

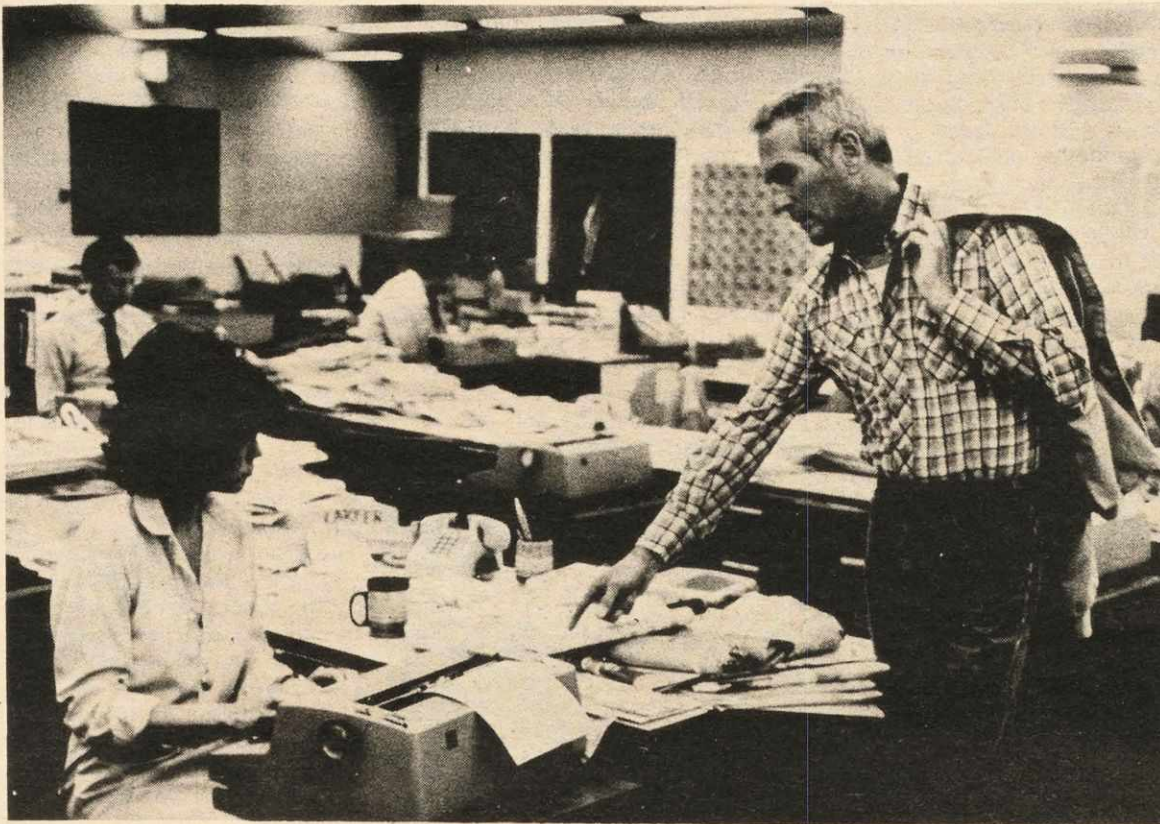
# Absence of Malice missing credibility

by Mike DeLory

**Absence of Malice** is the story of a dilemma in modern day journalism. On the one hand we have Megan Carter (Sally Field), an eager journalist, who wants to write a good, truthful story. On the other hand is Michael Gallagher (Paul Newman), the subject of an investigation into the suspected murder of a union leader. Though he has nothing to do with the murder, the police feel that by leaking the information to Miss Carter her story will put pressure on Gallagher to find out who the real killer was. After the story comes out the conflict arises between the truth Megan Carter wants to print, and the justice Michael Gallagher deserves.

As a basic premise the story is extremely interesting. In *Absence of Malice* we get to see the way those seemingly innocent or even boring stories we read in our newspapers can seriously affect the lives of the people they concern. The problems with getting to the basic truth, and getting it into print, are explored in the movie.

However, as a statement about journalism, the movie is inaccurate, bordering on silly. Unless



the *Miami Standard*, the paper for which Megan Carter worked, is Florida's answer to the *National Enquirer*, it is difficult to believe

they would have printed the articles she submitted. Field, as Carter, showed a distinct lack of interest in checking her stories

thoroughly. They were rushed onto the front page as soon as the information was obtained. Carter represents the kind of wri-

ter good papers try to avoid: grabbing for a headline and an increase in circulation by rushing an article into print before the story has been properly researched and written.

The relationship which develops between Megan Carter and Michael Gallagher is also rather unlikely. He has just been victimized by her journalism, and whenever they meet they pry each other for information. Not very stable grounds on which to build a lasting relationship.

*Absence of Malice* benefits greatly from the acting skills of Newman and Field. Both do an excellent job in creating believable characters. The supporting cast is also good, and some of their performances are absolutely superb. Sydney Pollack, the director, keeps the story going at a swift pace.

Kurt Luedtke, the author, is mostly responsible for the fact that the story is not convincing. He took a very good basic idea, and wrote a story that is difficult to believe.

*Absence of Malice* is worth seeing for the acting alone. However, you have to ignore the flaws in the storyline.

## Railing, Writing, and Revolution - Reds

by Michael McCarthy

**Reds** is a heavyweight movie. Among this season's crop of fluffy entertainment and demagogic melodrama films, **Reds** stands like a glorious, deep-rooted oak amid a field of withering grasses and dying leaves destined to be blown away by the wintry wind of oblivion.

Warren Beatty first attracted notice as a filmmaker with his sharply dramatic direction of **Bonnie and Clyde**. He had great critical and commercial success with the subtly biting **Shampoo** and a mammoth hit with **Heaven Can Wait**, which is, in my opinion, the finest romantic comedy ever filmed.

Beatty's work has always stood out for its well-woven combination of artistic ideal, statement, and popular (read commercial) appeal. He establishes himself in the forefront of American cinema, and is likely to take a position in the ranks of internationally important moviemakers with his latest film, **Reds**. Not only has he retained the successful blending of considerations which marked his previous efforts, but he has also broadened the scope of his material immensely.

The characters are revealed more sharply and in greater depth than in earlier Beatty films. The movie becomes almost epic in its ambience of the ideology and power of the 1917 Russian revolution, as well as the tensions and political currents flowing through the world at that time.

The film unfolds like a gossamer screen barely muting the spark of a slow fuse, running ever closer to the dynamite which eventually sets off the social

explosion suffusing the plot. Of course, there is a featured love interest to attract the paying customers. Universally common human situations keep the audience constantly supplied with something they can identify with.

**Reds** follows a period in the life of individualistic journalist Jack Reed. It deals with his ideas and those of his circle of dissident friends in America, who rebel in both their politics and their lifestyle. Reed has the foresight to go to Russia as revolution begins to stir. His reports and a resultant book make him famous and a focal point for those in the States displeased with the order of things. Reed becomes the leader of the worker's movement, and one of the founders of an American labour version of the Communist Party. He returns to Russia, and gets a first hand view of the differences between revolutionary ideas in theory and in practice.

The story's fulcrum is the relationship between Reed (Beatty) and fellow individualist Louise Bryant (Keaton). Keaton gives a poignant performance as someone seeking personal and professional independence in a society aswirl with formulas for living which don't seem to include a free woman. There is a somewhat unfinished quality to her portrayal, but this is more the result of not enough screen time than flawed acting. The dominant figure on the screen is Reed, and Beatty gives a superlative dramatic rendition of the journalist-cum-politico who is driven by forces which are not quite clear to him. They hurl him into a sce-

nario where his search for ideals gets him ostracized by his own country.

Beatty comes through with his best serious performance since the hunted entertainer in **Mickey One**. Like Keaton, his characterization suffers slightly from general similarities to past roles, an inevitable hazard of playing the "everyman" parts both have become known for.

Impressive as Beatty is, the true stellar performances come from the supporting players. It is a sign of the quality of Beatty's movies that he is always able to assemble a willing cast of high calibre (i.e. Faye Dunaway, Julie Harris, Goldie Hawn, Jack Warden).

This time around he has garnered Maureen Stapleton who gives a towering performance as dissident Emma Goldman. Goldman is deported from the states to Russia for her leftist sentiments, and like a true dissident is then deported by the Bolsheviks for her outspokenness. Equally memorable is Jack Nicholson as the young playwright Eugene O'Neill - friend of Reed, lover of Bryant, and general caustic malcontent. Nicholson is as good here as in any of his famous roles, and burns his bitter, tragic portrayal a foot deep into the screen, and further into the viewer's mind.

Perhaps also notable is the competent film debut of writer Jerzy Kosinski as a Bolshevik propagandist.

The film is very long (circa 3 hours), but the spectacle of Beatty's vision unfolding on the screen, constantly reaching the apparent borders of its themes, then redefining, expanding, and embellishing, draws you continually into the story and beyond to

the far-reaching implications of the events and ideas. The camera work is excellent; particularly memorable are the scenes of Reed and Bryant witnessing the masses of workers taking over the streets of Moscow during the nights of the Revolution (the subject of Reed's acclaimed book

**Ten Days That Shook The World**).

**Reds** gets my vote for best film, best director, best screenplay (which Beatty co-wrote), and best performance by a supporting actor, supporting actress, and perhaps by a lead actor as well, for the year. See it.



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