

which we were obliged to refuse to do. We were as a result classified, to use their term, as "a delinquent dossier," and we're still living with the consequences. Which is how mandates to assist creativity can sometimes take the form of programs that encourage giving-up.

We have been awarded this prize at a time when, in Quebec as in Canada, the institutional structures are being transformed, when the NFB is put into question, when the federal government is readying new cinema legislation, and new budgetary envelopes for production are being decided upon federally as well as provincially. But through all this a dangerous tendency is being confirmed: that of subjugating cinema to a forced internationalization, of enfeebing it to the all-powerful producer, of forcing it into the industrial harness, of planing it down at all costs to the dimensions of the small screen, of monopolizing creation and production in the hands of a few.

We believe that in order to assure the development of a veritable national cinematography the State must give creators the means of translating in all its forms the revolts and the aspirations of their society, and make these works available to the public. But ever since our cinema came under the five-year plan, exactly the reverse has taken place: the condemnation of a so-called budgetary "sprinkling" which in the past allowed at low cost the development of a crowd of original works; the concentration of monies on a few prestige productions that will supposedly answer all our problems; the search for infallible recipes to add spice to a sauce that has neither taste nor aroma; the wiping out of small production houses; the neglect of the upcoming generation, and research; the cloistering of individuals and genres; in short, the frenetic imposition of a production model that doesn't resemble us and that stifles the dynamic of creativity.

Federally, one can ask oneself whether the new Telefilm Canada will remain the same secret society, reserved only to select initiates of Big Business and invisible international coproduction.

As for the distribution policies, they are still striking by their absence. Bill 109, despite positive aspects, enforces no quotas on the screens and changes nothing in the light of the absence of markets for Québécois films. Essential distribution structures for our filmmaking like Les Films du Crépuscule, Cinéma Libre, or the Cinéma Parallele, that do intervene effectively in a domain that the state has left uncultivated are now threatened in their very existence through the lack of funding that would respect the very nature of their activity.

This scenario is not very colorful. One could even speak of a return to black-and-white. It is the struggle between industry and creativity, between the collective imagination and big bucks, between art and bureaucracy. Which of the two camps will prevail? Will creators become the hobos of cinema, condemned to hop the freight-train of production to carry out their endeavors?

If there was real assistance to our filmmaking, how many *Turlutes*, how many *Wives' Tales*, how many *Hiver bleu*, how many *Grand Remue-ménage*, how many *Futur intérieur*, how many *Mémoire battante*, how many *Doux aveux* would be made on the screens of Quebec?

Richard Boutet
& Pascal Gélinas'

La Turlute des années dures

It is difficult to be sure of one's attitudes in a decade like this. Can we heroize our men when we know them to be exploited? Can we romanticize our industrial scene when we know that our men work brutally and starve ignobly for it? Can we praise it – and in art there must be praise – when the most blatant fact of our time is the bankruptcy of our national management? Our confidence is sapped, our beliefs troubled, our eye for beauty is most plainly disturbed: and the more so in cinema than in any other art. For we have to build on the actual. Our capital comes from the actual. The medium itself insists on the actual. There we must build or be damned. – John Grierson (1935)

Every year the Quebec Association of Film Critics awards the \$5000 Louis-Ernest Ouimet Molson prize to the best made-in-Quebec feature film released in the year preceeding. This year the five finalists boiled down to a toss-up between André Forcier's *Au clair de la lune* and Pascal Gélinas & Richard Boutet's documentary musical tragedy on the Great Depression then and now, *La Turlute des années dures*, with the prize going to the latter.

A curious choice indeed – and one that possibly says far more about the discontent in the critical milieu over the orientation taken by the officially funded

filmmaking organisms. A wonderful occasion, to be sure, for Pascal Gélinas to say in public and on prime-time francophone television some important things that need to be said. All in all, an opportunity for the revival of a long-standing political debate about film and filmmaking that has of late been sadly stifled beneath the cold, wet blanket of hard times.

If this rediscovery of a critical voice is all to the good, it leaves unaddressed one basic question – the *raison d'être* for the prize itself – namely, the honoring of the best Québécois film of the previous year. Was *La Turlute des années dures* really the best film of '83?

The short – and blunt – answer is no. *La Turlute* is a competent documentary, a work of passion, dedication, and love, that was made under impossible conditions without any official support (except for the NFB as always under-the-table, aided reluctantly by Radio-Québec). *La Turlute* is a filmic gesture of criticism, directed against the capitalist system as a whole, and more specifically against what one could call the capitalist method of filmmaking. And it is for this, one suspects, more than for any intrinsic filmic value that the film was awarded the Ouimet-Molson prize.

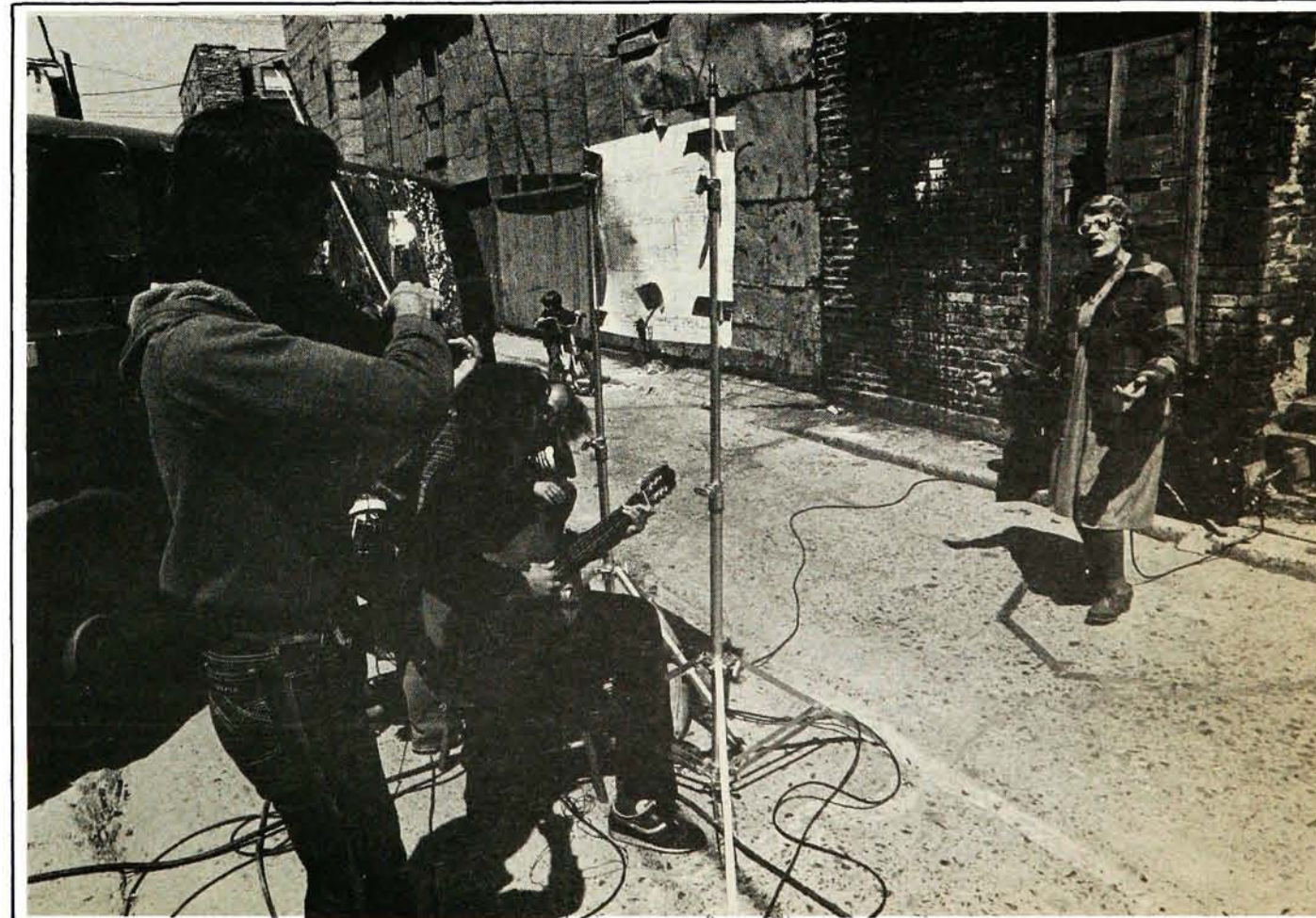
As a film, *La Turlute* accomplishes two important things: on the level of its archival footage, it rescues from oblivion, otherwise rarely seen Canadian images of the Depression. And this is a crucial act of memorization for we are all too familiar with, say, American or even German images of the dirty '30s. It is important to see what the 1929 Crash looked like in Canada: how the Montreal newspapers played the story, the consternation of Canadian stock traders, the closing of Canadian factories and so on. But once these images have been established, one can only conclude, with small comfort, that the Depression in Canada looked pretty much like it did

anywhere else in urban settings where workers have been reduced to idleness by capitalist over-production. Only in rural Quebec did the Depression look different; here, the Church-sponsored colonization of Abitibi or the lumber camps of the Quebec forests, reveal the face of an exploitation that was not only pre-capitalist, but was brutally intensified by the collapse of the outside capitalist economy pressing down upon the 'primary' natural-resource economy.

That these reminders of their double exploitation – as Québécois and as Canadians – would strike some powerful response in Québécois today is hardly surprising.

Secondly, on the level of sound, *La Turlute* accomplishes an equally important recuperation of the wordless type of folk music known as the "turlute", a kind of musical humming. The film's 25 songs are an archival feat of sound-recording, and a lively echo from an obliterated past. For these two reasons – image and sound – *La Turlute* can definitely lay claim to a fully deserved distinction as a film that has a necessity of its own. That necessity, however, does not necessarily make it the best.

For *La Turlute* makes the jump from the '30s to the present in a manner that is so blithely facile as to be questionable. Contemporary newspaper headlines and images of today's unemployed establish part of a simplistic parallel; the closing contemporary song with its message that "together we can change the world" updates the musical complaints of the '30s; and thirdly, the various witnesses in the film who lived through the '30s opine today that everything is much the same. Capitalism produces unemployment, mass unemployment produces work camps, work camps produce the recruitment material for armies; capitalism, therefore, produces war. Cut to Reagan, cut to missiles. Rousing song. End of film.



● An archival feat of sound recording, *La Turlute des années dures* captures echoes of a musical past