

Hysteria in the face of Platypus?

Response to the Spartacist anti-Platypus flyer

I am writing in response to a flyer issued by the Spartacus Youth Club in Chicago titled "Platypus: Pseudo-'Marxist,' Pro-Imperialist, Academic Claptrap," which was distributed at the November 6 public forum hosted by the Platypus Affiliated Society in Chicago on "The 3 Rs: Reform, Revolution, and 'Resistance:' the problematic forms of 'anticapitalism' today," with panelists Michael Albert of Z Magazine, myself representing Platypus, Stephen Duncombe of the Gallatin School of NYU, Brian Holmes of Continental Drift and Université Tangente, and Marisa Holmes of the new Students for a Democratic Society, held at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

[Since then, this flyer has been distributed and posted extensively by the Spartacist League/SYC at the University of Chicago -- including to my students outside a class I teach! -- and, presumably, elsewhere. This letter comprises my response to the flyer and has been submitted to the Spartacist League/U.S.'s newspaper, *Workers Vanguard*. In the interest of clarification, Platypus will be posting the SYC flyer, attached here as a PDF file, as well as any of our responses to it on our web site. I am posting to this list because, from their flyer, it is clear that the Spartacists monitor (and cite very selectively and dishonestly) my posts here.]

The core of the Spartacus Youth Club flyer's attack on Platypus is the lie that the Platypus Affiliated Society supports the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. This lie is then buttressed by a variety of other misrepresentations and innuendos, a very shoddy house of cards that was a waste of time and energy constructing, for it is not only without any basis in fact but also without any traction to its intended audience, which knows better -- as the SYC/SL should as well. We in Platypus seek to critique, e.g., the false "anti-imperialism" that runs the entire gamut, from the ostensible "revolutionary" Left to conservatives and reactionaries on the Right, that is really an expression of the pervasive pessimism and defeatism on the part of the powers-that-be towards the U.S. mission in Iraq.

But, first of all, it should be made clear that the Platypus Affiliated Society is not based on agreement on programmatic positions, but rather on commitment to reopening and pursuing questions on the Left, such as what it means to be anti-capitalist in a progressive, emancipatory sense, and exploring the necessity of reconstituting a Marxian Left today and for the future, specifically in light of the failure of historical Marxism.

Beyond the inability to characterize Platypus as having a programmatic political position of any kind, let alone a "pro-imperialist" one, it was incumbent upon the Spartacus Youth Club in their flyer to stick to the truth in attacking any statements that I have made that could be taken as representing Platypus, which comprise all the "evidence" presented.

When a group of members of the Spartacist League/Spartacus Youth Club intervened at the April 18, 2007 Platypus film screening-discussion of the 1985 film by Margarethe

von Trotta Rosa Luxemburg at the University of Chicago, I was personally asked whether I supported the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, to which I responded, emphatically, "No!" I have never in any form suggested, let alone said, because I do not believe that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq was good and supportable, but only questioned the alternatives, and distinguished the reactionary-conservative responses and oppositions to the invasion and occupation that have and should have nothing to do with any purported social-emancipatory Left.

The SL/SYC and its published statements seem to be unable to distinguish the Platypus approach to interrogating, e.g., "what is imperialism and why should the Left be against it?" (paraphrased from the title of the inaugural Platypus Affiliated Society public forum in Chicago on January 30, 2007 -- to which the SL was invited by Platypus but refused to participate with a speaker on the panel), from some kind of support for imperialism, which of course it is not.

The Platypus critique of the Left and its forms of discontent and "opposition" evidently is taken by the SYC/SL for support for the world as it is, which is a travesty of the critical tradition exemplified by Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky, et al. to which the SL/SYC claims to adhere (and none of whose figures shrank from facing reality squarely and honestly, and were among the first to admit, e.g., that the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution got into desperate trouble and started going wrong early on -- to which their answer, which we in Platypus find crucially important to learn from, was to take the fight further, to "defend and extend" political and social revolution, against those who by contrast adapted and conformed to defeats and failures).

Worse for the kind of conversation we in the Platypus Affiliated Society seek to foster, the Platypus interrogation and critique of the Left seems to engender a hysterical and misguided response that is in direct proportion to the stakes of asking such questions of the Left and the history of how it got here. The Left stands in need of critique precisely to escape the dead-end it has become. If the SL/SYC has resigned to staying there along with others such as the ISO, the RCP, the FRSO, et al. (as Lenin put it, those stuck in the swamp always resent those who try to leave the swamp), it should at least not resort to lying and other forms of misrepresentation against those who refuse to share such practical resignation and intellectual complacency that, if left unchallenged and not overcome, will condemn humanity to a future of continued domination, exploitation, oppression, and extermination.

-- Chris Cutrone
Chicago, November 7, 2007

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