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TEN DAYS TO DIE

Directed by G. W. Pabst. Produced by Carl Szokoll. Scenario by Erich Maria Remarque, based on the book by M. A. Musmanno. Director of Photography, Gunther Anders. A Cosmopolfilm (Vienna), distributed by Inter-continental Films. Austrian. English sub-titles. Cert. A. 101 mins.

Hitler, ALBIN SKODA; Wuest, OSKAR WERNER; Eva Braun, LOTTE TOBISCH; Goebbels, WILLY KRAUSE; Himmler, ERICH SUCKMANN; Fegelein, JULIS JONAK; Magda Goebbels, HELGA KENNEDY-DOHRN; Albert Speer, EDMUND ERLANDSEN; Martin Bormann, KURT EILERS; Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, LEOPOLD HAINISCH; Colonel-General Alfred Jodl, OTTO SCHMOELE; General Krebs, HERBERT HERBE; General Burgdorf, ERIK FREY; SS "Obersturmfuehrer" Günsche, HANNES SCHIEL; Field Marshal Ritter von Greim, OTTO WOEGERER; and Hanna Reitsch, HELENE ARCON.

A PART from a freakish *Don Quixote*, with Chaliapin in a memorable performance, I could not recall seeing anything of G. W. Pabst's work since his classic about a mine tragedy, *Kameradschaft*, made in 1932. This gap of 24 years made the prospect of seeing *Ten Days to Die* a matter of conjecture. So many German directors had wilted in that time, notably E. A. Dupont. Would Pabst stand up to modern standards?

Ten Days to Die (in Germany *The Last Act*), brilliantly scripted by Erich Maria Remarque, unfolds the story of Hitler's final physical and mental collapse, and his sordid death. It is a piece of cinema worthy of comparison with the greatest of Pabst's silent films. It is grim, deliberate, uncompromising, and quite horrifying. It makes the Russian *The Fall of Berlin* seem no more than a cheap parody.

The director has retained his gift for naked realism. He gives a ring of authenticity to the smallest details which fascinates me—Hitler's reading glasses, his signature at his marriage, and so on. The resemblance achieved by Albin

Skoda is remarkable; the study of advanced paranoia, compelling.

Thirty-two-year-old Oskar Werner, an over-rated actor in *Decision Before Dawn* and *The Angel With the Trumpet*, here gives a superb performance as Captain Wuest: arrogant, extrovert, moving in his scenes with a terribly disillusioned boy-soldier.

There is a slight theatricality about one or two of the duologues at which purists may cavil. I do not quarrel with the introduction of fictitious incidents and characters . . . they give the film a power and purpose it could not have otherwise built up. The fictional episodes do not detract from the broad historical truth of the whole.

The style of directing is solid and highly individual, borrowing nothing from the contemporary American cinema. It eschews dynamic cutting, intricate or highly mobile camera work, and thereby knocks on the head one fallacy which has grown dangerously of late—that such ingredients are *essential* to great film directing. There are hardly any close-ups; instead a large number of telling long-shots, with the occasional shock of a menacing shadowed profile.

Pabst has always preferred to make his point by the strength and shock of calculated visual evidence, rather than by wordy propaganda. He is less at ease with the spoken message. Thus occasional *verbal* pleas for sanity, in the script, have been cited as "dubious" anti-Nazi references. I think a study of Pabst's work makes suspicion unjustified. He strikes me as a real humanist. (I now wish he could film Musil's disturbing book about a pre-1914 Boys' Military Academy, *Young Torless*. The insight necessary to point the moral of this book would reveal Pabst's talents to the full.)

This is a controversial film. It is also a challenge. Too many people are misled by the detached anonymity which is Pabst's trademark. Such detachment naturally seems alien to the British, and its effect on this film appears at first as enigmatic and heart-warming as Himmler's pince-nez. Yet there are moments when Pabst shows us what the end of a world is like. His penetration and intelligence require equal efforts from his audience.

PETER JOHN DYER

Actor Skoda & Director Pabst

