

THE GUARDIAN SUSTAINER

DECEMBER

1977

monthly
publication for
members of the
Guardian
Sustainer
program

FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR:

Sustainers made 1977 improvement possible

By JACK A. SMITH

I suppose it's slightly redundant to tell you 1977 has been a very difficult year for the Guardian. But we've evidently pulled through alright.

Despite the grave financial problem visited upon us by the ending of the Guardian's tours to China, the paper—as a paper—has improved. As we end the year, it's better written and edited than when 1977 began. News articles, in general, are briefer, and we're covering more of the news from many more datelines. We plan to continue this trend next year, making an effort in the process of deepening our analysis. I think that's where we have fallen short.

In my opinion the principal reason we've managed to survive the difficulties of 1977 without any cutbacks in the paper is that the Sustainer system has not only held together but grown even though we were forced to increase the pledge from \$60 to \$100. Only a relatively small minority of people dropped out of the Sustainer program and many more joined. No matter how well we might have done on our other survival programs—and progress, to be frank, has been only so-so—the question has always been, could we hold the line on Sustainers?

We (that is, you) held the line. Sustainers not only made the additional sacrifice of \$40 a year but many sent in supplementary contributions that were extremely helpful.

A BIG STEP FORWARD

Never before, to my knowledge, have so many people been directly involved in helping the Guardian to keep publishing. This is a good thing—a big step forward on the road to complete independence. The loss of China tours was an extreme blow because a lot of money was at stake. We knew that, of course, well before making our decision to take a critical stance toward China's position in Angola and elsewhere. But we couldn't tell for sure whether the Sustainer system would keep together or be able to absorb the pledge increase. (In the years past, we lost many supporters when events imposed upon us the necessity to shift our position—such as in 1967 when the Guardian declared its support for the cause of the Palestinian people.)

The upshot of your continued backing is that the Guardian is more self-sufficient



Guardian photo by George Cohen

Members of the New York Guardian Club, staff members, Sustainers and readers formed a contingent to march in the New York City anti-South Africa demonstration Dec. 10. The evening earlier, the New York Club sponsored its first public meeting. Frances M. Beal, general manager, and Karen Gellen, foreign editor, spoke on the question of Korea.

today than ever before. There are at least two amazing things about this: First, that a relatively small cooperative of workers completely owns and manages a serious left-wing weekly newspaper that has achieved the largest circulation of its kind in North America. Second, that such a newspaper—which has a budget nearing a half-million dollars a year (despite our very low wage structure)—has no help at all from any political organizations, advertisers or rich backers but depends instead on the voluntary contributions of its readers.

A DEVOTED READERSHIP

The Guardian has an immensely devoted readership. We had some circulation loss when we had to increase the price of subscriptions but it was less than anticipated and now circulation is on the upswing again. The price increase, which we regretted awfully, was second only to the Sustainer system in producing the revenue required to make ends meet during 1977.

I don't want to sound too optimistic. A third factor responsible for our survival in 1977 was that we entered the year with a small financial cushion—monies we had saved for several years in case of a rainy day. As we end the year it's all used up and there's no cushion for next year at all. This means we're going to have to raise more money in the next 12 months than in the previous.

We're confident this can be done. Although many of the emergency programs we devised when the financial crisis hit did not pay off, the seeds were planted and we think they will grow in 1978. In addition, I think we've learned from our mistakes and have developed some experience in these matters.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Clearly, in the year to come we must develop a more sophisticated approach to fund-raising in general. The experience we

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What goes into a Marxist film review?

By IRWIN SILBER

How should a Marxist review films?

After almost 10 years of writing film reviews (and other cultural critiques) for the Guardian, I'd like to share a few of my thoughts with Guardian Sustainers. The subject seems to be a of considerable interest to a large number of readers who apparently either "love" or "detest" my film reviews.

Basically there are two kinds of films—theirs and ours. These two categories are not to be determined on a case-by-case basis, which is the approach some people take. For instance, back in the 1960s there were those who thought that John Wayne films were "theirs" and "Easy Rider" and "The Graduate" were "ours." Among Marxists, this view has a desultory legacy in the approach that dominated left and communist thinking in the 1930s when the explicitly reactionary and racist films were considered "theirs" while films with some measure of social conscience, such as "Grapes of Wrath" or "Juarez" were "ours."

All of the above are "their" films. That is, they are ideological commodities produced by capital for sale in the "free" market. All of these products and the overwhelming bulk of commercial film fare produced in the capitalist world are owned and financed, one way or the other, by monied entrepreneurs whose intentions are inevitably defined by the compulsion for profit. Even those whose immediate consciousness may be "political" or "aesthetic" are obliged to take into account the necessity for a profit if they hope to attract financial backing and if they plan

to go on to make other films.

Nevertheless, within this framework, commercial film reflects a wide range of views as it caters to (and shapes) a great variety of popular tastes. Most of the film produced is not explicitly "political." That is, it does not deal with a political subject or appear to be commenting (from any perspective) on events or even values with an obvious political content. But in a more fundamental sense, it is all political, for every seemingly nonpolitical love story, western, crime, adventure, science-fiction, historical or frothy musical inevitably tends to reinforce and normalize prevailing mores and social values that are ultimately based on the underlying property relations of the capitalist system.

This is fairly obvious these days, in the case of the classical western film, for instance. Today it is absolutely painful for many Marxists of my generation, seeing an old western on television for instance, to realize that in our formative years we had little awareness of the racism and implicit justification for imperial genocide in the way in which these old films treated Native Americans. Interestingly enough, however, many Blacks of a similar age recall that as children they almost instinctively were rooting for the Indians against the white man. Others, of course, ruefully recall having been manipulated into identifying with the oppressor, certainly a useful device in the shaping of consciousness as it applied to their own realities.

Nor did the politics of the westerns end there. The racism invariably extended to other nonwhite and non-Anglo peoples,

particularly Blacks and Mexicans. Today's westerns tend to be a little more sympathetic to Indians than their forebears and Black cowboys have almost become a fetish. But the racism continues unabated toward Mexicans. Just check out Robert Altman's modern-day "classic" of gore, "The Wild Bunch," for a grim reminder.

The "new" western, like the old, continues to glorify individualism and if it has replaced the "happy" ending with the cynical, well this is no more than an accurate reflection of the more prevalent sense of cynicism in society at large.

FILM AS A BAROMETER

The point of all this is that at all times film makers are producing for a market, trying to judge its emotional and psychological needs, trying to peddle commodities which customers will buy for their "use" value. Commercial film, then, is a marvelous barometer telling us how the "experts" (the film producers) perceive elements of popular social and political consciousness at any given moment.

The principal task of the Marxist film critic in reviewing these films is to read this barometer correctly, to understand what the filmmakers are trying to do—not in some deliberately conspiratorial fashion or even in a fully conscious way—but in their response to perceived social awareness as mediated through the commodity marketplace.

Of particular importance, I think, is to evaluate the most popular phenomena because, read right, they provide the most interesting kind of barometer. It is also especially important to consider and properly analyze those films which arise in response to the demands of changing consciousness—the films that reflect the new Black consciousness or that speak to the war-weariness provoked by U.S. military defeat in Indochina and the cynicism provoked by Watergate and a general sense of corruption in public life.

These films frequently have a "progressive" content which tries to address a radically changing world view. But they also invariably find one way or another to direct the felt social anger or anxiety into a channel that will make its presentation on the screen acceptable to the urgencies of bourgeois rule—whether it is building illusions about the even-handedness of justice, the reform possibilities of the bourgeois state or even just promoting a cynicism that leads to passive acceptance of the social reality.

It is only within such a context, in my view, that a Marxist film critic can then begin to take up certain aesthetic questions in contemporary film.

Of course, a different approach must be taken to "our" film. I'll deal with that in the next Guardian Sustainer.

New Sustainer campaign approaching goal

Once again, Guardian readers have come through for us.

The response to our Sustainer campaign of the past few months has been most encouraging, particularly in the last several weeks. Checks and letters continue to come daily from people who have decided to join the program. We are now quite near our goal for the campaign.

The comments made by these new Sustainers run the whole range of political issues covered by the Guardian, but the most common remarks are, "Keep up the good work," and "I should have become a Sustainer sooner." Seeing the response to our appeal and reading these letters is a constant source of encouragement for the Guardian staff. For those of you who are reading this newsletter for the first time, welcome to the Sustainers and thank you for your support.

When we announced the new Sustainer drive, we set a goal of 150 new people. This figure was based on minimum economic
2—Guardian Sustainer, December 1977

needs to avoid cutbacks. Despite the achievement of comparable goals in past campaigns (thanks to you), 150 seemed like a long way off, and a slow start to the campaign made us question whether we were being realistic. But the number of responses soon picked up and has held steady, confirming our belief that among the Guardian's loyal readership there were a good number more who were willing to support the paper by becoming Sustainers.

SUSTAINERS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

These new Sustainers have made a critical difference in our fight for survival. Sustainers as a whole have kept us publishing in 1977, and we want to thank you all for your help.

A reminder: many of you are due to renew your pledges January 1. Please do so soon, and if possible, increase your pledges or make an extra new year's contribution.

Thanks again for your help in 1977. Best wishes for the holidays and new year. W.R.

Taking pictures for the people's cause

Photographer George Cohen

Imagine a Guardian with no photos. Or just a few UPI shots. But few pictures of demonstrations, of the slum conditions of Harlem, of mass picketlines.

The difference between 24 pages of gray and a visually powerful paper is often due to the skillful work of Guardian photographers who provide photos from throughout the country and the world.

Coordinating much of our photographic work is Guardian staff member George Cohen, 36, who also just happens to take some of the best leftist photographs in the country.

Although George's photos often first appear in the Guardian, their circulation doesn't stop there. They are regularly picked up by various community and left papers in this country. And often they are used in other countries—by the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea for use in its official paper, or by the Cubans for one of their films, for example.

A native of New York City, George started doing serious photographic work in 1963 as an assistant to a commercial photographer. Disturbed by the fashion

and food photography business, he left.

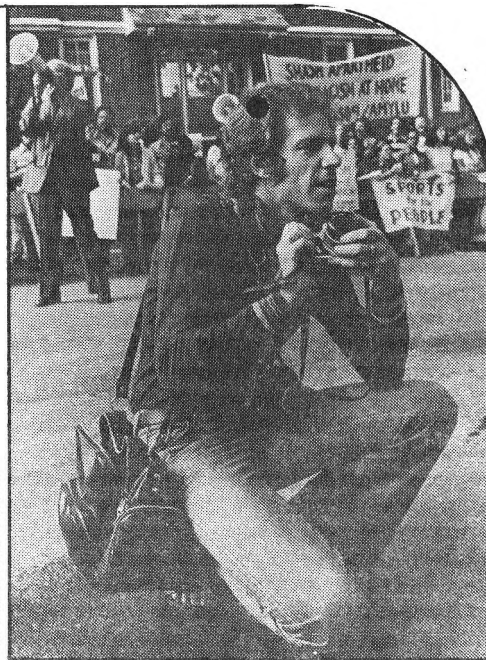
"The type of photos I wanted to take weren't marketable," said George. "The only people who wanted to use what I was interested in was the left press."

For a number of years, George did free-lance photography and part-time jobs to get by. In 1968 and 1969 he traveled to Cuba, taking a series of photographs. And in 1971, as a stringer for Liberation News Service, he went to Northern Ireland to capture the struggle there. He has been working with the Guardian regularly for the last three years and last spring joined the staff on a full-time basis.

"I had been reading the Guardian since 1964, so it was like getting together with an old friend," said George.

"As far as demonstration photos, the pictures are as good as the demonstration. If the people are militant, it shows in the photo.

"The left needs more photographers who are on the side of the people so that others can see the tangible evidence of the power of the people. Photos are a



Liberation News Service

George Cohen on the job.

fantastic organizing tool and many people don't know this. Definite political statements are being made in photographs. Together with words, you can't beat it. It's a magnificent propaganda package—photos and words together."

How we made it through 1977

(Continued from page 1)

gained this year will help. The same goes for our circulation-distribution efforts; Guardian Typesetters, the Marketplace and other endeavors.

The existence of the Guardian Clubs, one of our successes in 1977, will help. With five Clubs today and 10 expected by the end of next year, we anticipate substantial circulation gains. We've begun to experiment a little in this area recently by air-shipping bundles of papers to our Bay Area Club in California, which has undertaken to distribute the paper to new outlets throughout the vicinity. It is too early to judge the results, but we believe it will work. Assuming it does, we'll expand the experiment to a number of other cities where we have Clubs or groups of friends and where the Guardian has few or no outlets and the paper arrives later than it should.

Breaking the circulation-distribution problem—i.e., low visibility and late arrival—is one of our key tasks in the year ahead. Increased circulation is our life's blood, not only in terms of additional circulation revenue but in broadening the base of potential Sustainers and contributors. We believe the Guardian would be far more widely read if we could only get the paper in the hands of the people.

The answer to circulation increases is not just to get the paper on the stands and bookstore shelves, however. We have to produce a better paper as well. Part of this depends on our ability to improve and

strengthen our bureau network. Guardian bureaus, which are staffed by volunteers, exist in five cities. We intend to increase the number of bureaus and improve their journalistic output.

IMPROVING THE PAPER

In addition, we'd like to correct a number of the paper's shortcomings—such as the need for more analysis mentioned earlier. Although many of our articles certainly are analytical, many really aren't. They cover events but without probing deeply enough, down to the roots of the matter (even when those events are reported on well and you may not read them anywhere else). This doesn't mean every article has to double in size to accommodate more analysis. It can be done without being long-winded—or being sectarian or dogmatic for that matter. We want Marx to be in every article, but not by name. We want every article to be informed by Marxist understanding and a class approach while at the same time simplifying our delivery so that the Guardian is easier to read.

In this connection we've taken note of a number of criticisms this year that our language and formulations are not always a simple matter to wade through all the time. As part of reaching the broader masses of people we must reach (both as a political responsibility and a requirement for broader circulation), we'll be making an effort in the coming year not only to be more Marxist but to publish clearer, better articles for more

people.

This won't be easy. It means improving our writing and our politics as well as broadening the range of stories we print, not only in terms of more stories from different areas but a wider variety of articles covering topics the Guardian has just touched upon briefly.

Other areas slated for intensive efforts at improvement include our coverage of the various people's movements, national issues, the federal government, the rightist trend, cultural coverage and reportage about the developed world. Your suggestions in any of these areas would be helpful. (You should write me a letter about any thoughts you have about improving the paper in general. It would be a big help.)

We also hope to sharpen the paper in other ways this coming year. We are quite conscious of the fact that we've not spelled out a clear position on the question of the class nature of the USSR, for instance, and that our use of the term social-imperialist has not been adequately defined.

These are some of the things we hope to achieve in the next year, assuming, naturally, that we resolve the serious problem of generating the additional revenues required to get by without the cushion we've used up at a period of increasing inflation. I don't have to belabor the point that members of the Sustainer system remain utterly crucial to us in the new year. Somehow we're going to raise that additional money—but Sustainers must hold rock-firm. The only way we're going to get through this is together.

Letters from our Sustainers

This spot in The Guardian Sustainer will be reserved for your letters every month. Try to keep them as brief as possible. All letters will be printed with the author's initials but you must send in the communication with your full name.

GUARDIAN CLUBS

S.D. and W.T., Cleveland: We were pleased to read the Guardian's reply to a letter in last month's Sustainer which stated that the Guardian Clubs are not intended to become a national center for the party-building movement. We are Sustainers because we think the Guardian plays a critical role in our movement, and we welcome the development of Guardian Clubs as an organizational expression of the Guardian's political line, which will help support the paper and play a role in party-building.

However, it would be a great mistake if the Clubs were to see themselves as having the only "correct" approach to party-building. There are many Marxist-Leninists involved in a variety of kinds of work and organizational forms who will be outside the Clubs. We hope that the Clubs will adopt a broad, nonsectarian approach to these groups and individuals.

USSR

S.H., E. Charlotte, Vermont: I, too, share your concern with certain internal aspects of Soviet society, and of course, they must be discussed in the pages of the Guardian. And yet, was it not historical necessity that they became a "superpower?" Were that not so, would the Soviets have survived? And without that first socialist bastion as a safe "rear" where else would there be socialism today?

BURCHETT TOUR-1

L.T., San Diego: The additional \$25 contribution is my expression of gratitude that my husband and I were able to attend Wilfred Burchett's speech at San Diego State. I am so glad he could come here.

BURCHETT TOUR-2

T.R., Brooklyn, N.Y.: I am very glad that Wilfred Burchett was able to come to this country and conduct a national speaking tour. It is fitting after all these years of our reading his invaluable reporting from the battlefronts of people's struggle, that thousands of North Americans have turned out to honor Burchett and hear what he has to say.

However, I have to say that I was disappointed with the address that Burchett gave in New York last month. His talk

stressed anecdotes and isolated incidents. What was lacking was any in-depth political analysis of the current anti-imperialist struggles, or any real linking of these struggles with the tasks of our movement in this country. It was not the level of politics that Guardian readers associate with the newspaper.

SMEAR CAMPAIGN

S.J., New York City: How shameful were the articles in the New York Post calling Wilfred Burchett a KGB agent! It is frightening to see how easily the press can become a blatant tool of the most reactionary forces in the U.S. ruling class. It is imperative that this type of smear be recognized as a threat to the entire progressive movement. I was glad to see Burchett and the Guardian taking immediate and strong action to publicly oppose the Post's sinister scheme.

I've added an extra donation to my pledge this month as a gesture of solidarity against the rightist attacks.

SOUTH AFRICA

D.K., Los Angeles: I want to thank the Guardian for opening my eyes to the incredible oppression of the black South African masses, and to their growing resistance. Now that South Africa is in the news everywhere, the Guardian continues to be the most dependable source of news, with the best analysis around. This is also true of Zimbabwe, where the maneuvers of Smith and the neocolonialist collaborators have confused some people.

One thing your Africa coverage points up is the glaring need for much more mass activity in this country to support the people's liberation and oppose U.S. efforts to get the racists off the hook. Left organizations and individuals should put aside their differences and unite in a principled way to build such a mass movement.

'RIGHTWARD DRIFT'

J.D., Gainesville, Fla.: I severely reject the current rightward drift of the paper—your temporizing and connivance at the revisionist wind in China, your facile about-face on raising the question of socialist Cuba (at a time when Cuba is further embroiled as a pawn of the USSR, as in Ethiopia), your underestimation of the fascist development in the U.S., your hypocrisy with respect to your claim of primacy for revolutionary theory in this period—very true, but what concrete steps have you made toward providing an interchange for the theoretical contributions of the current theoretical revival of Marxism-

Don't forget to give the Guardian this year

Now is the time to take advantage of our special holiday gift subscription rate of \$15—there must be a number of friends and relatives who would like to regularly receive the Guardian. It's a great way to help us build circulation and introduce the paper to others. (We'll send a card with your name as donor.)

By the way, your complimentary copies of the 1978 Guardian Calendar have just been sent out, so you should receive them soon. The calendar makes a great gift, too, as do our sets of notecards and postcards. (Calendars are \$3.50 each, \$2 for orders of 10 or more. Notecards and postcards are each \$3/set, five or more \$2 each.)

Leninism in the U.S.? You call for theory, but act as if the left's current spate of theoretical outlets were adequate. They are not.

EXTRA CONTRIBUTION

R.L., Boston: Here is an addition to my Sustainer contribution which seems to be necessary in light of mention of this week's paper of the possibility of a cutback.

Let's assume that this will be the short-term way to avoid cutbacks, while the work the Guardian Clubs are doing to expand circulation will be the long-term basis for avoiding cutbacks and expanding.

SENIOR CITIZEN

H.R., Eureka, Calif.: I am retired and living on Social Security and two small pensions, so if I miss paying you once in a while it is because I couldn't stretch my money far enough.

Like most senior citizens most of my friends are conservatives or nonpolitical. However I think you are doing a fine job of telling people the truth. Keep up the good work.

NEEDS GUARDIAN

R.S., Portland, Oregon: I realize that I have been negligent in my Sustainer payments, but as everyone knows, money is not easy to come by these days. I was truly contemplating quitting the Sustainer program because I felt that I couldn't afford it. Well, I have reconsidered. If everyone took this attitude no one would be able to read and learn from the Guardian. If the Guardian were to go under it would be a great loss to the Marxist-Leninist movement in this country and to all radical minded people. Keep up the good work.

We are still short of volunteers, for a variety of tasks. We need proofreaders Tuesdays and Wednesdays (we'll show you what to do). Our administrative staff can use help at all times. If you're on vacation or have a free day or evening, please call Donna at 212-691-0404.

The Guardian Sustainer is published monthly for members of the Sustainer program of the Guardian independent, radical newsweekly. All correspondence should be addressed to The Guardian Sustainer, 33 West 17th St., New York, N.Y. 10011.