



OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

VINCENT LINDON
AT WAR
A FILM BY STÉPHANE BRIZÉ

NORD-OUEST FILMS PRESENTS

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2018 | France | Drama | French | Scope | 5.1 | 113'

Photos available on www.mk2films.com



SYNOPSIS

Despite heavy financial sacrifices on the part of their employees and record profits that year, the management of Perrin Industries decides to shut down a factory. The 1 100 employees, led by their spokesman Laurent Amédéo, decide to fight this brutal decision, ready to do everything to save their jobs.

INTERVIEW WITH STÉPHANE BRIZÉ

DIRECTOR

Why this film?

To understand what lies behind what you see in various media that regularly go out to cover sporadic violence accompanying industrial unrest. And instead of “behind,” it would be better to say “before.” What occurs before these sudden outbreaks of violence? What roads lead to it? Anger, nurtured by a sense of humiliation and despair, building over weeks of struggle, and revealing, as we will see, a colossal imbalance in available forces.

What are the force fields around which the film was structured?

The film’s cowriter Olivier Gorce and I started out working on twin axes — conceiving of the film as a romantic epic while piecing it together with no dressing-up of real life. The film evolved around the description of an economic mechanism that ignores human considerations in parallel with the observation of the rising anger of workers caught in the tumult of plans to shut down their factory. An anger embodied notably by a union representative who deploys no political rhetoric, just the necessity of giving voice to his pain and indignation as well as that of his coworkers. His point of contention: refusing to be stripped of his job to allow a company to make even more money than it already does, despite that same company pledging to protect the workers’ jobs in return for them making financial sacrifices.

Is the situation depicted in the film exceptional?

No, absolutely not. If that were the case, it would have been a way of making the real say something that it does not say. This situation is so unexceptional that one hears of similar situations every day in the media, but without truly coming to terms with the issues and mechanisms at work. The example of Perrin Industrie shown in the film, is that of Goodyear, Continental, Allia, Ecopla, Whirlpool, Seb, Seita, and so on. In every case, expert analysis has revealed the lack of economic difficulties or absence of a threat to competitiveness.







You have made a very political film.

Political in the etymological sense — it observes affairs of state — but I am not the mouthpiece of a particular party or union. I simply scrutinize a system that is objectively coherent from the markets' viewpoint but, just as objectively, incoherent from a human viewpoint. And those two viewpoints are set against each other in the film. The human dimension against the economic dimension. How can these two world views possibly overlap? Can they even coexist nowadays? I find the subject interesting because I'm not convinced that many people grasp exactly what is behind all these plant closures that you hear about every day in the media. I don't mean factories that close because they are losing money. I mean companies that close plants despite their being profitable.

The situation described in the film appears to be simple: “Workers reject the sudden shutting down of their factory.” There is nonetheless a whole legal framework that must be respected. How do you approach such material?

Olivier Gorce and I met a vast number of people to be sure we grasped the ground rules in this type of situation: workers, HR execs, CEOs, lawyers who specialize in workers' rights or in defending business interests. Our purpose was to avoid summarily setting dogmatic ideas alongside each other, rather we aimed to pit radically different viewpoints against each other, using solidly researched arguments.

Our meetings with a lawyer who specializes in defending workers whose factories shut down enabled us to understand the various stages of the process as they are laid down in law. That knowledge informed our encounters with Xavier Mathieu, a former union leader at Continental, who recounted how the conflict he experienced in 2009 had been organized and structured.

After these meetings, we found ourselves facing a huge volume of information. The aim then was to distill the narrative arc of a man and a group swept up in a battle to save their jobs while respecting the due process of law. All without drowning the audience in legal nuances and, above all, without locking ourselves into a story that illustrated an intrinsically French reality. We had to sift through it all, find ways to make intricate issues easily understood, define the starting point of the conflict, as well as its end point, and transform all the workers' means of action into moments of hope or dejection. One fundamental issue, however, was never called into question: our workers are simply trying to protect their jobs. Until they reach a point where a number of them no longer want to continue the struggle—or no longer can—and decide to accept the company's offer of a severance package. Which is very powerful dramatically because two persuasive viewpoints face off. With the constant necessity of allowing these viewpoints to be heard as objectively as possible.

What emerges from the film is that in the end every side—workers, executives, politicians—has potentially valid arguments. It is not a simplistic confrontation of good-guy workers versus cynical bosses and politicians.

That was one of the project's fundamental complexities—peeling away the layers of a system without reducing the various protagonists to caricatures. There is an economic system that is served by men and women whose interests are quite simply not those of the workforce. But if there is one thing that emerges clearly from all that we saw, processed and analyzed, it is that the playing field is not level. As long as it is legal for a plant that is running a profit to shut down, the balance of power is skewed from the get-go. You see it at every stage of the conflict described in the movie.

Until the mindblowing conclusion, when we find out that although a plant slated to shut down must by law be put up for sale, there is no law compelling the owner to sell it. In that context, the workers have practically no chance of winning the battle. They can resist, hinder the implementation of layoffs for some time, impact the company's image through spectacular actions that make headlines, or cause it to lose money through sit-ins, which major industrial groups obviously don't like one bit, but in the end the workers' financial fragility and lack of legal recourse mean they are unlikely to stop the plant from shutting down. The company's strategy in this instance is to justify its sudden decision with arguments that must seem as objective as possible. Often by crunching numbers to back up their arguments.

To embody this the man fighting for his job and the jobs of his coworkers, you once more turned to Vincent Lindon.

It's a relationship that grows film after film, year after year, and is truly extraordinary. It's not so much the trust that exists between us that is essential to this process, but the complete absence of mutual sycophancy. After three films, in which I had Vincent playing men off words, it was necessary to develop our practice and radically change the nature of the character and his arc. While continuing the necessary observation of the world. In this film, he is a man who speaks out, resists, fights back loudly. We both needed this because it's one of our defining traits. We are invested with anger. A shift in the premise; an evolution of our practice: this role as a leader and this story fulfilled both those requirements.





The interaction of Vincent Lindon with non-professional actors brings to mind *La loi du marché*.

La loi du marché marked the beginning of a new stage in my career, both in style and substance. This film was about using the experience of that earlier one as a stepping stone to revisit the method in order to take it even further. At the same time, it was also about continuing the process of observation of mechanisms of constraint operating in the world of work.

With regard to working with non-professionals, they bring truthfulness to the dialogue I put in their mouths—the truthfulness of experience. That is colossal. It comes into play in the context of Vincent's exceptional ability to embody a character, combining to create a representation of reality that fascinates and touches me enormously. Casting was a huge undertaking—we met hundreds and hundreds of people in Paris and the Lot-et-Garonne region where the film was shot. Exceptional encounters, incredible men and women, absolute commitment from everybody, a shoot of quite rare intensity. There were clearly moments when people had a sense of fighting to keep open a plant where they worked.

Can you describe your practice with Vincent Lindon and the other actors?

Everyone is treated exactly the same. The script is extremely precise. I give everyone their lines to learn. Nothing revolutionary, basically. Somewhere along the line, a story comes down to structured text and dialogue. All that interests me is that the result looks natural, as if it occurred at that particular moment. Whereas everything is thoroughly prepared, of course, and by absolute necessity in the light of the specific, technical topic we're dealing with. There was no room for approximation. Same goes for technical aspects. The framing must seem spontaneous, whereas everything is planned out in detail.



What was your technical and aesthetic approach?

We shot with one camera sometimes, and sometimes with two or even three. It depended on what we were aiming for. It may sound paradoxical, but a scene with 250 people does not necessarily require more cameras. I needed my three cameras for the scenes with fifteen people talking around a table. We needed to be “where it’s happening” to catch what’s being said, at the same time as we were “where it’s happening next” to catch what’s coming next. So we moved forward like that, walking a fine line between the precision of the script and the illusion that everything is happening on the spur of the moment.

You punctuate the story with TV news reports. Why?

Firstly, because the media play a major role in how a conflict of this kind is assimilated. It’s impossible not to involve them in the story, so it became a useful way of putting over information that facilitated understanding of how the situation was developing. It was also fascinating to juxtapose our news footage and movie footage. The film never attempts to put the media on trial, but it’s interesting for the audience to observe the disparity between the supposedly objective reporting of a situation in news bulletins and the reality of mechanisms at work behind the scenes of a conflict. That reality is captured here by the cinematic process. Broadcast news has no time for nuance. It merely reports events with some pictures, a voiceover and snippets of interviews. The result is that we know something is happening somewhere, but it is impossible to transcend our personal convictions. There is simply

no room for that. Let’s think back to footage of Air France executives having shirts ripped off their back by strikers. The violence of that footage undermines the legitimacy of the workers’ cause because any normal person immediately sympathizes with the person who seems on the verge of a lynching. The violence of one misstep caught on film negates legitimate anger and struggle. It then becomes easy for politicians to jump on the bandwagon, naming and shaming so-called thugs. I don’t think any worker gets up in the morning intent on ripping the shirt off of the HR exec’s back. That footage of Air France executives embroiled in the workers’ anger is what started me thinking, what happened earlier for it to come to this? Months and weeks of struggle lead to incidents like that. News cameras are not there to record all that. Responsibility for showing that falls on movies and fiction.

But the documentary camera could also capture it. Why not choose that approach?

Krzysztof Kieslowski said he had given up documentaries in order to go places to which his documentary camera gave him no access. I would say the same. Fiction allows me into places that would often be impossible to access as a documentary-maker. I refer to the meetings behind closed doors, with the President’s special adviser, for example. After completing an extensive period of research, I take the material that interests me in order to dig deeper in whatever seems important and pare down whatever seems less so for my story. I construct the story in such a way as to highlight exactly what I want to emphasize. In this kind of story, fiction must make a pact with reality, pledging

not to dress it up. And that pact must be respected from the first to the last minute, with no concessions.

For the music, you invited a composer to write his first film score.

Yes, his name is Bertrand Blessing, and he’s best known for his work with dance companies. I met him well before we started shooting, at a show that combined music, slamming and acrobatics. The energy of his music keyed into the energy I instilled in my story, although it was not even fully written then. I went to see him after the show and we soon began working together. I must thank Nord-Ouest, who produced the film on a very tight budget, for giving me the chance to pursue and test my intuitions. It’s an incredibly positive and trusting working environment. Bertrand’s music captures the chaos, and the workers’ tenacity and pride. That’s what I asked of him. It takes us into the realms of anger and rage of the workers’ combat.

A 23-day shoot is very short.

Indeed, it is. Very short for a film like this one, with so many people on screen. But I was eager for the energy on set to resonate with the energy of the combat engaged in by workers in a situation such as the one depicted in the film. In both cases, the countdown is ticking, it’s a constant battle against time. No comfort, no respite, just a struggle to secure what is essential. At the same time, I could not really afford another approach. One thing the reality of cinema has in common with the reality of the world is that the market is not crying out for films of this kind. They need to exist, however. Even more than ever.



FILMOGRAPHY STÉPHANE BRIZÉ

FEATURE FILMS

- 2018 **AT WAR**
Cannes 2018, Competition
- 2016 **A WOMAN'S LIFE**
Venice 2016, Competition
- 2015 **THE MEASURE OF A MAN**
Cannes 2015, Best Actor Award
- 2012 **A FEW HOURS OF SPRING**
Locarno 2012, Piazza Grande
- 2009 **MADemoiselle CHAMBON**
- 2007 **AMONG ADULTS**
- 2005 **NOT HERE TO BE LOVED**
San Sebastián 2005, Competition
- 1999 **HOMETOWN BLUE**
Cannes 1999, Directors' Fortnight

FILMOGRAPHY VINCENT LINDON

SELECTION

- 2018 **AT WAR** by Stéphane BRIZÉ
Cannes 2018, Competition
- 2018 **THE APPARITION** by Xavier GIANNOLI
- 2017 **RODIN** by Jacques DOILLON
Cannes 2017, Competition
- 2015 **THE MEASURE OF A MAN** by Stéphane BRIZÉ
Cannes 2015, Best Actor Award
- 2015 **THE WHITE KNIGHTS** by Joachim LAFOSSE
- 2015 **THE MEASURE OF A MAN** by Stéphane BRIZÉ
Cannes 2015, Best Actor Award
- 2015 **DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID**
by Benoit JACQUOT
- 2014 **MEA CULPA** by Fred CAVAYÉ
- 2013 **BASTARDS** by Claire DENIS
- 2012 **AUGUSTINE** by Alice WINOCOUR
- 2012 **A FEW HOURS OF SPRING** by Stéphane BRIZÉ
- 2011 **PATER** by Alain CAVALIER
- 2011 **THE MOON CHILD** by Delphine GLEIZE
- 2011 **ALL OUR DESIRES** by Philippe LIORET
- 2009 **MADemoiselle CHAMBON**
by Stéphane BRIZÉ
- 2009 **WELCOME** by Philippe LIORET
- 2008 **ANYTHING FOR HER** by Fred CAVAYÉ
- 2007 **THOSE WHO REMAIN** by Anne LE NY
- 2007 **COULD THIS BE LOVE?** by Pierre JOLIVET
- 2006 **ACCORDING TO CHARLIE** by Nicole GARCIA
- 2005 **THE MOUSTACHE** by Emmanuel CARRÈRE
- 2005 **L'AVION** by Cédric KAHN
- 2004 **JUST TRUST** by Étienne CHATILIEZ
- 2003 **THE COST OF LIVING** by Philippe LE GUAY
- 2002 **FRIDAY NIGHT** by Claire DENIS
- 2001 **CHAOS** by Coline SERREAU
- 2001 **DAY OFF** by Pascal THOMAS
- 1999 **MY LITTLE BUSINESS** by Pierre JOLIVET
- 1999 **NO SCANDAL** by Benoit JACQUOT
- 1998 **THE SCHOOL OF FLESH** by Benoit JACQUOT
- 1998 **PAPARAZZI** by Alain BERBÉRIAN
- 1997 **SEVENTH HEAVEN** by Benoit JACQUOT
- 1997 **FRED** by Pierre JOLIVET
- 1996 **STRANGLED LIVES** by Ricky TOGNAZZI
- 1996 **LA BELLE VERTE** by Coline SERREAU
- 1996 **THE VICTIMS** by Patrick GRANDPERRET
- 1993 **ALL THAT... FOR THIS?!** by Claude LELOUCH
- 1992 **THE CRISIS** by Coline SERREAU
- 1992 **THE BEAUTIFUL STORY** by Claude LELOUCH
- 1990 **GASPARD ET ROBINSON** by Tony GATLIF
- 1990 **THERE WERE DAYS... AND MOONS**
by Claude LELOUCH
- 1990 **C'EST LA VIE** by Diane KURYS
- 1988 **L'ÉTUDIANTE** by Claude PINOTEAU
- 1988 **A FEW DAYS WITH ME** by Claude SAUTET
- 1987 **A MAN IN LOVE** by Diane KURYS
- 1986 **BETTY BLUE** by Jean-Jacques BEINEIX

CAST

Laurent Amédéo
Vincent LINDON

Mélanie (CGT activist #1)
Mélanie ROVER

Plant CFO
Jacques BORDERIE

Chief Financial Officer
David REY

SIPI activist #1
Olivier LEMAIRE

Head of HR
Isabelle RUFIN

SIPI activist #2
Bruno BOURTHOL

CGT activist #2
Sébastien VAMELLE

Mayor of Agen
Jean-Noël TRONC

Unions' Lawyer
Valérie LAMOND

TV Reporter
Guillaume DARET

President's Special Adviser
Jean GROSSET

CFE-CGC activist #1
Frédéric LACOMARE

Special Adviser's Assistant
Anthony PITALIER

Laurent's ex-wife
Séverine CHARRIÉ

Economist
Romain de BOISSIEU

Confederation Hostess
Marie NADAUD

Confederation Security Guard
Rachid MAMLOUS

Confederation Exec #1
Grégoire RUHLAND

Confederation Exec #2
Daphné LATOUR

Mr Censier (CEO Perrin France)
Guillaume DRAUX

CGT activist #3
Letizia STORTI

CFTC activist #1
Carole BLUTEAU

CFTC activist #2
Cédric PERSONENI

FO activist #1
Laurent BOUKHARI

CFE-CGC activist #2
Gilles DORBES

Middle Manager
Cédric DAYRAUD

SIPI activist #3
Stéphanie PIETROIS

SIPI activist #4
Rachid HARYOULI

PR Manager
Jean-Claude LAUGEIS

DIMKE CFO
Pieter-Jan PEETERS

DIMKE CEO
Martin HAUSER

DIMKE Lawyer #1
Marie-Hélène FOURNIER

DIMKE Lawyer #2
Laurent BRUNEAU

CGT activist #4
Teddy PERROT

FO activist #2
Michel FREYNE

Laurent's daughter
Emma MONNOYEUR

Laurent's grandson
Aaron BAUDSON

Laurent's son-in-law
Mathis RAMAGE

TV and radioreporters
Laurent DESBONNETS
Mélanie BONTEMES
Alexis CUVILLIER
Nicolas DE LABAREYRE
Caroline THEBAUD
Angélique BOUIN



CREW

Director

Stéphane BRIZÉ

Producers

Christophe ROSSIGNON
and Philip BOËFFARD

Scenario

Stéphane BRIZÉ
and Olivier GORCE

With the collaboration of

Xavier MATHIEU,
Ralph BLINDAUER
and Olivier LEMAIRE

Associated Producers

Vincent LINDON and Stéphane
BRIZÉ

Line Producer

Eve FRANÇOIS-MACHUEL

Original Music

Bertrand BLESSING

Casting

Coralie AMÉDÉO A.R.D.A.

Director of Photography

Éric DUMONT

Editing

Anne KLOTZ

1st Assistant Director

Émile LOUIS

Script

Marion PIN

Sound Engineer

Emmanuelle VILLARD

Sound Editing and Mix

Hervé GUYADER

Set Design

Valérie SARADJIAN A.D.C.

Costumes

Anne DUNSFORD

Production Manager

Christophe DESENCLOS

Location Manager

Kim NGUYEN

Post-production Manager

Julien AZOULAY

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OCS,
CINÉ+

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