

REVIEWS



● Today's angry young man for all seasons: Pierre Curzi as Lucien Brouillard

Bruno Carrière's Lucien Brouillard

Bruno Carrière's first dramatic feature jumps a fair number of hurdles on sheer energy of intention. This character study cum political thriller is at times both overly ambitious and a little muddled, but that never seems to dull its spirit. Carrière displays an instinct for canny casting and solid film craft, both of which combine to pull him over some tough dramatic terrain.

Lucien Brouillard is mostly about the confrontation between personal ambition and self-sacrifice, but it gleans both texture and tone from its setting. Lucien (Pierre Curzi) is a kind of self-styled social agitator, a one-man crusade against injustice whose gestures of protest often land him in trouble. His legal net is provided by childhood friend Jacques Martineau (Roger Blay), a well-placed lawyer with visions of ascension into Québec's ruling class. Just how much of a liability Lucien will prove to him is something Lucien's wife Alice (Marie Tifo) sees more clearly than her husband. When the reactionary premier Provencher (Jean Duceppe) blocks Martineau's political ambitions, the lawyer hatches a plot to rid himself of two road-blocks at once; political double-dealing and assassination suddenly hijack the movie.

It's that twist of melodrama that really throws the spanner in the works here, but the calibre of performance and the particulars of place and character pretty much redeem the imbalance. Pierre Curzi is marvellous as a working-class Québécois whose battle for right is finally self-destructive. There's something very childlike about Lucien, and Curzi captures it perfectly with that lopsided grin of his and wonderfully articulate body language. His courting of Alice, his angry disbelief at a crooked legal system and his naive trust in Martineau's intentions are what give Lucien his sad-eyed grace: he's set up for a crash from the

beginning because he *believes* so badly. Curzi is the centre of the movie, and he holds it with absolute conviction. Strong support, as always, is offered by Tifo as the madonna-faced Alice, and Blay as the rather complex Martineau, whose conflicting emotions are finally mangled somewhat by the awkward climax.

What's beautifully evoked here is Québec's passionate political edge, the way people tend to commit themselves with Lucien's brand of "all or nothing" dedication. The film weaves that passion into a classic tale of exploiter versus exploited with a kind of gentle grace, something that remains undefeated with the pitch for dramatic intrigue at the end. Carrière is a convincing director of both actors and narrative, and he's packaged the movie with clean, unpretentious technique. But there is a sour note here. As to how the camerawork of the extraordinary Pierre Mignot measures up, I'm hard-pressed to say: the distributors opted to meet a tight release date by screening a badly-timed test

LUCIEN BROUILLARD d. Bruno Carrière sc. Jacques Jacob, Jacques Paris, Bruno Carrière dialog. Louis Saia d.o.p. Pierre Mignot art d. Gilles Aird ad. Serge Beauchemin ed. Michel Arcand mus. Yves Laferrière 1st a.d. Ginette Breton 2nd a.d. Robert Martel 3rd a.d. Claude Cartier continuity Ginette Sénécal loc. man. Suzanne Girard p. assts. Jean-Pierre Laurendeau, Marie Potvin, Ronald Guevremont p. sec. Suzanne Comtois admin. Bernadette Payeur, Bérandère Maltais p. man. René Gueissaz 1st asst. cam. Jean Lépine trainee Christiane Guernon add. cam. Serge Giguère, Bruno Carrière stills Bertrand Carrière boom Yvon Benoit asst. ed. Noël Almey ed. ed. Paul Dion asst. ed. ed. Michel Charron props Marc Corriveau asst. props Philippe Chevalier dec. Maurice Leblanc painter Guy Saint-Georges make-up Micheline Foisy hair Bob Pritchett cost. dea. Michèle Hamel dresser Martine Fontaine lighting Daniel Chretien elec. Robert Lapierre Jr, Jacques Girard, Denis Ménard key grip Michel Chouin musicians Robert Lachapelle, Richard Perrotte, Robert Stanley sd. ex. Terry Burke mixer Michel Charron titres Michel Larocque animation Film Docteur du Québec Inc. archives Pascal Gelin, Ateliers Audio-Visuels du Québec Inc. opticals Antoine Desilet, Pierre G. Verge, Michel Delisle lp. Pierre Curzi, Roger Blay, Marie Tifo, Paul Savoie, Jean Duceppe, Germain Houde lab. Bellevue-Pathé Québec (1972) ltee, Film Optical (Québec) ltee, Negbec Inc. equipment rental Panavision Canada ltee assoc. p. Marc Daigle exec. p. René Gueissaz p.c. l'Association coopérative de productions audio-visuelles (ACPAV), the CFDC, Bellevue-Pathé Québec (1972) Ltd., Famous Players Ltd. and Société Radio-Canada colour 35mm running time 89 min., 1983

print for the press. Many of the night exteriors were positively illegible, and that does strike one as being patently unfair to both Carrière and his really top-notch DOP.

Anne Reiter ●

Jean-Guy Noël's Contrecoeur

Jean-Guy Noël's *Contrecoeur* seems full of interesting ideas and totally bereft of some means to pull them together. His tale of three misfits who band together for a trip to a small Québec town follows a more or less conventional narrative, and then doesn't resolve it: that's by no means a cardinal sin, but *Contrecoeur* doesn't seem sure of its own intentions and ends up confusing the spectator. That's a flat-out problem.

The story follows Blanche (Monique Mercure) and Fabienne (Anouk Simard) as they make plans to visit the town of Contrecoeur where they've left behind some fairly complex family ties. Théo (Maurice Podbrey) is Fabienne's father and Blanche's ex-husband, while the alcoholic Roger (Gilbert Sicotte) is Fabienne's ex-husband and Blanche's son. The two women take Fabienne's boyfriend Jean-Paul up on his offer to drive them to Contrecoeur in his oil tanker; during a long snowbound night on the highway, the three play power

games and uncover some truths — most significant is the fact that Jean-Paul is dying of multiple sclerosis. Blanche has insisted from the outset that she is travelling to meet spring, an ongoing, mid-winter obsession that Fabienne finds rather annoying. But she capitulates to it after their presence in Contrecoeur sets off a chain of emotional events; the two women strike out on the highway again with a sickly Jean-Paul between them.

It's possible that *Contrecoeur* is intended to work as a somewhat complex mood piece, but it doesn't, finally; there's so much dramatic baggage here that you're trying to piece together the plot most of the time. Noël has enlisted the

CONTRECOEUR d. Jean-Guy Noël sc. Jean-Guy Noël, Gilles Noël d.o.p. François Beauchemin s.d. Jean Rival ed. Marthe de la Chevrotière p. man. Michel Beliaeff, Luc Lamy 1st a.d. Jacques Wilbrod Benoit loc. man. Francine Forest art. des. Vianney Gauthier cost. des. Johanne Prigent make-up Diane Sinard cont. Marie La Haye 1st asst. cam. Louis de Ernsted, Michel Bissonnette, Robert Vanherweghem 2nd asst. cam. Daniel Jobin asst. ed. Marcel Fraser boom Michel Charron asst. art. d. Claude Pare props Charles Bernier stills Anne de Guise gaffer Jacques Paquet best boy Daniel Chretien, Richer Francoeur key grip Michel Chohin grip Jean Trudeau, Marc de Ernsted p. assts. Nathalie Moliavko-Visotzky, Robert Lapierre p. sec. Estelle Lemieux sd. ed. Marcel Pothier asst. ed. Yves Chaput, Paul Dion mixer Michel Charron neg. cutter Carole Gagnon titres Madeleine Leduc legal André Thauvette music Jan Garbarek, Ralph Towner, Offenbach lab. Les Laboratoires de Film Québec Télémontage, Bellevue Pathé lp. Monique Mercure, Anouk Simard, Raymond Cloutier, Gilbert Sicotte, Maurice Podbrey, Claude Maher, Françoise Berd, Michel Forget, Fernand Gignac, Louise Saint-Pierre p. Pierre Lamy p.c. Les Productions Pierre Lamy ltee, with assistance from the CFDC, l'Institut québécois du cinéma, Radio-Québec, Les Cinémas Unis color 35mm running time 95 min.



● Emotions run high for Gilbert Sicotte and Anouk Simard

help of a strong, engaging cast, and they are an intriguing group to watch – a notable exception is Maurice Podbrey, whose obvious unease with the camera worsens an already difficult role.

Noël has adopted a kind of 'art film' approach to his narrative, with long closeups of blinking truck lights and the like, but it doesn't clarify his purpose or theme. The film is far from incompetent; it's just bemusing in a kind of "what's going on and why should I care?" way that tends to confuse and ultimately alienate. You don't know what you're supposed to think.

Anne Reiter ●

Peter Raymont's

Prisoners of Debt : Inside the Global Banking Crisis

It is necessarily a part of the business of a banker to maintain appearances and to profess a conventional respectability which is more than human. It is so much their stock-in-trade that their position should not be questioned, that they do not even question it themselves until it is too late. Like the honest citizens they are, they feel a proper indignation at the perils of the wicked world in which they live – when the perils mature; but they do not foresee them. A Bankers' conspiracy! The idea is absurd! I only wish there were one!

John Maynard Keynes

The great virtue of Peter Raymont's *Prisoners of Debt: Inside the Global Banking Crisis*, the hour-long National Board-CBC documentary co-production which the CBC aired March 29, is that it so utterly confirms the correctness of J.M. Keynes' observation. The conventional respectability, the lack of questioning, the smugness of proper indignation; it's all there. Unfortunately, that's all that's there, and that's the problem.

In the '20s and '30s, the imagery of the previous worldwide banking crisis was, at the very least, dramatic. Bankers leapt from the tops of tall buildings as banks went bankrupt and money literally disappeared. But in today's planned Depression, with its pockets of social misery effectively contained or transferred to distant, developing lands whose problems are too far removed to be affecting, the imagery of crisis is simply not there.

In the absence of the visually extraordinary, then, the camera eye contents itself with the mundane. The blame for this visual blandness must rest with Raymont and co-director/writer, financial editor Robert Collison, tempered by the fact that credit is due these two for having tackled a highly abstract and inordinately complex subject. And with all due respect to Keynes, what may in the '30s have seemed like the absurd notion of a bankers' conspiracy has, by the '80s, given the general rise of Absurdity, become far more probable. As Raymont's film unwittingly proves.

It is the Bank of Montreal's consider-

able good fortune to have as its chairman a man whose deceptive avuncularity conceals a power so secure that he was able to commission his own NFB-CBC self-portrait and have it executed by that modern-day artistic wretch, the documentary freelance. Let there be no mistake about it: *Prisoners of Debt* is William Mulholland's film: it is about him, his bank, and the people who work for him; in a word, *his* world, the world of the Sun King that would be revealed for the first time to Peter Raymont and his camera-crew. No public relations film would have dared supply what Raymont does happily: the gross historical flattery, the parallels to Cosimo de Medici, the monumental loftiness of the view from the top of First Canadian Place.

Yet less than one year ago – in the summer of '82 when much of *Prisoners of Debt* is set – the reversing of monetary policies from inflationary to deflationary sent powerful aftershocks through the international capitalist system and pushed unemployment in the developed world up to the 60 million range. The price of oil dropped and with it fell banks (in the U.S. and later in the Mideast), national economies teetered on the brink of bankruptcy (Poland, Mexico, and to a lesser degree Venezuela and Nigeria), and companies like Canada's Dome Petroleum found themselves unable to repay the interest on their gigantic loans. All this *Prisoners of Debt* shows yet doesn't show. Mulholland is

shown on the phone (12 hours a day, we are told) steering the Canadian Big Four banks into a loan-consortium with the Canadian government to bail out Dome; the Mexican finance minister reveals to Mulholland, one month before the news became public, that Mexico is broke, but the film cannot go beyond the external behaviour of bankers' conventional respectability because that is all there is to see.

What it meant, of course, was vastly different: in Canada, to take but one example, the Dome bail-out effectively destroyed the National Energy Policy as the market – represented by the banks – taught a hard lesson in high finance to the amateurs in the Canadian government. There's a wonderfully brief scene in *Prisoners of Debt*, that goes completely unexplained, where Mulholland patronizingly pats "Red" Ed Clark, who designed the NEP, on the shoulder, having just – as the old expression goes – pocketed Clark's balls.

But that would be another film altogether, another film which would contain interview footage with Canadian journalist Walter Stewart who does know a thing or two about Canadian banks, instead of, as *Prisoners of Debt* does, having interviews with American Martin Mayer and Britisher Anthony Sampson who may know much about the U.S. and U.K. banking systems respectively but less about Canada's.

To be sure, *Prisoners of Debt* shows us many things never before seen by

mere mortals: such as Bill Mulholland's office, limousine or horse; bankers in twosomes, threesomes or whole roomful; millionaires and moneymen by the pound, franc or mark. This may be of great interest on some level, but does showing ordinary images of bankers really tell us anything about banking?

Prisoners of Debt repeatedly makes the point that the summer of 1982 was a time of grave financial crisis. Yet the one central question the film never clarifies is: for whom? In one scene Mulholland and the Bank of Montreal's chief accountant are standing before an electronic ticker-tape as the Canadian dollar plummets below 78 cents U.S. How far will it drop? Mulholland is asked, Shrug, grin, "Who knows?" In another scene Mulholland admits that had not a last-minute deal been worked out between Dome, the three other banks and the Canadian government, the Bank of Montreal would have pulled the plug on Dome – the papers were drawn up – a move which supposedly would have caused a major financial collapse. But – and this is vital – that collapse would not have been the bank's.

Raymont and Collison gently wonder in *Prisoners of Debt* whether the banks in having financed the boom in the first place thoughtlessly risked a catastrophic bust. In the film the bankers defend themselves with the familiar "We only give the people what they want." Mulholland more candidly says that basically nobody knows what's really going on until a crisis hits.

Instead, let's all go horse-riding; have fun while you can; it could all collapse at the drop of a hat. In banking as in history, it comes and it goes. From the 54th floor, all is mere transience and vanity.

Fine sentiments indeed, and Raymont and crew got a nice trip to Florence to illustrate this. But – and this is a point the film does not make – in the end, as someone like Mulholland well knows, it is not the banks that are the prisoners of debt: it is the national governments and even more so their hostage populations whose blood, sweat and tears will pay for the errors of the governments and the banks. One wishes Raymont and Collison had paid somewhat more attention to this enduring aspect of the banking situation.

Instead *Prisoners of Debt* gives us the smug philosophy of the Marie-Antoinettes of finance capital. Citicorp's Walter Wriston complains that, whatever he does, the banker gets blamed; like the filmmaker, he adds slyly. In that perspective, when bankers and filmmakers get together on a film, one is justifiably suspicious.

Perhaps it all comes down to this, which was Keynes' ultimate bit of advice: that banking is too important to be left to bankers. It follows that Peter Raymont's *Prisoners of Debt* proves that films about bankers are still too important to be left to filmmakers. At least until proven otherwise.

Michael Dorland ●

● Conspiratorially charming chairman: William D. Mulholland of the Bank of Montreal



PRISONERS OF DEBT: INSIDE THE GLOBAL BANKING CRISIS
 d. Peter Raymont, Robert Collison sc. Robert Collison
 ed. Murray Battie d.o.p. Mark Irwin, c.s.c. René Ohashi add. cam. Martin Duckworth loc. sd. Bryan Day add. loc. sd. Richard Nicol narrator Peter Raymont sd. ed. Robin Leigh re-rec. Terry Cooke p. John Kramer exec. p. John Spotton
 produced by National Film Board of Canada, Ontario Region production, in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation color 16mm screening time 57 min. 35 sec.