, as well as its ability to respond to a major oil spill. As a result, BP's securities traded at artificially inflated prices." It claims that after the Deepwater explosion, BP stock dropped 48 percent, "wiping out \$90 billion in equity." Ohio and New York pension funds lost over \$200 million from their transactions in BP common stock. New York has joined Ohio as a lead plaintiff in the case.

The press release quotes a November 9, 2010 interview which Tony Hayward (former CEO of BP) gave to the BBC: Hayward "confirmed that BP had failed to draw up sufficient emergency response plans, admitting that 'we were making it up day to day.'"

This is not the first time the state of Ohio has invested employee pension funds in a corporate monstrosity with disastrous results. They also invested in Enron and AIG. That is why our pension funds are in trouble. Why is life a vicious circle of bad investments, corporate swindling, lying and deception, and lawsuits? We employees have nothing to say

about where are funds are invested, and we are forced to contribute to these plans, through payroll deductions, and we are tied to the stock market whether we like it or not. I agree with what the *World Socialist Web Site* published on March 18 in an article by Nick Beams: "The lives and livelihoods of the world's people are subject to the blind and destructive operations of the capitalist market and private profit system."

Lesley J
Ohio, USA
23 May 2011

On "US Defense Secretary Gates urges post-2011 occupation of Iraq"

The American military couldn't secure the country with 200,000 troops. Now they expect to maintain a base there in perpetuity with less than 50,000 troops. This must make a real military disaster for the US the most probable outcome. Surely even the most reactionary American politician can see that to have a permanent base in Iraq you must first construct a permanent political base there. But the government of the US has done the opposite. Its policies in Iraq have created a huge opposition to the entire US military. Like the Israeli army in Lebanon they have overstayed their "welcome." If they try to remain they will end up being driven out. As the Israeli army was from Lebanon.

Chris
Ireland
26 May 2011

On "From Shakespeare to comic books: Kenneth Branagh directs Thor"

Once again, the cultural section of the *World Socialist Web Site* disappoints with hyperbole and condescension. The headline of the article itself speaks volumes. One can't help but wonder if the review wasn't half written before viewing the film.

"We have noted before what a generally empty-headed trend this is."

For a web site that continually makes reference to "social context," especially in regard to the arts, this statement is

particularly noteworthy. The problem, it would seem to the casual observer, is not that the cultural tone of Hollywood—and indeed, American society at large—has been lowered, an inevitable result of the decay of American capitalism. It is that comic book films are an “empty-headed trend.” The use of the word “trend” seems to ignore the fact that Hollywood has been making comic book film adaptations with some regularity since the 1930s.

Perhaps the biggest problem with the review is the writer’s insistence on using easily discredited hyperbole to make his point. To wit: “one must say there has hardly been a film project based on a comic book yet that has resulted in a meaningful work”.

Come now. While I suspect that Mr. Lee will have little good to say about such critically acclaimed films as *The Dark Knight* and *A History of Violence*, and doubtless considers the tightly scripted Amicus classics *Tales From the Crypt* and *The Vault of Horror* beneath him, perhaps he might be able to make at least a backhanded compliment to films more firmly rooted in reality like *Ghost World*, *Persepolis* or *American Splendor*.

The point is not to mount a defense of *Thor*, which by all outward appearances is another piece of typical Hollywood “blockbuster” trash. The point is that such a criticism can be made without impugning an entire art form. One cannot help but be reminded of the cultural elitists of yore who thought that the work of Thelonious Monk wasn’t music, or the paintings of Picasso weren’t art. Unless the *World Socialist Web Site* is prepared to make a systematic Marxist assessment of comic books in general, it stands on shaky ground when dismissing the entire idiom out of hand.

Nicholas P
26 May 2011
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I have always been a fan of the WSWS site and the insights it has provided over the past years.

But come on already, “Why so serious?”... *Thor* was a rocking, fun movie. That is all it is meant to be along with the rest of the super-hero films.

There is no meaning in them except that some times one person can make a difference and to never give up hope...

Steve N
New York, USA
26 May 2011

On “*Director Lars von Trier at Cannes: Playing with social dynamite*”

I really enjoyed your appreciation of Lars von Trier and his Nazi fascination as an expression of revulsion at human beings as beasts and of a perhaps unconscious desire to create the super-beast of Nietzsche, Leni Riefenstahl and that “artist” Albert Speer’s imagination. It struck me how close the career of Von Trier follows that of the Hungarian director, Bela Tarr. It is, by the way, not in France (that’s still to come) but in Hungary that fascism has made its greatest gains and where the super-beasts, the ubermensch, are back on the street in their uniform.

Until his latest Nietzschean movie, Bela Tarr had exploited his gift for striking visual images, like Von Trier and Tarkovky in Russia, to express the strongest revulsion to human beings. To cite two examples, Tarr’s *Damnation* takes place in a rain-drenched industrial neighborhood where people slush about in the mud while betraying each other. In one scene, the main character is spying on a married woman he is in love with in the rain. An older woman approaches an inexplicably recites from the delirious Apocalypse of John of Patmos that have led so many astray, even recently. That leads him to get down on all fours and howl for an extended period among a pack of stray dogs, a scene slowed to a painful crawl, Tarr’s trademark. “He couldn’t live among men so he decided to live among dogs,” the director cheerfully explained some years ago at the Toronto Film Festival.

And who could forget that seven hours of *Satantango* on a collective farm where everyone betrays everyone else, with the first 15 minutes or so focused on a group of cows in a field, switch to human beings doing the same. This leads to a painful half an hour during which a child, later to freeze to death, strangles a cat slowly while her mother has sexual congress with a man who drops by. The eating scenes alone will put you off food forever, but as in *Damnation* there is the interminable “death dance” worth catching on YouTube.

You are quite right, all this fascist ethos come from the disintegration of Stalinism including its Maoist variants as well as the New Left. Trotsky called fascism “the socialism of the barnyard”. This is its counterpart on film.

AL
Toronto, Canada
24 May 2011



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