“The Last Truck”: Politics and Art

written by Nelson Lichtenstein | September 17, 2009

The extent to which a film, book, essay, meeting, or web posting will evoke the emotional immediacy of some contemporary disaster or the analysis of why and how it happened is an aesthetic issue and a political one as well. My analysis of the film tilts toward the latter, and not merely a result of my Victorian Marxist inclinations. Just recently, the University of California system has been visited by a round of disastrous cut backs and furloughs. At a couple of packed town hall meetings over the summer there was plenty of outrage and I dare say plenty of material for films like "The Last Truck." But in the end many in the audience went away confused and unsatisfied because key questions were left unanswered about why precisely we are in the midst of this crisis. So a group of us have organized a "teach-in" designed to answer some of those questions, by marshaling an analysis and a path forward. I am hopeful that our event,modeled on the Vietnam era "teach-ins," scheduled for October 14 here at UC Santa Barbara, will have some of the same political, emotional, and even aesthetic consequences of those Vietnam-era teach-ins held more than 40 years ago. Nelson Lichtenstein