

Film, history and socialism

Part One

By David Walsh
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This is the first part of a talk given by David Walsh, arts editor of the World Socialist Web Site, to a meeting organized by graduate film students January 17 at York University in Toronto, Ontario. The second and concluding part was posted Tuesday, January 23. Also see “Questions and answers at David Walsh’s talk at York University in Toronto.”

My purpose this evening is to address certain problems in cinema from the point of view of Marxism, that is to say, an outlook that considers art as an element of human social development. The contradictions and difficulties in filmmaking are necessarily bound up, in such a view, with the broad social and historical process.

Film is little more than a century old. It is an art form whose entire history is contained, for all intents and purposes, in the twentieth century, a century of convulsive and often tragic events, of global civil war, of gigantic and as yet unresolved social struggles.

If art in general is “the most complex...the most sensitive and at the same time the least protected” part of culture, as Trotsky suggested, then how could it have avoided receiving some very serious, even devastating blows in the course of the past hundred years?

And when one considers cinema in particular, which from the technological point of view is associated with the growth of modern industry, which mobilizes vast physical and human resources for its accomplishment, which created and depends upon a mass audience and which has been regarded as the most powerful medium of communication by regimes of every political stripe—I think one is safe in saying that the vicissitudes of cinema are inseparable from the political and social vicissitudes of the twentieth century. On that basis, I would argue that to have a theory of film history in its most general outlines, first of all, one must have a theory of the twentieth century.

We will return to that. In fact, it’s a central theme of this talk.

The state of art in general and the state of the cinema in particular are of great concern to us. The socialist movement has great and noble goals: the elimination of exploitation and poverty, the establishment of genuine democracy and social equality, the creation of a classless culture and society, truly human for the first time.

How are such goals realized? In the first place, out of the objective contradictions of capitalism. We are not voluntarists, we base ourselves firmly on the logic of world economic development. The pre-conditions for a new society exist within the old, in this globalized, complex, highly developed system of production, which today is colliding so explosively against the boundaries of the nation-state system and the private ownership of humanity’s vast industrial and technical resources. This is the source of the ever more tense and volatile international political situation, in which the American ruling elite has undertaken the mad and doomed project of bringing the entire world under its sway. As I say, for a Marxist, these objective facts and processes are decisive.

Nor, however, are we fatalists. A social revolution in the modern era depends upon the conscious democratic choice and activity of the

overwhelming majority. No profound social transformation will occur accidentally or spontaneously.

A higher cultural and moral level of the population, a greater degree of self-awareness, solidarity, self-sacrifice—all of this is vital to the future progressive development of human society. We understand that the man and woman of the future will be created by transformed material conditions, we are not utopians, but the willingness to undertake such a transformation itself requires an expansion of consciousness.

We are very much concerned with the cultural development of the working population, that overwhelming proportion of humanity that earns a wage, including wide layers of what used to be considered the middle classes. A progressive social change on the order called for by the contradictions of contemporary society demands that a far greater proportion of the population be able to think clearly and independently about a variety of issues, to reject the lies and manipulations and pressure of the media and manufactured “public opinion,” to exercise political and moral judgment in difficult circumstances—all of which involves a deepening of the understanding of the human condition in its manifold dimensions.

One of art’s roles is to hold a mirror up so that the population can see itself without illusions, particularly so that it can see its weaknesses, its backwardness, even its crimes and inhumanity. What is a theme common to all significant literary and cinema works in the modern era? That indifference to human suffering is one of the greatest failings. A culture worth its name, first of all, strives to create a climate in which such indifference is considered odious and ignoble, reserved for the people at the top of society, government leaders and cabinet ministers, corporate directors, bankers, generals and police officials.

Art ought to tell even the most painful truths about people, about their social and personal relationships. The Russian revolutionary thinkers and writers, before 1917, often referred to Russia’s awful poverty, “our backwardness,” they would say. In North America, we have our own vexing problems to expose and overcome.

Culture is vital to the revolutionary process. The transformation of society is not the result simply of a political program or slogan, much less clever tactics; it comes about as the result of a massive cultural and moral awakening as well, which has its objective roots in the irreconcilable internal conflicts of the old society.

It is difficult to conceive of the October Revolution of 1917 without taking into account the role of Russian literature and democratic sentiment in the nineteenth century. The more advanced layers of the society were saturated with humane conceptions.

Consider Tolstoy. Not a socialist revolutionary, a pacifist, a believer that all would be right if society lived according to the principles of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. But an enemy of cruelty and oppression. In his late, powerful novel *Resurrection*, his protagonist has bitter experiences with the judicial system. Considering the various prisoners he has come across, Tolstoy writes, he “clearly saw that all these people

were arrested, locked up, exiled, not really because they transgressed against justice or behaved unlawfully, but only because they were an obstacle hindering the officials and the rich from enjoying the property they had taken away from the people.... This explanation seemed very simple and clear...but its very simplicity and clearness made him hesitate to accept it. Was it possible that so complicated a phenomenon could have so simple and terrible an explanation? Was it possible that all these words about justice, law, religion, and God, and so on, were mere words, hiding the coarsest cupidity and cruelty?"

Do we have at present a culture, including a film culture, that champions such sentiments? Everyone here knows the answer to that. Our film and popular culture generally tends, on the contrary, to revel in violence, to boast of its callousness and indifference to others. To paint human beings in the blackest colors, and to wallow in the process, is considered the "radical" viewpoint. This is getting to the "dark heart of things." Brutality and four-letter words represent the unadorned truth. The overall message is: this is what people are like, we're not going to kid ourselves any more. The violence in Tarantino, Scorsese, Gibson has reached the level of the pathological. Something is terribly wrong with this social layer.

Our attitude toward contemporary film work is very critical. We write about this a great deal on the *World Socialist Web Site*, I don't intend to go into detail here. Much of today's filmmaking is very poor—bombastic, trivial or narcissistic, sometimes all three at once. For the most part, it neither enlightens, moves nor delights. And not only commercial filmmaking. American (and Canadian) "independent" cinema is very weak, by and large, amorphous, self-indulgent. European art cinema is in the doldrums. There are honest and well-meaning individuals in Europe whose work I think is overvalued and undercriticized at present, precisely because they work in such a vacuum. Italian and Japanese cinema, two of the pillars of postwar culture, are in very sad shape. There are indications of a global change, but they remain fitful.

The case could be made that the decade of the 1990s as a whole was the weakest in cinema history, taking the 1910s as the first decade in which feature production took hold. In the US, that was the era of the first film stars, Hollywood's replacement of the East Coast as the center of the film industry, D.W. Griffith's remarkable works, Chaplin's first efforts, Mack Sennett's *Keystone Cops* and the establishment of studios. One of the first epics, Italy's *Cabiria*, a three-hour film, was made in 1914.

In the 1920s, of course, the silent film reached its high point, in American, Soviet, German and other films—we think of Eisenstein, Chaplin, Murnau, Lang, Buster Keaton, Dreyer, Erich von Stroheim and countless others. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nanook of the North*, *Nosferatu*, *Greed*, *Battleship Potemkin*, *Napoleon*, *Metropolis*, *The General*, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, *The Man With a Movie Camera* are a few of the notable works.

The 1930s brought the full-scale arrival of the sound film, the flowering of classic Hollywood cinema, the arrival of the German and Jewish refugees en masse in the US, the strong work of the French poetic realists, including Jean Vigo. A remarkable cast of characters inhabited Hollywood from the Marx Brothers, to James Cagney, Greta Garbo and Jean Harlow. *M*, *Scarface* and *Dracula* were released in the same year. Frank Capra's populist efforts arrived, Alfred Hitchcock became an internationally known name. Chaplin's *Modern Times*, Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* came out.

The next decade we identify with *Citizen Kane*, Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* and the best of the wartime films; *The Maltese Falcon* and, later, *film noir*, as in *Double Indemnity*, Ulmer's *Detour*, Tourneur's *Out of the Past*; the first Technicolor films. In Italy, Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* and then the full blast of neo-realism, Roberto Rossellini's *Open City*, Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* and many others. *The Best Years of Our Lives* and *They Were Expendable* indicated a critical attitude toward

the official patriotic versions of things. Also from John Ford, his great Westerns.

In the 1950s, despite McCarthyism, Hollywood is not exhausted—Hawks, Ford and Hitchcock had some of their best films still in them; also *Sunset Boulevard*, Brando in *On the Waterfront* and "adult Westerns" such as *Shane* and *High Noon*. Japanese cinema makes its mark, with a number of giants: Kurosawa's *Rashomon* is released in 1950. In India, the films of Satyajit Ray; in Sweden, Ingmar Bergman; in France, the birth of the New Wave. Toward the end of the 1950s, a series of darker American films, Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1957) and *Imitation of Life* (1959), Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958), Vincente Minnelli's *Some Came Running* (1959) and Otto Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958).

The 1960s brings Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* and Antonioni's *L'Avventura*. The best films of Godard and Pasolini. Kurosawa and Bergman continue to be prominent. There is certainly a definite decline in Hollywood. John Cassavetes' first films. Sergio Leone's spaghetti Westerns, *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Easy Rider*, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. The end of the restrictive codes in Hollywood. The British neo-realist films; Joseph Losey and Dirk Bogarde combine for some interesting efforts; Lindsay Anderson's *If ...* Also, the Brazilian new cinema and Luis Buñuel's sophisticated surrealist efforts.

In the 1970s, in the US: Coppola's *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*; *Chinatown* and *Five Easy Pieces*, a series of remarkable films by Robert Altman, *The Deer Hunter*, Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*, Scorsese's *Mean Streets*. The Australian New Wave emerges. Above all, in the 1970s, the new German cinema, including Herzog, Wenders, Schlöndorff—and within that, above all, Fassbinder's films from 1971 to 1975, from *Beware of a Holy Whore* to *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*.

The disaster surrounding *Heaven's Gate* in 1980-1981 helped sound the death-knell for the American independent cinema of the time. Kubrick makes interesting films in the 1980s, but this is a bleak period overall for US filmmaking. In France, there is Tavernier, Pialat and Rohmer; Godard is barely alive artistically, and Fassbinder lives only a part of the decade. Bresson and Tarkovsky make their last films. In Taiwan in the 1980s, there is an eruption in cinema, after decades of anti-communist dictatorial rule; in Iran as well, after the fall of the Shah. China comes on to the scene also. These last three developments prove to be virtually the only ones that extend into the 1990s.

Of course, I'm speaking very generally, and there is an obvious element of subjective opinion in this, but I think a case could be made that the years 1995-2005 were the weakest in cinema history.

Let me make a few points about this. First, there is not a hint of nostalgia in this. Both the Hollywood and European art cinemas had serious limitations. I don't wish to idealize, either. Briefly, in my opinion, filmmaking's greatest days lie ahead. In any case, as long as cinema remains a business under capitalism, it will never reach its potential.

Here it is necessary, as elsewhere, to disagree with so much of film theory. This is not the fault of the individuals involved; rather, it's the result of historical traumas that knocked the confidence in an alternative to capitalism out of so much of the intelligentsia in the latter portions of the twentieth century. For example, Jean Mitry, in his interesting and monumental work, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, in the first section entitled "Preliminaries," writes: "The production of films entails such resources that no fortune would suffice were only the consideration of art to be taken into account. It is only the commercial aspect which can ensure the continuation of production and, as a consequence, any possible progress, whether it be technical or artistic...." And later, driving home the point, "To repeat: one does not make a film to make a film, one does it to *make money*."

He is not criticizing these facts—these are his starting-point. Such comments should not arouse indignation perhaps so much as a sorrowful

shake of the head. As I say, behind them lie a great many political difficulties—in particular, the emergence of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, its historic crimes, which did so much to discredit socialism in the eyes of millions, the subsequent betrayals and defeats of the working class and the resulting decline in the influence of socialism and Marxism. Mitry's common-sense language represents an example of what Trotsky called "the worship of the accomplished fact." For cinema to be only conceivable as *profit-making* cinema, at the mercy today of hedge fund managers and global speculators, would be for me a profoundly dispiriting notion.

In any event, we should have no nostalgia for any type of "golden age"! That doesn't help anyone and it would be mistaken.

Moreover, I don't suggest that the 1990s or perhaps the 1995-2005 period represented a low point to discourage anyone or to paint a universally bleak picture. Not at all. Those who simply find modern life nightmarish and unbearable will never do anything but hide under the covers. If the present is uniformly detestable, where are we to find the possibilities for a future, alternative culture? As we've argued before, the light of human genius, including human artistic genius, has not suddenly dimmed. One only has to consider the strides that have been made in so many fields, particularly scientific, medical and technical.

Over the last half-century, humanity has been thrown back, in our view, in the areas of politics and art, especially film, drama and literature, where the issue of an understanding of historical laws and social organization plays so large a part. All serious art in the modern era, in our view, contains an element of protest against the conditions of life, whether that protest is lyrical or epic. All criticism of social life gravitates toward Marxism, the current that offers the most comprehensive and unrelenting critique of the existing social order. A decline in the influence of Marxism, as the result primarily of Stalinism and the endless official barrage of anti-communism, produces a decline in critical thought and art work.

The present problems are a historical product. It is not accidental that the 1990s also witnessed, in the US at least and probably worldwide, the lowest level of social protest and strike activity in a century or more. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 provided the ruling elites with a certain breathing space, exploited to the full, within which to roll back social programs and attack living standards, launch neo-colonial wars, stultify the population with propaganda about the "end of history," the ultimate triumph of free enterprise, the miracle of the market, and so forth.

Cultural life, too, paid a price for this ignorant chatter. We were promised an era of peace and prosperity. Instead, we see unending war, which threatens to engulf the globe, international instability and a chasm of immense proportions that has opened up between the handful of super-wealthy and the rest of the earth's inhabitants. This reality is sinking into the consciousness of great numbers of people. Reaction has its limits, and the present reaction is rapidly reaching its limit. A worldwide radicalization is in the offing.

So, our present cultural and cinema malaise is a product of definite historical and social circumstances. With the end of those circumstances, a new cultural atmosphere will emerge. But we are far from suggesting that anyone should wait around with folded arms. No, it's our responsibility to do whatever we can to prepare the groundwork for a different state of artistic affairs.

I would like to discuss somewhat more concretely that historical process, in particular as it relates to American filmmaking, to Hollywood, in short. I think this is reasonable because the American film industry has had at its disposal the greatest technical and financial resources, and represented, from its earliest days, essentially an international undertaking. Without flattering anyone's national sensibilities, it is worth noting that the first legitimate film star, the first performer to be identified on screen and in film advertising was Florence Lawrence, the "Biograph

Girl," around 1910, born in Hamilton, Ontario; the first superstar, "America's Sweetheart," Mary Pickford, was born on University Avenue near Gerrard Street in downtown Toronto; and one of the first organizers of comic mayhem, Mack Sennett, was born in Quebec's Eastern Townships.

"Hollywood" is less a spot on the map than an ideological, cultural and commercial nexus. Thomas Jefferson, in the wake of the French Revolution, with its universal significance, declared that every man had two countries, "his own and France." One might say that filmgoers in every country have two film industries, for better or worse, their own and "Hollywood."

Another objection arises. Hasn't "Hollywood" been a swear word, an epithet for leftists since at least the 1930s, the epitome of manipulative, conformist kitsch, a relentless fount of middle class ideology, and so forth? Brecht wrote his famous poem, entitled "Hollywood," during his exile there: "Every day, to earn my daily bread / I go to the market where lies are bought / Hopefully / I take my place among the sellers."

Hollywood is, to say the least, a contradictory phenomenon. As Marxists, we have least of all any reason to idealize it. However, a little perspective is required. Large-scale narrative filmmaking emerged in the form of privately owned, competing enterprises. How could it have been otherwise? Filmmaking, which is itself dependent on a series of scientific and technical innovations, was born with modern industry. The stamp of capitalism, private property and bourgeois ideology is obviously there in cinema from the beginning, with all the falseness, dishonesty, sentimentality and cheap appeals that the defense of this system inevitably entails.

However, is the film industry now or has it ever been *merely* a giant black hole that sucks in and retains every ray of light? Has it been nothing but a machine for the propagation of falsehoods? I would say that that would be a very foolish, blockheaded conclusion. After all, filmmaking depends on an audience, not made up of fools. In a certain sense, to sell their product, to make a deep impression on an audience, the studios were obliged to call upon the integrity and conscientiousness and skill of a considerable number of talented human beings, in some cases probably, great artists.

Marxists argue that the evolution of art is determined by the evolution of the world. Did Hollywood cinema in its heyday tell us something about life in the US? Is there an objectively truthful element, disregarding for the moment the inevitably limited character of the representation, in *Little Caesar* or *Bringing Up Baby* or *High Sierra*? Do we learn something about human beings, about how they live together, about their psychology and behavior? Or is it mere propaganda? I think the answer is clear. The films endure because of their truthful elements, not their historically determined limitations.

Every cultural phenomenon has a dual character. It represents both an objective advance, a deepening of humanity's understanding of the external world and its own activities. A serious art work is not simply one individual's opinion or subjective "narrative"; it allows something essential about life to emerge. It has objective validity.

On the other hand, art is not created by free-floating atoms but by social creatures, the product of specific environments and historical conditions, which, in the end, are the conditions of class society. The artists themselves belong to certain social layers and inherit the prejudices and limitations of those social layers.

Hollywood, from this point of view, is an extreme example of the double character of culture. Its artistic life took shape within this hothouse atmosphere of capitalist competition and the drive for profit. To become indignant about that fact misses the point, in my opinion.

Hollywood filmmaking needs to be treated objectively. It generated extraordinary advances in story telling addressed to a mass audience, within very definite objective limitations, sometimes crippling limitations.

We would argue that, in the end, the radical implications of filmmaking, its truth-telling abilities, proved to be incompatible with the profit system. American capitalism in the 1930s, despite its terrible economic condition, still had great reserves. In that sense, the New Deal and the flowering of Hollywood cinema exist on the same historic plane.

In the postwar period, America became the dominant capitalist power, taking into itself all the contradictions of the world system, and proved unable to coexist with an honest and critical cinema. Thus, the McCarthyite witch-hunts, the blacklist, the illegalization of anti-capitalist views or serious criticism in the cinema. Criticism to the bone, criticism of private property and American global ambitions, and the criminality of the ruling elite, became impermissible. But even then, in the late 1940s and early to mid-1950s, films that obviously opposed McCarthyism appeared—*High Noon*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *Johnny Guitar*, perhaps Allan Dwan's *Silver Lode* and others. It's an intensely complex process.

Why has there been such a terrible falling off in American cinema? I've suggested some elements of the explanation, but I would like to make that more specific, if only briefly. Again, the present cinema is not simply a nightmare, nor is television or popular music. We're not beginning from zero; the events of the past century have not occurred for nothing.

I don't believe, however, that any objective comparison of films from the period 1930-1955, let's say, and the past 15 years or so would work to the advantage of the latter, in terms of texture, depth, seriousness, even social insight.

This is clearly not a technical problem. Cinema has made great strides. No doubt the freshness of the medium made a difference in those earlier years, but color film, video, digital technologies, the Internet, are relatively recent innovations. Why has the content of films, that living complex of moods and ideas, deteriorated and become so unenlightening, so uninspiring, so generally trivial?

Goethe writes that "Literature deteriorates only to the extent that people deteriorate." How do we explain the deterioration in those making American cinema?

Jean Mitry says, "It is indisputable that the photographic image is always the consequence of a certain interpretation." If this is so, and undoubtedly it is, then the question becomes: why have the interpretations weakened? What has become of those doing the interpretations? Why are they seeing the world less deeply, less richly, less evocatively?

Another approach might be: under what historical and intellectual conditions do images become more dense, more complicated, more textured, more highly charged with meaning? Is this something that can happen by accident? Does the filmmaker simply stumble on important images and truths? Does the result of his or her efforts have something to do with the general social situation?

To examine this fully in the context of Hollywood would require a lengthy investigation of what gave rise to the film industry, which is far beyond this discussion.

I will argue for this: that what was best in the American film industry emerged in large measure out of world culture and politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, culture and politics in which the socialist labor movement was a prominent element.

In an overview of the San Francisco film festival in 1996, I wrote the following: "The critical-minded culture built up from the last third of the nineteenth century...was the crucible in which were formed the artistic geniuses of the first decades of this century.

"The artists may not have agreed with the Marxists about the contradictions of capitalism, but there was a general, instinctive acknowledgment by the most insightful intellectuals in Paris, Berlin, London, Vienna, Budapest and, of course, Moscow, that the existing society was on its way out and thought had to be given to the cultural problems of the future human organization. Anyone who doubts that this has relevance to the American film industry need only consider the

following list of filmmakers—all of whom worked in Hollywood—who were born or raised in Germany, Austria or Hungary between 1885 and 1907: Erich von Stroheim, Michael Curtiz, Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch, William Dieterle, Josef von Sternberg, Douglas Sirk, Robert Siodmak, Edgar Ulmer, Max Ophuls, Billy Wilder, Otto Preminger and Fred Zinnemann." Not an insignificant group.

This is by no means simply a question of left-wing filmmakers or writers, but since that history has been so buried in the official version of Hollywood's history, it's probably best to make some reference to their existence. Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner in *Radical Hollywood* and Brian Neve in *Film and Politics in America*, among others, have documented some of this usefully.

The Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression had a shattering impact on the American population, as elsewhere, including artists and intellectuals. All the myths and claims about the free enterprise system were called into question virtually overnight. The mass suffering made "business" and "banking" and "Capitalism" itself into dirty words for millions. Under those conditions, the American Communist Party, founded in 1919 in the wake of the Russian Revolution, gained a great following, including within the film industry.

Tragically, by the mid-1930s this had become a thoroughly Stalinized outfit, run by scoundrels. The American CP, one of the most slavish in the world toward the Kremlin bureaucracy, had swung around to supporting Franklin Roosevelt and the Democratic Party, a betrayal with long-lasting consequences. The crimes of the American Stalinist leadership, including participation in the attempts to assassinate Trotsky, are legion. However, thousands of honest people joined the CP, mistakenly believing that it stood in the tradition of the Russian Revolution and fought for a socialist transformation of the US.

Its influence was widespread. Much of this history has been hushed up, in many cases by the repentant individuals themselves. How many Americans would be shocked to learn that many of their favorite film or television stars supported or belonged to a "communist" party, and that many of their favorite films were written or directed by "communists" or socialists?

For example, Buhle and Wagner write that, according to FBI reports, which probably exaggerated but did not make things up entirely, "Lucille Ball, Katharine Hepburn, Olivia de Havilland, Rita Hayworth, Humphrey Bogart, Danny Kaye, Fredric March, Bette Davis, Lloyd Bridges, John Garfield, Anne Revere, Larry Parks, some of Hollywood's highest-paid writers, and for that matter the wives of March and Gene Kelly along with Gregory Peck's fiancée [were] all in or close to the party." Buhle and Wagner later include Franchot Tone, then married to Joan Crawford, Jose Ferrer and apparently Ronald Reagan, as among those in or around the CP periphery. One could add Sterling Hayden, who turned informer later on, then regretted it, Sylvia Sidney, Shelley Winters, Lauren Bacall, and many, many others. Melvyn Douglas and Frank Sinatra were also named by an FBI informant, along with Paul Muni, born in Ukraine and a veteran of Yiddish theater in New York, whose career was wrecked by the blacklist.

Among the screenwriters, the names are too numerous to mention. They include the writers or co-writers of *Holiday*, *The Awful Truth*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *The Naked City*, *A Guy Named Joe*, *Casablanca*, *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, *High Noon*, *A Place in the Sun*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Public Enemy*, *She Done Him Wrong*, *The Philadelphia Story* and so on, along with literary figures and occasional screenwriters such as Dorothy Parker, Lillian Hellman, Dashiell Hammett, Clifford Odets.

Directors in and around the Communist Party included Abraham Polonsky, Nicholas Ray, Joseph Losey, Elia Kazan, Robert Rossen, Jules Dassin, John Berry, Martin Ritt, Edward Dmytryk. As I say, the list is extensive. One should not forget Chaplin himself, a prominent "friend of

the Soviet Union,” who traveled in left circles.

There were independent figures of the left, socialists like Romanian-born Edward G. Robinson, who was a friend of Diego Rivera, the revolutionary Mexican artist, and held a private conversation with Trotsky in Mexico in 1938; James Cagney, who was red-baited as early as 1934; directors John Huston and Orson Welles; two of the greatest cinematographers of all time, Gregg Toland and James Wong Howe, and many others. No serious treatment of the classic American cinema can avoid the fact that opposition to capitalism animated a considerable portion of those writing, directing, performing and filming some of its most interesting films.

To be continued

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