

ENTERTAINMENT

The bureaucracy of dirty work

Costa-Gavras film studies men and power

By IRAMICAY

By June, 1940 the French armies had retreated from their struggle to fight off Nazi occupation and the German troops had entered Paris. One year later Maréchal Pétain had risen as the country's new leader and his makeshift government was comfortably ensconced in the new capital, Vichy.

The Vichy government was forestalling the bloody struggle that would eventually be necessary to free the country and had only to give obsequious respect and attention to the benign Nazi occupation commanders to retain effective control of France.

This is the scene set at the beginning of *Special Section*, Costa-Gavras' sixth, and most recent, feature film.

A group of young intellectuals

join together to rally resistance. Choosing individual assassination as their method of action, with their one revolver the group kills a German sea captain chosen arbitrarily in a Paris Métro station. The young resisters escape capture and are not seen again in the film, but their action in a period that has previously seen only vocal protest to the occupation stirs both the Nazis and the Vichy cabinet to action.

The French minister of the Interior is so eager to appease the Germans and maintain the status quo — so as not to interrupt his rise in power — that he willingly cooperates with them in avenging the dead sailor with six French lives as they demand.

But since the real killers escaped, it's up to the Vichy government to

furnish six victims to be guillotined.

Pucheu, the Interior Minister, whose resemblance to Richard Nixon is remarkable, proposes a bill to the cabinet that would grant the government the power to reclassify the seriousness of the offenses committed by political prisoners already in jail. In effect, the law, declared after their "crimes" had been committed, would hold the prisoners responsible to its statutes retroactively.

At first the Minister of Justice is horrified; the new bill counters all notions of constitutional legality. But in a process that begins with him and eventually travels down the bureaucratic structure of his department, the minister is convinced, and a Special Section of the court is established to try the prisoners selected at random among the Jews and Communists on file.

The process by which the special tribunal is created, and the ensuing horrifying fiasco of civil rights that the trial becomes, are Costa-Gavras' chief motivations in directing the film:

"What I am talking about now, and have been since *Z*, is the relationships between men and power. This can also be called politics. What holds my interest and attention are the invented mechanisms established by man which eventually escape his control and end up controlling man himself," he says.

The filmmaker also suggests that when the times comes for the government itself to act illegally — witness Watergate — someone can always be found in the bureaucracy to do the dirty work. Whether they



A scene from *Special Section*, Costa-Gavras' latest film, starring Robert Yves.

are motivated by ambition, fear or routine, those down the chain of command can always be manipulated or replaced.

Costa-Gavras' previous films have been based, more or less, on the current affairs of the times of their release—the coup in Greece or the Mitrone affair in Uruguay, for example. They've also been photographed in more of a documentary style. The vérité image quality of the previous films suited their "newsevent" feel.

Special Section is a strikingly beautiful film, boasting the lighting and colour technique of cinematographer Andreas Winding.

The technical image quality combined with the art direction of Max Douy elevate the film to membership in the group of projects both European and American, that appear infrequently to announce an update in the visual state of cinema art.

Special Section is a complex story about the subtleties of human behaviour in political situations. The director exercises complete control of each scene. Costa-Gavras has assembled a cast of about 25 professionals, none of them singularly important, but all very believable in their roles as cogs in the Vichy bureaucracy.

For Better or for Worse is in a class by itself

By DAVID ROCHE

Claude Jutra's latest film, in which he performs as actor, author, and director, is a close-up study of a marriage in trouble, or more exactly, a study of two troubled individuals whose problems are revealed and exacerbated by having chosen to live together. A technically polished, professional movie of the kind we've come to expect from Quebec, *For Better or for Worse* boasts fine photography and editing. It is also Jutra's talkiest movie to date.

Aspects of Jutra's story resemble serious theatre of the late sixties, i.e., much earnestness and a certain reality-illusion conflict in the plot. There is a telescoping of time so that one day in the marriage is actually some fifteen years; there is fantasy played for real, and there is even a madwoman haunting the corridors of the couple's apartment building.

But of themselves, these are not real setbacks. Tight yet suggestive writing is always at a premium in the movies, and it's more than welcome in Canadian features.

Jutra's wit is evident in each of his capacities: as director, he keeps the story going at an even pace, and his dialogue is constantly novel without being flashy. He is especially adroit at portraying the fear and self-disgust of his characters. His acting adds a

further refinement — as the husband he is a very likeable guy, with the sort of human fallibility that made James Stewart and Henry Fonda so popular. He's warmly funny, although he has dignity, too.

Monique Mercure as Loulou, the upstairs neighbor, is a delight. Toronto theatre-goers have seen her as Rose Ouimet in Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles Soeurs*, but here she plays a better-educated, more hedonistic woman — a nice foil for Monique Miller's bourgeois dissatisfaction as Jutra's wife.

The vision of marriage expressed here is sardonic to say the least, and the quality of civilized bitterness is new to films on this theme. The way Jutra combines this with the absurd and even slapstick elements puts his newest feature in a class by itself.

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