

Letters from our readers

14 August 2012

On “Letters denounce effort to keep SEP candidates off Wisconsin ballot”

When is an election not an election? How about when you have only two choices on the ballot and they are both owned by the 1 percent. The US sends people all over the world to make sure that they hold honest elections. I think it is time for the rest of the world to send people to the US to make sure that we have honest elections. This would be a long-term deal because if they wait until the election, the 1 percent have already made their choices for us.

RD
Oklahoma, USA
13 August 2012

On “Washington’s bipartisan class-war policy: No jobs, no benefits”

Kind of symbolic of all the cutbacks is that the US Census Bureau has put a note up that 2012 may be the last year that a Statistical Abstract of the United States is published. These have been published annually since the late 1800s, but now they are advocating as a cost-reduction measure that this 2012 edition should be the last one. The Statistical Abstract had some uses for looking up data on the USA. I guess that as things go under there may be some more reluctance to publish real statistics.

Patrick M
13 August 2012

On “Workfare schemes given legal sanction in UK”

I am glad that Julie took the opportunity to hit out at the appalling *Spiked* web site. Deliberately contrarian would be a fair description of their contributors as they take up issues of the day with a view to being as provocative as possible. At their worst they resemble

left libertarian versions of “shock jocks”. I recall that they have carried some quite unpleasant attacks on Julian Assange.

They originated as a Revolutionary Opposition tendency in the UK’s Socialist Workers Party and split to become the Revolutionary Communist Group, then split again to become Revolutionary Communist Tendency then Party then Living Marxism. Along the way they have found a niche at the edge of mainstream media, and forgot most of the principled positions they once held.

Apart from their abject failure to support any democratic stance in the Assange case, they are quite happy to criticise the Levenson enquiry, not from the left as the whitewash it is but as a threat to press freedom.

Mike M
Sheffield
11 August 2012

On “Two significant works: Fritz Lang’s House by the River (1950) and Carol Reed’s The Third Man (1949)”

Dear Kevin,

I wanted to thank you for your artistic and thoughtful review of these two, older films. *The Third Man* is one of my favorite films of all time (I would say Kubrick’s *Spartacus* is the other), and though I’ve watched it countless times now, I learned quite a bit from your review. I’ve never seen *House by the River*, but I now intend to.

These kinds of reviews are the reason I go to the WSWs before any other site for commentary on film!

Best regards,
Daniel

11 August 2012

On "Farewell, My Queen: The last days of the ancien régime"

You are quite right to wonder what was going on in the head of a director who would portray royal hanky-panky at the onset of the French Revolution, leaving out of the film the people who made revolution and their reasons for doing so. Special mention is made of "the affair" between Gabrielle de Polignac and the unfortunate Marie Antoinette, which dominates the movie to the exclusion of history. This is especially unfortunate when the film comes out at a time when the quickly approaching revolution resembles events preceding the French Revolution, far more so than the era of the Russian Revolution, I think.

In any event, I can answer your puzzle and use the occasion to plug one of my favorite historians, Stanley Loomis, on whose last great work, *The Fatal Friendship* (1972), the movie was undoubtedly based. In fact, Loomis is very much a bourgeois historian concerned exclusively with the beau monde at its highest levels, but this is precisely what is fascinating. For it is also a time when the financial aristocracy, as evil and merciless as those of today, infected with their culture circles around Louis XVI, whose cousin, the Duc D'Orleans gathered the Donald Trumps of his day and schemed against the queen and his brother in an attempt to gain the throne.

Marie Antoinette withdrew by this point to a very small and very opportunistic circle at Versailles, where the "affair"—which takes up very few pages and is very delicately and intelligently handled—takes place. By the way, the "fatal" attraction of the title in Loomis' work is not about Gabrielle de Polignac but a much more important figure, Count Fersen, who led the armies against the revolution raised by the "other" Duc D'Orleans.

See, King Louis' cousin who absented himself from Versailles, organized the citizen's march which took the king and queen prisoner, and joined the Revolution as Phillipe Equality, would you believe, died at the

onset of the revolution, had a brother who took over the title, fled the country and turned against the revolution leading to the very mysterious battle of Valmy, which, it seems, was never really fought. History is interesting. He is the daddy of Louis Phillipe, "the bourgeois king", of another fascinating period leading to the 1848 revolutions.

As a teacher, it causes me great distress that my students are so ignorant of history. Would that this film had followed the example of a very great movie, *All This and Heaven Too* with Barbara O'Neil, based on another Loomis work about a murder in the haute monde of 1847 on the eve of the revolution, and stuck to history, even if the masses are excluded.

AL

Toronto, Canada

11 August 2012



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