

THE GUARDIAN SUSTAINER

JANUARY
1978

monthly
publication for
members of the
Guardian
Sustainer
program

News coverage strengthened in 1977

The New Year—let's keep improving!

From The Guardian Staff

When 1977 began, we set ourselves the goal of "broadening and deepening" the content and coverage of the Guardian. At the end of the year, we believe that we can say that considerable progress was made toward that goal—although we've still got a long, long way to go.

Our international coverage has been characterized, of course, by its emphasis on Africa. This was a conscious decision—based on our estimate that the leading front of struggle against U.S. imperialism on a world scale had now shifted to southern Africa.

But good intentions alone are not enough to provide good coverage. It takes good reporters—and we are sure that no one will take it amiss if we say that Sara Rodrigues is rapidly becoming the Wilfred Burchett of southern Africa. Stationed in Luanda, her weekly reports have kept Guardian readers and the entire U.S. movement completely up to date on developments in Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zaire and South Africa. Sara's reports alone have made the Guardian the single best and most reliable source of information about southern Africa of any newspaper in the U.S.

Wilfred himself went back to Vietnam

during 1977, sending out an excellent series of articles from Ho Chi Minh City, from the sites of what were once the former "liberated zones" where Wilfred had been stationed with NLF troops in the early days of the war, and from the reeducation centers.

In northern Africa, Dan Connell went back to Eritrea where his dispatches from that important liberation struggle continue to provide Guardian readers with reliable firsthand coverage of that battlefield. Liberation movements and anti-imperialist struggles continue to be our principal focus as you can see through our reports on Chile, Polisario, the Philippines, the Middle East, East Timor and Puerto Rico.

THE 'DEVELOPED' WORLD

We made some improvement this year in our coverage of the "developed" world too—particularly Western Europe. Especially important has been our discussion of "Eurocommunism" and our analysis of the capitalist world economy. Weaknesses are in the lack of coverage of the struggle in Northern Ireland, England and Canada. But our most grievous shortcoming is on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We hope to make some breakthroughs on this area in 1978, but frankly, getting authoritative coverage is not an easy matter. There is plenty of the self-serving kind of reportage available on Eastern Europe—both pro and con—but we don't have any great confidence in either. Well, we're working on it and there's no point in promising more than that until we think we can deliver.

Domestically, we strengthened our working-class coverage, registered some gains in covering the women's movement, expanded our cultural pages and felt proud of some first-rate reporting such as our stories on the International Hotel, Seabrook, layoffs in steel, the Arizona farm workers and much more. The articles we carried on the growth of the right were a good beginning, but we need a lot more in this area.

IMPROVEMENTS STILL NEEDED

Our sense is that domestically we broadened more than we deepened. We must work even harder on the task of providing a nonstereotyped, nonjargon weekly Marxist analysis of the major events in the country. We were able to produce two important

supplements in 1977. In March we put out an International Women's Day supplement with a good range of articles from different countries, especially in the third world, and an important theoretical statement concerning the Guardian's views on the woman question. In June we issued our party-building supplement, which put forward our views on the party-building tasks facing the U.S. left.

1977 was also important for two events that took place outside the pages of the Guardian: the establishment of the Guardian Clubs and Wilfred Burchett's first North American speaking tour. The first five Guardian clubs have been functioning for several months now and, having accumulated some practical experience on the Burchett trip, are developing their internal life and consolidating themselves organizationally.

Burchett's tour was significant on two counts. First, it enabled tens of thousands of Guardian readers, supporters, friends and others to meet and hear a man whose own life's work is so intimately bound up with the main tide of revolutionary struggle over the past quarter of a century. And second, the attempts by the John Birch Society and organized right-wing forces to disrupt the tour fizzled completely.

GUARDIAN SUSTAINERS

Finally, 1977 was the year in which the Guardian Sustainer program took a leap forward—and just in time. You are all aware of the financial difficulties involved in producing this newspaper week in and week out and the extraordinary problem we faced after the cancellation of our trips to China. You, the Guardian Sustainers, are the people who came through as never before.

It is obvious that we need you now more than ever. The beginning of the year is generally a time when many Guardian Sustainers renew their annual pledges and renew their political commitment to the paper. Many of you send in your total annual pledge at one time now. If you have not yet renewed your Guardian Sustainership, this is the time to do so.

To all our readers, friends, supporters—but most especially to Guardian Sustainers—our firmest comradely wishes for a year of revolutionary solidarity and new victories in 1978!

Bay Area dinner to honor Morris Wright

Bay Area Guardian readers, particularly Sustainers, are cordially invited to a dinner Feb. 5 to honor long-time movement activist Morris Wright on his 70th birthday.

Morris, a Guardian staff member and frequent contributor to the newspaper, has worked for many years in the labor and anti-imperialist movements in the Bay Area.

In addition to the dinner, the program will include music, skits, scenes from the film "Salt of the Earth" and speeches.

The event, sponsored by the Bay Area Guardian Club, will be from 6-9 pm at Dovre Hall, 3543 18th St., San Francisco. Admission is \$7.50. (Children free; childcare will be provided.)

Left films should deepen consciousness

By IRWIN SILBER

The chief function of the bourgeois film critic is to be a consumer guide. Beyond the pseudo-intellectualisms and archcommentaries on cinema aesthetics is the bottom line: should I spend my \$4 (or whatever) to see this film or not? Will it provide me with the emotional and psychological satisfactions—however momentary—that I want?

While the critics are supposed to call the shots as they see them, no one gets very far in the business of movie-reviewing by being a professional nay-sayer. A few years ago the New York Times had to ease out a major critic for being too consistently negative about U.S. commercial film. It wasn't only the industry protests, of which there were plenty, but the impossibility of maintaining a viable entertainment guide for the consumer without recommending enough commodities for purchase.

Some people feel that left film criticism should also fulfill the consumer guide function. "When I get done reading one of your film reviews," a Guardian reader writes, "I still don't know whether or not I should see the film." But as I explained last month, my purpose in reviewing bourgeois commercial film is not to advise you how to spend your Saturday nights. Rather, it is to evaluate popular film: (1) as a barometer of mass consciousness as perceived by the film industry's entrepreneurs; and (2) as a reflection of the way in which bourgeois ideology responds to changing social currents.

Within this context it is possible to discuss the arts of acting, directing, script-writing and cinematography among others. But those who are looking for a critique of film as "film" had better look elsewhere.

Evaluating the films created and produced outside the commercial film establishment—particularly the films of political organizations and/or radical film-

makers—requires a somewhat different approach. Here I am especially interested in the films of left groups or films from liberation movements and socialist countries. (Anti-establishment "avant garde" films are really part of the bourgeois world; the successful ones are tomorrow's marketplace mainstream and their producers and directors are the establishment figures of the future.)

If a Marxist analysis of mass commercial film can be seen as a report on objective social conditions, then reviewing left-wing political films is fundamentally an evaluation of the "subjective factor." In other words, since such a film is made specifically in order to educate and affect political consciousness, it must be evaluated in terms of the soundness of its political approach and the effectiveness of its communication.

True, a film is not a pamphlet—although it can be at times. A number of Felix Greene's films on China, some Newsreel films and others have certainly filled a pamphleteering function. But the main impact of a film is emotional. That is, it shapes consciousness by establishing an emotional bond between the viewer and particular political ideas usually represented by individuals or movements.

FILM AND ITS AUDIENCE

As in all of the communicative arts, a political judgment cannot be made simply by analyzing the work itself. The film must be judged in relation to its audience. An already ardently left audience may really get off on unrelieved seas of clenched fists and red flags—but by themselves, these symbols may well do nothing (or less) for those audiences groping for ways to break with old ideas.

On the other hand, in the guise of avoiding the kind of sectarianism described above, there is also a kind of reformist approach to political filmmaking which is unduly fearful of jarring the sensibilities of its audience. This type of film generally confines itself to the level of consciousness already achieved by the audience—what Lenin described as tailing after the spontaneous movement of the masses—and shuns the tasks of deepening that consciousness. Attempts to do so are usually dismissed as "sectarian." I am thinking here of films I have seen describing the overthrow of Allende in Chile which do not venture beyond the relatively safe domain of condemning CIA intervention and detailing the brutalities of the junta.

To go beyond prevailing consciousness is a risky business—artistically and politically. It cannot be done simply by a declaratory pronouncement that lays out the "correct" political line. This may satisfy the filmmaker's political associates but unless the message has convincing emotional credibility with its audience, it will be little

more than a futile gesture. (Under certain circumstances, a formal political "lecture" might be appropriate, but it would still have to meet the test of "convincing emotional credibility.")

This has always been the great challenge to left-wing artists: how to create an art that is both politically revolutionary and emotionally involving. In this connection, a study of the theory and work of Bertolt Brecht is almost mandatory for any radical artist. This was precisely the problem that Brecht and those who were closest to him (such as composer Hanns Eisler) were always trying to solve.

But back to film. In addition to evaluating the work itself, a Marxist critic must take into account the general social and political circumstances of the moment. Some of the first feminist films, for instance, reflected many of the political shortcomings of the early days of the women's movement. But the very fact of women as serious subject matter in films made by women trying to break with the prevailing sexist consciousness meant that these films had a value and a power that had to be recognized and encouraged.

Another example. A few years ago, when hostility to and contempt for the working class was a prevalent current on the left, the first attempts by some filmmakers to explore the realities of working-class life—even though today some of these films might be deemed "economist" or "workerist"—was likewise a step to be applauded and encouraged, because those films were addressing a crying political need.

Let me conclude this with an example from another medium. Some years ago, the Broadway musical "Hair" represented an interesting cultural phenomenon. Its message of "give peace a chance" and the desirability of shedding personal inhibitions was significant on the Broadway stage as a reflection of a widespread mass disenchantment with the Vietnam war and the social institutions which accompanied it. The play also suggested how most of what was then self-consciously described as "counter-culture" was really quite adaptable to the realities of the bourgeois marketplace.

These were the two sides of "Hair" which a Marxist social critic was obliged to take into account in making an evaluation.

But when the dominant musical chant of the giant antiwar demonstration at the Washington Monument in 1969 came out as John Lennon's "All we are saying is give peace a chance," Marxists had an obligation to put this in yet another context. For it simply was not true that "give peace a chance" was "all" that the millions who had mobilized during those days were saying.

The demonstration itself was a powerful political act. But the musical accompaniment which its leaders deemed appropriate to represent it by lagged far behind the consciousness that already existed.

We need your help

If you've ever wondered how you could help out the Guardian—besides putting your monthly Sustainer pledge in the mail—we've got just the answer for you.

Become a Guardian volunteer. Devote a few hours each week to giving us a hand here at the New York office, proofreading copy, putting out mailings, etc.—there's a wide variety of tasks and projects. Tuesday and Wednesday evenings are the most hectic, but there's work to be done other weekdays, too. And we always appreciate the chance to get to know our friends and Sustainers on a personal basis.

So if you have some free time, consider spending it at the Guardian's office. Call Donna at 212-691-0404 to make arrangements.

70 years young

Fred Harte: Mainstay of Guardian office

Just about the first Guardian staffer you'll meet when you come by the paper's office is Fred Harte.

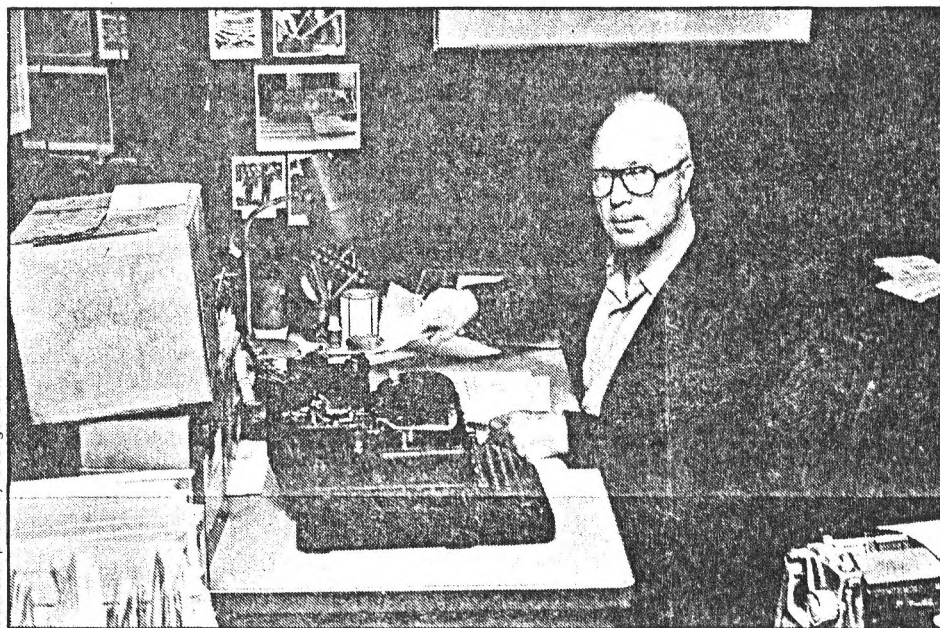
Ever since coming to the paper full time 15 years ago, Fred, among his other duties, is "keeper of the Guardian's gate." He receives visitors, answers the phone, and generally makes sure that people get the person or service they want.

It's also Fred who makes sure your paper gets to you every week. In his key post as the paper's liaison with the Post Office, Fred sifts through the bureaucratic maze of regulations and problems that crop up each week.

From his meticulously ordered desk and files, Fred can put his finger on the information necessary to solve just about any distribution-delivery problem that develops. "I take a certain amount of pride in creating systems," says Fred. "I'm a very systematic person."

Having just celebrated his 70th birthday and 15th year with the paper last month, Fred is one of the veteran workers on the staff. (His age had been a well-kept secret, with most staffers guessing him to be in his late 50s.) A charter subscriber to the paper when it began in 1948, Fred for many years was a supporter before he joined the staff in 1963.

What made him a Marxist? "Well, it was kind of a gradual process," he explains. "I didn't start out a radical—in fact I voted for Herbert Hoover in 1932. But I was an atheist since I was a kid, and that set me on the right track. My first political involvement was in the



Guardian photo by George Cohen

Fred Harte at work.

Scottsboro Boys' defense. Later the American Labor Party, and of course the Progressive Party."

Besides Fred's day-to-day contribution, he scrutinizes the paper each week pointing out the grammatical as well as political shortcomings at the weekly staff meeting. It's a rare misplaced comma that slips by the Fred Harte inspection.

Fred's vigilance has paid off in other areas as well. When a group of disgruntled members of the Revolutionary Union (RU) [now the Revolutionary Communist Party] tried to pay the paper's office a "visit" in 1975, they didn't get

very far. Warned of the mass visit as the RU members were entering the building, Fred dashed to the elevator door and locked it shut. "I never knew whether I got it locked in time though, because so many of them packed in the elevator that it sank to the basement," Fred explains. "But I never locked a door so fast in my life."

Over the 15 years Fred has seen many changes at the paper. "There were anarchists, ultra-'leftists,' rightists and left-liberals, but through it all the paper preserved its reputation for principle." Fred says he has no plans to retire.

Burchett tour closes successfully

Wilfred Burchett has returned home to Paris, having completed his whirlwind North American tour.

The tour was a solid success, allowing Burchett to speak in person to thousands of people and helping to raise funds for his future travel and living expenses. For the Guardian and the Guardian Clubs, the tour provided useful organizing experience that will be helpful in putting together future tours and events.

Of course Burchett's 2-month visit was not without its challenges—particularly the vicious smear campaign against him by various organized right-wing forces—not to mention the threat of violence by rightists.

The large turnout for Burchett's speaking appearances and the response to his many press interviews and campus engagements indicate not only the high respect in which he is held among anti-imperialist forces, but also the potential for increasing mass anti-imperialist sentiment, particularly in

supporting the liberation struggles of southern Africa.

Even for Burchett, who as a revolutionary journalist has traveled under the most difficult conditions, the nonstop schedule was exhausting. And although his audiences always received him warmly, his treatment was not always the most hospitable—particularly in New York City, where Burchett and his wife Vessa were "mugged," he had his pocket picked on a second occasion and was physically threatened by a right-wing "journalist" on a third. Despite all this, he kept his good humor.

The Guardian staff would like to extend our deepest thanks to Wilfred for sharing his experiences and insights. We're sure that the Sustainers and readers do the same.

In news from the Guardian's administrative office, meanwhile, we have successfully concluded our new Sustainer campaign, having reached our goal of the number of

new Sustainers needed to continue publication at its current quality. Furthermore, we just sent the last of our promotional mailings, and other efforts to boost circulation are proceeding smoothly. The Marketplace, after a very busy holiday season, is gearing for a year-end, year-beginning sale. Other projects to strengthen the Guardian's material base are continuing and you'll be hearing more about these in future months.

W.R.

PUT US IN JAIL

The Guardian loses money every time it sends a subscription to a prisoner—and we have many inmate-readers. Help us to continue sending our cut-rate subs to prisoners by making a donation to our special Inmate subscription fund. Send a note along with your check earmarking your donation for this purpose. Guardian, 33 W. 17 St., New York, N.Y.

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.

CUBA SERIES

J.S., Cambridge, Mass.: The self-criticism conducted by the Guardian regarding publication of the articles on Cuba was good, because in general I think you have not aired these criticisms often enough....

However, I disagreed with the criticism. I do not think printing the articles implied support of them, and I recall specific denial of support. The articles were not so critical as to damage Cuba. They were thought-provoking, good political articles that deserved to be printed.

In general, given the political position of the Guardian among the left, more of these kinds of articles (by outside groups which may be in partial or substantial disagreement with the Guardian's stance) should be printed. One of the most important roles the Guardian has to play is to provide a forum for the left.

SPANISH PAGE

N.K., Santa Fe, N.M.: I continue to press you to institute a column or page in Spanish. For a paper with your circulation, I cannot accept the argument that you don't have the funds to do this. Other papers less known with less funds now have a Spanish page.... Try it—I'll double my monthly pledge if you will do a page in Spanish. And I can use the Guardian with more people if you do.

FILM REVIEWS

W.F., Teaneck, N.J.: I've completed my Sustainer pledge, but here's a piece of my Christmas bonus to start the new year right.

Reader reaction to Irwin Silber's reviews is much more intense, it seems to me, than to his political writing. That's a manifestation of a persistent blind spot in the consciousness of the U.S. left, a witness to the pragmatism and weak theoretical commitment of many who consider themselves Marxists.

As an old "Old Leftist," I can vouch for the age of this phenomenon. There were always those who felt that coming down heavy with the "class angle" approach on films that were meant to "entertain" was wrong—an embarrassing display of the humorless dogmatism that played into the hands of our enemies. They were wrong as are their modern counterparts.

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.

ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

J.W., Iowa City: I urge the Guardian to give careful consideration to environmental issues because there are many people involved in the environmental movement who have come to a clearer understanding of the nature of the capitalist system but are as yet unaware of Marxism-Leninism.

One area that the Guardian occasionally touches on is the phony dichotomy between jobs and environmental progress. This is used frequently by business and labor misleaders—usually to keep workers in line over job safety and health demands. It will require persistent tough exposure and analysis before it is laid to rest.

Another subject: why does the Guardian give such limited, and almost always negative, coverage of the RCP? No one is perfect, but it seems that the RCP's commitment to long-term struggle is clear. We need a dialog and the Guardian should not be above initiating it.

Finally, I think that in the coverage of liberation and third world struggles there is occasionally a reluctance to cover situations where it is not easy to "take sides." Trying to unscramble the situation on the Horn of Africa is very difficult. We need a lot more information and background material than we've been getting lately from the Guardian. I'm sure you're working on this—I only hope you can speed it up.

SOVIET HEGEMONY

A.B. & D.B., Grass Valley, Calif.: We would like the Guardian to clarify what exactly is "Soviet hegemony" vis-a-vis the USSR and its relations with the third world. In the Dec. 21 issue the excerpt from Peking Review on "China on Angola" constantly refers to Soviet hegemony in the most vitriolic terms. And the Guardian also has many times referred to the same—in less violent adjectives. What does all this mean?

Secondly, also in the Dec. 21 issue was an excellent article on Angola by Sara Rodrigues. How can we reconcile Rodrigues' informative and positive report on the socialist development in Angola with the complete and totally opposite view in the Peking Review reprint? Personally, we support wholeheartedly the article by Rodrigues and the Guardian's unwavering position regarding Angola and all of Africa. Doesn't the PRC have observers, reporters, or informants in the area? Is it possible that the PRC is blinded by its emotions rather than political reality?

IRELAND

A.C., Vancouver, British Columbia: I have some criticisms of your reports on Ireland. As

an Irish-Canadian who has kept in close touch with events and struggles in Ireland, I give critical support to the official IRA and the Republican Clubs. However, you seem not to consider sources of information other than the official IRA. This is unfortunate because some of the recent publications of this organization (on fishing rights around the Irish coast and foreign capital and the Common Market) are very confused.

In short, there are other publications on the left in Ireland (I am not thinking only of the revisionist Communist Party of Ireland, Trotskyist or ultra-"leftist" groups).

APPRECIATIVE

J.A., Norwalk, Calif.: I was going to forego a Sustainer check this month since I've been on strike and since I am entitled to miss two during the year, but between Burchett's appearance in Los Angeles and the ever-outstanding quality of the paper, I'm just too appreciative to let a month go by.

ANGOLA

E.H., Charlotte, N.C.: Publishing a tirade against the Angolan revolution ("China on Angola," Dec. 21) demonstrates the Guardian's petty bourgeois commitment to "fairness" and "independence." The role of the communist press is not to "present both sides," but to present the side of the proletariat. Your support of the MPLA and the Angolan revolution since November, 1975, though belated, has nevertheless been significant, especially the excellent articles by Sara Rodrigues. Despite your disclaimer, the inclusion of the Peking Review article sows confusion and doubt about the Angolan revolution.

WOMEN IN DPRK

K.R., Pittsburgh: Thank you for opening up my eyes to the tremendous accomplishments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In the past few months, your coverage of life in socialist Korea—particularly the articles on education and the role of women—have been excellent. They will be needed even more if we are ever to build a mass Korea support movement here.

I did have one objection, though, to the article about the role of Korean women (Dec. 21). The article points out that the country's strategy for women is to provide for massive state intervention in order to socialize those tasks—like childcare—which have traditionally been mislabeled "women's work." While this strategy seems correct, the state should also make it a secondary aspect of its policy to educate male Koreans that it is not the women's job to make the meals or care for the children, but that men should share these responsibilities equally. From what I've heard, there is little consciousness of this type in socialist Korea, and I think the question should have been raised in the article. By ignoring the issue, you provide ammunition to the bourgeois feminists who say there is no women's liberation in "male-dominated" socialist countries.