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THE FABULOUS



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REEL REVIEWS

By WILLIAM CLAIRE

Today's class concerns the Canadian film industry. Pay attention.

When the money ran free and the federal government advocated that Canadians should have their own film industry, funding was given to producers who met certain requirements. The requirements had a lot to do with politics and little to do with art, creativity or any other factor of the human imagination.

The operative word was quantity: the number of Canadian actors, Canadian locations, Canadian technicians and, most importantly, Canadian dollars.

Then the Americans came in with slick, meaningless plots, pretending Canadian towns and cities were American towns and cities and capitalizing on AM radio teen beat issues of the day.

Many of these films were never released for commercial distribution. But the producers never really cared anyway. These productions were tax write-offs. And tax write-offs were even beneficial if the movie was never released. That way, there would even be less profit and more of a deduction.

One such example of economic astuteness and film sleazery is *The Class of 1984*. Originally released under a different title, the film went nowhere.

The plot jumped on the socially marketable violence of the punk phenomenon and its music. This raison d'être was wedded with the old idealistic-teacher-in-the-school-of-ruffians chestnut.

Lots of gratuitous violence, lots of fluff and foolery.

Oh, yes. The requisite serious overtones were there, too. Based on statistics showing 28,000 acts of violence in schools in the United States, the film, in a semi-sci-fi manner, projected to 1984, wondering what would happen in our dear old alma maters.

Sadly, the movie advocates violence for the sake of violence. Retributive, personal justice becomes the only effective way to fight meaningless acts of violence and brute stupidity.

Biased to the extreme in promoting this point of view, the law always favors the hoodlum. Can't even throw the so-and-so out of school, the principal laments. (Why not?)

The idealistic, new music teacher (Perry King), justifiably driven over the brink by the brilliant, misunderstood hoodlum student (Timothy Van Patten), unjustifiably takes the law into his own hands with a bloody vengeance.

Roddy McDowall portrays King's confidant, the biology teacher with a drinking problem. Our hoodlum hero drives McDowall over the edge, too.

McDowall uses his hurt puppy look to his best advantage and might have drawn some tears from the audience, except for the incompetent direction and the four-dollar editing budget.

Filmed on what must have been an extremely low budget, the film uses one secondary street in downtown Toronto for all its outdoor shots. In addition, all cars on that street drive in the same direction.

Continuity is also a problem. In one scene, the high school is totally defaced with painted and sprayed graffiti and other expressions of intellectual student protest. Later in the day, everything's spankingly Mr. Clean spotless.

Oh, yes. the downtown Toronto high school's name? Good old Lincoln High, after that famous Canadian prime minister.

So, we have an American star, a British co-star, and Canadian filler. The biggest Canadian name is Al Waxman. He plays a world-weary cop who looks like the King of Kensington recovering from a bender.

Fortunately, the days of Hollywood North are winding down. Many tax write-offs projects will never be seen at your local popcorn emporium. Watch for them on TV as examples of Canadian movie making.

The initial rationale for this injection of government funding was to build an independent Canadian movie industry with a distinctive Canadian identity.

Final exam will be to find one film that meets this description.

Class dismissed.