

Quebec film highlights depression, recession in guilt and thought provoking musical tragedy

By ALEX PATTERSON

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attention to minor details which, in other accounts, would require pages of explanation. In one specific instance, an American visitor to Managua who becomes visibly disturbed by the disappearances, murders, and acts of violence around her notes with a great sense of curiosity that *Time* fails to mention a single word of it. The little anecdote is a telling portrait of our own perceptions of the Third World. The Sandinistas have been organizing in Nicaragua since the 1960s against the Somoza dictatorship which has been carrying out atrocities since 1932, yet that nation's problems finally catapulted to the headlines with the on-camera murder of a CBC reporter in 1979.

Too often, we ignore the development of stories which inevitably burst upon us with ferocity, capturing the media's attention through an act of violence. People are too full of outrage to explore the history and motives for such an act. As the war against Nicaragua continues to widen, and we see the occasional story about new US military advisors, North Americans should be considering the history which has led to the current struggle of the Sandinistas. Jakober's *Sandinista* is as good a place as any to start, and like any good novel, it provides us with answers that serve as a base for new questions.

This weekend you can take advantage of "a rare opportunity to see vital new cinema." *From Quebec: Films by Women* is a three-day mini film fest at the recently resurrected Cinema Lumière on College Street. Featured are four highly acclaimed films concerned with social issues.

Presented by the Development Education Centre (DEC Films), the series boasts the award-winning feature-length documentary on the Great Depression's effects on Quebec, *The Ballad of Hard Times* (La Turlute des Années Dures). A "musical tragedy" comprised of period footage, newspaper headlines, interviews with men and women who survived it, and songs of the day *The Ballad of Hard Times* is a painless lesson in Canadian history. In fact, the film has been assembled with such skill that it is highly entertaining as well as thought (and guilt) provoking.

Beginning with the stock market crash in 1929, filmmakers Richard Boutet and Pascal Gelinat trace the most important events of the notorious decade that followed as it affected Canada in general and Quebec in particular. The old newsreels have been edited with such verve and sense of rhythm that they achieve a kind of fluidity of motion seldom seen in movies, let alone serious documentaries. The marching feet and speeding trains take on a life of their own, inspiring the mood of crisis and chaos that its creators undoubtedly intended.



CANADIAN GOTHIC: Quebec settlers facing the depression as documented in *The Ballad of Hard Times*.

Intercut with these sequences are scenes with individuals who lived through it all and tell their own stories in personal terms. The subjects Boutet and Gelinat have found are lively, articulate and altogether winning. They talk about their hardships and their protests, and some-

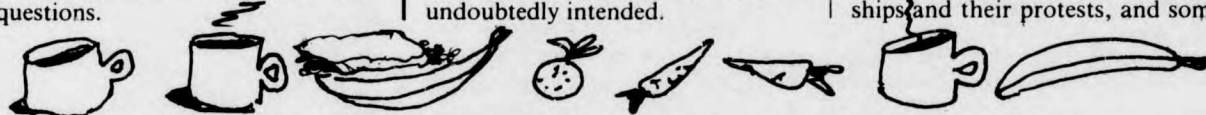
times even sing folk songs of the 1930s. (Apparently, there is an untapped wealth of French-Canadian ditties of the period—both plaintive and satirical—as evocative of the province's Depression experience as Woody Guthrie's are of the Oklahoma Dustbowl.) There are

also songs on the soundtrack by professional singers and musicians; the use of the word "Ballad" in the title is more than justified.

Like the recent documentary about American Communists *Seeing Red* (which this film resembles and to which it is in many ways superior), *The Ballad of Hard Times* jumps rather abruptly in chronological order, and leaps into the present. We are introduced to fishermen who, no matter how hard they work, can't earn enough to live on because of pricing decisions made by businessmen in different cities. This is a legitimate way of drawing comparisons between the Depression and the current recession, and all to the good. However, the film also wants to enlighten us about the arms race and the peace movement, and here it runs the risk of going off-topic. While the subject of the connections between industry and militarism is an important one, it is also a huge one; too huge for the last 15 minutes of an investigation of the dirty '30s.

Also on view are *Quel Numéro/What Number?* (techno-peasants toiling in "the electronic sweatshop"); *Not Crazy Like You Think* (life in an unconventional mental home) and *It Can't Be Winter, We Haven't Had Summer Yet* (a recently-widowed older woman learns to cope on her own).

Two films per night will be shown, and scheduling information can be obtained by calling DEC Films at 597-0524. All are definitely worth a look for those seeking alternative entertainment this weekend.



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