

Hugues Mignault's

Le Choix d'un peuple

The documentary *Le choix d'un peuple* chronicles the campaigns and outcome of the May 20, 1980 Referendum. The film begins with the results – 60% no, 49% yes – and then jumps back to the "Oui" and "Non" campaigns, their progression and, once again, conclusion.

Voice-over narration accompanies the first few minutes of the film, providing a brief introduction. After that the compilation of campaign footage and informal interviews are left to speak for themselves, which they do, often humorously.

There is a "home-movie" quality to much of the footage. It captures those funny, human moments that occur when people don't realize they're being observed. Much of the camerawork appears to be hand-held, reinforcing the spontaneity of many of the images. So the camera takes us into Claude Ryan's living room where he, with family and friends, sits eating dinner and watching the results on television; a young man is captured in close-up as he takes a large bite of his dinner. Jean Chrétien teases Brian Mulroney about the tie he's wearing. As an interview with a farmer goes on and on, the film cuts to a close-up of a cow yawning. The camera focuses on two sets of feet at a big rally; it tilts up revealing one set as belonging to a sleepy Claude Ryan.

Another perspective the film provides is how the campaigns are filtered through the media. There are several shots of television coverage of the events. Again and again, the film returns (as though to two comedy show hosts or sports commentators) to Robert Bourassa and Pierre Bourgault as they wait in a TV studio watching live coverage on a large screen, and making revealing and amusing comments.

Director Hugues Mignault remarked, while introducing his film at its Montreal première, that this film offers a chance to look back, to laugh and to cry. The film's many funny moments serve as necessary comic relief from its sorrow and passion.

Le choix d'un peuple brings the political to the personal level. More than anything, it is composed of faces, of people – some who care deeply one way or the other, and others who are uninterested, because "no matter what the result of the Referendum is they'll still have to go to work the next day."

Mignault claims *Le choix d'un peuple* is not a political film – the "Oui" and "Non" campaigns are given approximately the same amount of screen-time. But somehow, in the footage selected, the "Non" supporters seem a little less impassioned (as though, perhaps, their cause is less worthy of passion). The sad Québécois ballads that accompany scenes of grieving "Oui" campaign supporters greatly intensify the feeling of sor-

row. There is no equivalent to portray the joy of the "Non" supporters.

English Quebecers are virtually unrepresented in the film. *Le choix d'un peuple* gives the impression that sovereignty was largely a French Québécois concern – the English Quebecer present only as the threatening, unseen Other. The English are mentioned, once, by a "Oui" activist – as the enemy. At one point someone wonders how many of the "Non" votes were English.

Of the few Anglos who do make it into the film, one is a patronizing man whose French everyone (a largely French audience) laughs at. Another Anglophone man is interviewed on the street (he is saying in troubled French that he thinks it's ridiculous to even have a referendum); he turns and walks off quickly, looking embarrassed, intimidated – the camera follows his retreat, as though pleased. A businessman, Michel Gaucher, while being interviewed, takes a call from an Anglo business-associate. There seems no reason to, but the camera rolls throughout the call, the Anglophone completely unaware of the interview in progress, while Gaucher plays with a toy dumptruck as he talks nonchalantly to the English voice.

Pierre Trudeau, appropriately enough, has the last word in the film. But the final sequence undercuts the decisiveness of Trudeau's speech. A slow montage of various moments from both campaigns is accompanied by a sad Québécois ballad – bringing the sorrow of the "Oui" loss to the forefront.

The night of the film's première, the director and producer Bernard Lalonde

gave a short introduction, noting that the ending of *Le choix d'un peuple* is still undecided. One of the film's final ambiguous images supports this: two people in a crowd, one with a Quebec flag, another with a Maple Leaf, wave them back and forth in such a way that they cross and part.

The connotation is that the issue of Quebec's independence is not merely one of the past. Mignault concluded his introduction with a reiteration of René Lévesque's consoling and hopeful words that evening in May 1980: "à la prochaine fois." Many supporters in the theatre audience cheered loudly.

Fay Plant ●

LE CHOIX D'UN PEUPLE d. Hugues Mignault sc. Mignault, Bernard Lalonde, Michel Pratt, Jean Saulnier p. Bernard Lalonde assoc.p. France Morin Lemoine ed. Jean Saulnier asst.ed. Guy "Borza" Boutet mus.comp. Pierre Langevin mus.d. Marc O'Farrell sd.ed. Eric de Baysier, Noel Almey mix. Henri Blondeau cam. Bruno Carrière, Marc Bergeron, Louis de Ernsted, Robert Vanherweghem, Daniel Jobin, Richard Lavoie, Carl Brubacher, François Gill, Michel Caron, André Gagnon, Maurice Roy, James Gray, Marc Tardif sd. Michel Charron, André Legault, Antoine L'Heureux, Dominique Chartrand, Robert Girard, Gilbert Lachapelle, Jean Payette, Marcel Fraser, Marcel Delambre, André Dussault, Alain Corneau, Jean-Guy Bergeron, Robert Morin asst.d. Pierre Lacombe, Louis Laverdière, Alain Corneau, Daniel Le Saunier, Margot Ricard, James Gray, Carl Maillot, Jacques Marcotte, Jean Saulnier, Michel Pratt, Dominique Bernier, Richard Lavoie asst.p. René Clermont, Yvon Arseneault, Yvon Favre, Michel St-Laurent cam.assts Michel La Veaux, Daniel Vincelette, Pierre Blackburn, Jean Caron, Paul Gravel, Daniel Fitzgérald, Marc Tardif, Pierre Duceppe, Sylvain Brault, Madeleine Ste-Marie, Simon Poulin stills Bertrand Carrière, Pierre Beaudin p.c. ACPAV. Produced with the financial participation of La Société générale du cinéma du Québec, Téléfilm Canada, Bellevue Pathé, Les techniciens du S.T.C.Q. dist. Cinéma Libre, 4872, rue Papineau, Montréal (Québec) H2H 1V6, (514) 526-0473, 16mm, col., running time: 99 mins.

Paul Tana's

Caffè Italia

The Québécois, reassured in their *Québéctitude* by the last 20 years of nationalist agitation, have mellowed quite extraordinarily these days. Externally there's an openness to foreign influences that's unprecedented in its relaxedness, while internally it is accompanied (at last) by a welcoming recognition of the equality of the other ethnies that make up contemporary Quebec society. And Paul Tana's charming documentary *Caffè Italia*, a collective biography of the Italians of Montreal, is a reflection of this fact.

Montreal's some quarter-million Italians were the first non-Francophones (after the Métis and the Irish, but not the Ashkenazim Jews) to actually achieve a degree of integration with the surrounding Québécois population, with whom they come to share an urban neighborhood (Rosemont) and a common religion. However, the process of integration was both uneasy and not without its ambiguities. If the Italians were not, unlike the later Greek immigration, historically unprejudiced to speaking French, the fact remained that they had come, not specifically to Quebec or even to Canada ("Canada?" says one of the film's interviewees, "nobody had even spoken about it"), but to America – and America was obviously English and dollar-speaking. Much of the charm of *Caffè Italia* lies in its documenting the Italians' own slow realization that the part of America they had ended up in was, indeed, somehow different. This realization, which the film nicely captures in its contradictoriness, in turn, reflects back on the audience as a shared recognition that, whether our ancestors were *habitants* or the uprooted peasants of Europe, it's a shock on both sides to find that we inhabit the common modernity of today's Quebec. But in that shock lies the basis of a community, and it's in contributing to that new-found sense of community that Tana's film becomes, more than just a film, but a genuine cultural moment.

For *Caffè Italia* is a case-study in culture shock, and the clash of contending modernities. Between 1902 and 1931, until it was halted by Mussolini, Italy exported 11 million emigrants, and generally the poorest of the *mezzogiorno* peasantry who could not be absorbed into the growing proletariat of the industrializing northern Italian cities. Spared from proletarianization in the Old World, the immigrants to the New World arrived just in time to join the ranks of the floating proletariat that industrialized America, including, in Canada, the building of what the Italians called "our CPR."

In a docudrama sequence so utterly mind-boggling that it has to be seen to be believed, Tana brilliantly captures some of the weirder cultural manifestations of the deculturation wrought by

● *Le Choix d'un peuple*: a chance to look back, to laugh, to cry



Photo: Bertrand Carrière