



FILM: **DEAR COMRADES!**

FDG RATING: 3.8 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Andrei Konchalovsky: *director*
Yuliya Vysotskaya: *actress, Lyuda*
Yuliya Burova: *actress, Svetka*
Vladislav Komarov: *actor, Loginov*

DATE: September 19, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **DEAR COMRADES!**

The 2020 film, **DEAR COMRADES!**, was Russia's entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 93rd Academy Awards. It recreates the Khrushchev-era, June 2, 1962 massacre of workers who were protesting at the Novochoerkassk Electric Locomotive Plant, an event that was covered up, shrouded in secrecy by the Soviet government for 30 years. The Soviet government forces fired into a crowd of unarmed protesters. The bodies were removed to different towns then buried in secret. The atrocity was meticulously suppressed, never to be officially investigated and brought to light until 1992, after the Soviet Union's collapse.

The black and white cinematography makes the film very realistic, effectively placing the viewer in that time period, watching the events unfold through the eyes of Lyuda, a middle-aged staunch loyalist, active Communist Party functionary, a Novochoerkassk city official who, by the way, is having an affair with her boss, a local handsome, KGB operative. They are aware of rising food prices, increased production quotas at the city's electric locomotive factory and the looming possibility of a workers' strike. Lyuda grumbles about the party's general direction under Khrushchev, reminiscing about how much better things were under Stalin, whom she idolizes. Loginov reminds her of her privileged position, which grants her access to coveted goods, and warns her of the consequences of not toeing the party line.

But things are much worse for the workers who, in desperation, organize a mass strike, which includes Lyuda's teenage daughter, Svetka. She works at the Electromotive and does not share her mother's staunch loyalism. As the protests escalate, local party bureaucrats don't take it as seriously as they should. They label the protesters as hooligans and gangsters who are exploiting a "temporary hardship," and ought to be stamped out. Even Lyuda stands up in a room full of male officials and zealously demands that unruly protesters be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

The power of the film is that we know the workers as well as the bureaucrats will be betrayed by the system they believe in. (The deceptive propaganda of solidarity). We hear one protester say, "The Russian military would never actually shoot us."

It's especially interesting to see the generational differences not only between Lyuda and her daughter, but also as one published critic observed, "Lyuda's aging father sits in a corner, wearing his old military uniform and waiting for death. In this simple tableau of domestic discord, you see a multigenerational microcosm of Russian history, the dreams and delusions of the past and the soon-to-be-broken promises of the future jostling alongside each other in the same enclosed space."

Lyuda is shocked at what happens when the Russian military confronts the protesters. As the massacre starts, the party members try to leave the factory and can't. Chaos ensues as the colleagues frantically try to find a way out. The whole confrontation is seen through Lyuda's eyes, while crawling to safety even as one of her colleague's gets struck by a stray bullet. We witness the chaos through the windows of a shop where Lyuda is hiding and the scene outside is presented almost as choreographed madness. It's the illusion that she is safe but she really isn't which is the thread that runs throughout the film.

She survives but can't find her daughter who was among the thousands in the town square. Lyuda embarks on a harrowing quest through blood-spattered hallways and bureaucratic loopholes, desperate to find her daughter alive or at least obtain confirmation of her death. Her unlikely companion on this journey is a KGB

agent, Viktor who is moved to help her for reasons that are never expressed. The further Lyuda goes and the more she discovers, the more her confidence in her party ideals crumbles.

The film is especially educational from a historical perspective. The director exposes the magnitude of the comprehensive cover-up, "the practiced speed with which the government's suppressive apparatus roars to life", as stated by a published film critic. One resident reviewer noted that the blood wouldn't wash out of the street so a layer of concrete was poured over it. Another observation is that the film purposely mimics the style of a Soviet film made in 1962, that it is deliberately ironic.

Many of us were reminded of protests here in the US, Kent State, the Vietnam War.

An interesting side note is that the film maker's father wrote the Soviet national anthem which may be why, several times in the film, we hear Lyuda sing the lyrics to a very nationalistic, propaganda sounding song.

Extremely well-acted with exceptionally effective cinematography, Dear Comrades! roused a relatively solid 3.8 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net

www.filmdiscussiongroup.com