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[CAMPUS](#): May/23/2005

Premiere celebrates activist's life

By [Mike Blank](#) | *Vibe Editor*

Hundreds gathered yesterday at the General Lectures building for the world premiere of a documentary that celebrated the life of world famous Detroit political activist Saul Wellman.

"Professional Revolutionary: The Life of Saul Wellman" is a locally produced, in-depth look at the life and times of Wellman, a man who, throughout the course of his life, took the rare step of actually acting on his beliefs.

Critically acclaimed author of "Naming Names," "A Matter of Opinion" and publisher of The Nation, Victor Navasky introduced the film to an engaged audience. He prefaced Wellman's story of activism and persecution with a brief historical retrospective. He commented on how the Cold War did not begin until a senator advised President Harry S Truman to gain the public's support the government needed to "scare the hell out of the American people." Almost immediately after World War II, the image of the Soviet Union was transformed from our friendly ally to that of a global communist conspiracy bent on world domination.

From the hearings in Hollywood, McCarthy's Committee, to government infiltration into Detroit unions, an attack on all those left of center had begun. It was in this context that Wellman experienced the beauties and horrors of American freedom.

Navasky concluded his introduction with three lessons that should have been learned from that era: At some point, resistance becomes an equivalent to morality; "scapegoating" is a WMD — weapon of mass distraction; and more damage has been done to government and society by anti-subversion forces than could ever be done by the so-called subversives themselves.

Born into Russian-Jewish family in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1913, Wellman said in the film that he knew that as a young man, he wanted to be part of a group that changes the world for the better. When other kids said they wanted to be police officers or firemen when they grew up, he wanted to be a revolutionary. As Wellman became more involved in political activities in the early 1930s, he was expelled from high school for attending a workers rally against unemployment. He said being expelled was a "liberating experience."

Wellman later fought with anti-fascist International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War in the late '30s. He was a paratrooper for the United States during World War II.

After the war, Wellman came to Detroit as an organizer for the Communist Party. It was in Detroit that Wellman underwent extreme persecution for his political beliefs, eventually serving time in prison.

Detroit became Wellman's adopted home and he became a political father figure for those on the "left" throughout the 1960s, '70s, '80s, '90s, and until his passing in 2003.

Film director and co-producer Judy Montell was pleased with the premiere.

"It is a great pleasure to finally present this film to the Detroit people who made it happen," Montell said. "It was put together by a group of people who loved Saul." Wayne State Professor Ronald Aronson and film contributor was ecstatic about the premiere.

"It seems like just yesterday, Jim Jacobs and I were in the backyard with Judy and Saul," Aronson said, "and we began talking about some crazy idea about a movie."

The film, besides being a captivating documentary of one man's life, can also be viewed as an inspirational story of how one person's action can have a ripple effect that will continue to touch and affect others for years to come.

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“Professional Revolutionary: The Life of Saul Wellman,” can be purchased at www.professionalrevolutionary.org.



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