
Review: Movie is homage to internationalism

Reviewed Work(s): The Army of Crime (L'armee du crime) by Robert Guédiguian

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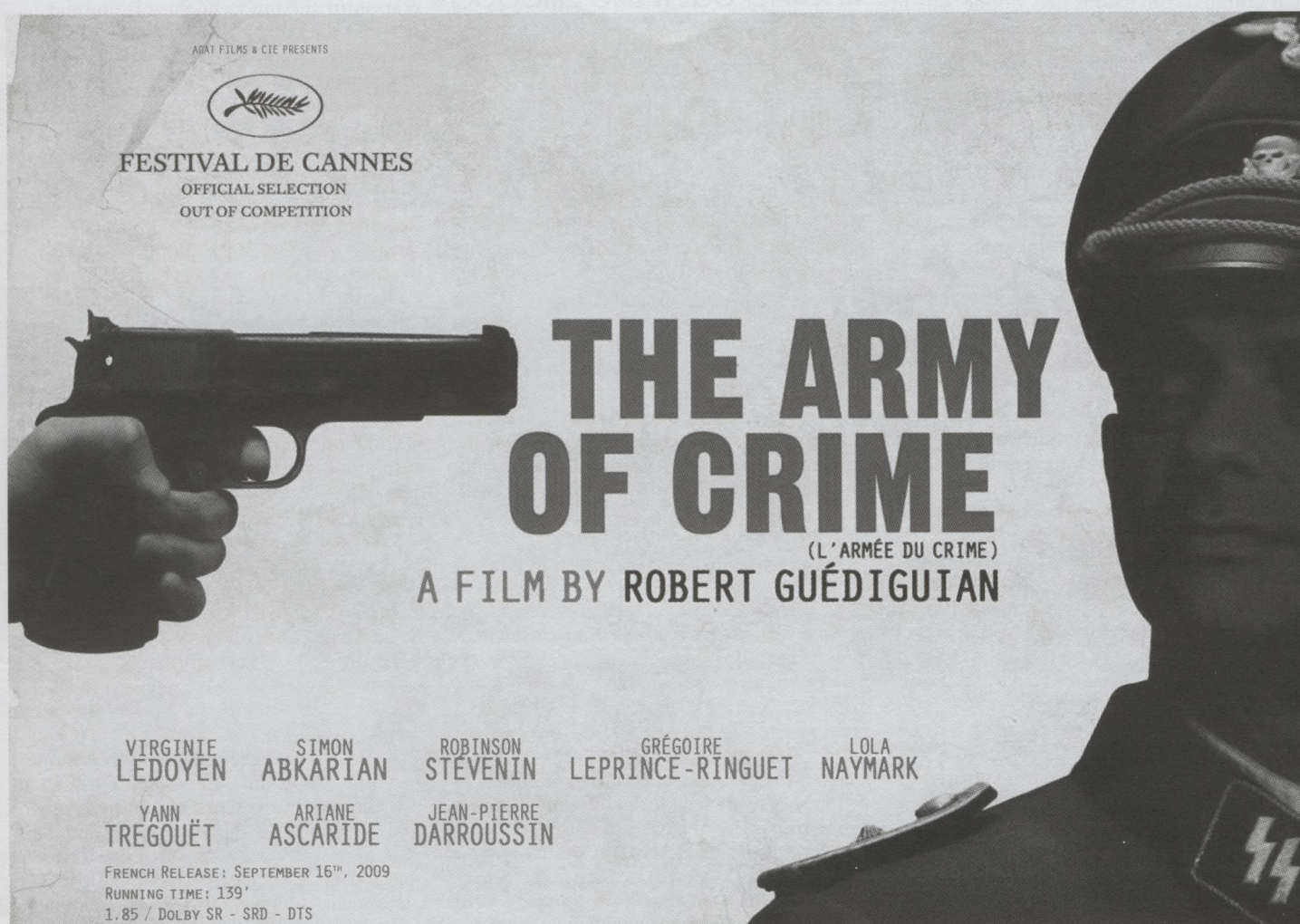
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Reviews



Movie is homage to internationalism

The Army of Crime (L'armée du crime)

Dir: Robert Guédiguian, 2009

It is hard to make a film about the Second World War that shows us something we haven't seen before. Yet Guédiguian's beautifully tragic film manages to do this by steering well clear of the battlefields and combat that for many of our generation have come to symbolise this war.

The story is instead focussed on a group of men and women who resisted the Nazi occupation of

France, but who were never acknowledged by history for their efforts. The protagonists are an assorted group of communists from around Europe, including Poles, Romanians, Italians, Spaniards, Armenians and others seeking refuge from fascism in France. Several are also Jewish and have borne the brunt of the anti-Semitic dictates of the Nazis. Their actions led to the infamous *Affiche Rouge*, a red poster put up all over France to denounce the occupiers as an 'army of crime'.

The discrimination they face

contrasts sharply with the seeming normality of life in Vichy France. Officers walk arm in arm with smiling girls, the sun shines and German soldiers play football in the park inviting Frenchmen to play with them. Yet anti-Semitic propaganda is already present in newspapers. It is within this context that the young Jewish communists begin to react against the increasingly anti-Semitic policies of the Vichy government. This uncoordinated and sporadic resistance is condemned by their leaders, and soon channelled into politically motivated and organised resistance by the Communist Party as a whole once the Nazis invade the USSR.

The question of the legitimacy of violent resistance to tyranny is one of the main issues addressed

in the film. A particularly poignant part of the film shows Missak Manouchian, a poet whose family were massacred in the Armenian Genocide, struggling to reconcile the need for violent resistance with his personal morality. He faces the dilemma shared by all those who fought in the war. Eventually he has to choose sides. He does so with dignity, fully understanding what it means. One of the film's strengths is that it treats this complex subject with subtlety. Ultimately the message is clear when one of the characters states 'We fight for life. We kill people but we're on the side of life'. This is not a glorification of violence but rather an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of using violence to resist greater violence. ►

Reviews

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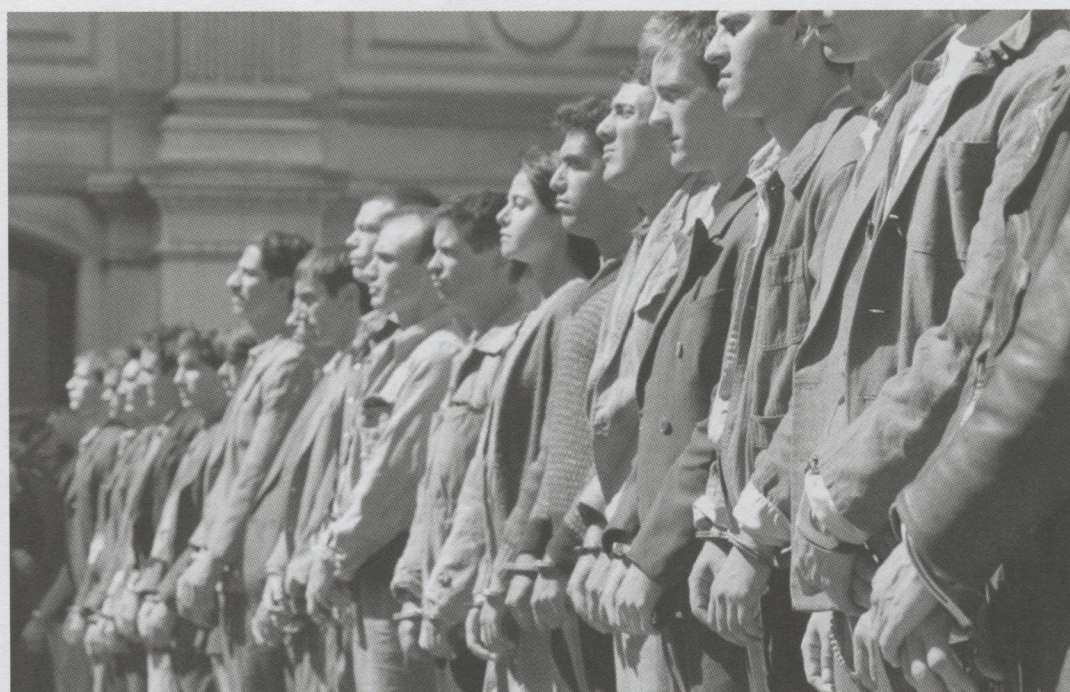
► In another scene successive members of the 'army of crime' go into a brothel full of Nazi soldiers and French prostitutes intending to bomb it. The first to go in comes back unable to fulfil his mission. He is criticised by the others, but none of those who follow are able to do it, observing that the women are too lovely. This scene is a rare moment of comic relief but also serves to show their humanity.

Vichy France appears as a place of ambivalent politics amid the normality of everyday life. After a student at an elite school is beaten up for painting a hammer and sickle on its walls, the headmaster insists that his school is not a political place and will stay neutral. Staying neutral was not an option in a Europe sliding into cataclysm. This was clearly understood by the Jews and communists of occupied France.

The group carry out a variety of violent acts that succeed in casting fear into the hearts of the enemy and those who collaborated. This success also brings them to the attention of the Gestapo and the Vichy police. What follows are scenes reminiscent of Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*. The role of the French police in assisting the Nazi soldiers is forcefully exposed, most notably by offering their services in torture *par excellence*. Their common struggle 'against Bolshevism' is more important than defending the sovereignty of their country, let alone the lives of foreign refugees and French Jewish citizens.

The false patriotism of the Vichy police and the collaborators who acted as their informants contrasts sharply with the resistance being led by foreigners, whose actions proved, in the light of history, far more patriotic. This film is an homage to internationalism, showing that human values are universal and not circumscribed by nationality, religion or ethnicity. It reminds us of the immense courage and historical importance of those who fought fascism in occupied Europe, from the Spanish Civil War onwards.

■ **Marcela Navarrete**



Excellent update for tenant champions



Repairs – tenants' rights

4th edition, by Jan Luba QC, Deirdre Forster and Beatrice Prevatt. Published by the Legal

Action Group. ISBN: 978-1-903-30767-0

The introduction to the fourth edition of *Repairs – Tenants' Rights* provides an excellent overview of the changing context within which housing practitioners have been working in this area since the last edition was published in 1999.

Importantly, the authors remind the reader that the updating of the book has been prompted by the fact that the latest available data indicates that there are still over 1.2 million non-decent privately

rented homes and over 1.1 million non-decent social rented homes in England alone.

The authors provide a comprehensive treatment of the legal framework and all relevant issues in a highly practical guide to the conduct of claims for housing disrepair in the County Court and actions under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in the Magistrates' Courts.

The section on remedy and damages draws on material presented regularly over the years in *Legal Action* and will assist practitioners when they are using the housing disrepair protocol and at other junctures in the legal process, such as track allocation in claims where tenants have moved on, or where outstanding remedial works have been completed.

The latter is a familiar battleground, not least because of

the absence of public funding for claims allocated to the small claims track. Indeed, the authors highlight recent failed attempts by landlord representatives to raise the small claims threshold; a move that would have effectively shut out those tenants daunted by the prospect of negotiating the courts without legal support.

There are useful precedents in the book that will assist those new to the subject. The authors have also updated the section on technicalities; useful for those who otherwise might not know one end of a soffit or quoin from another.

The updating of this publication will be welcomed by all practitioners working within a quite technical area of practice but one in which very tangible results are regularly secured, be it the defeat by way of counterclaim of possession proceedings brought on the basis of rent arrears, or the ostensibly straightforward matter of ensuring that a damp house becomes dry and appropriate payment of compensation made.

■ **John Hobson**