

## Document Citation

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Author(s)	Gordon Gow
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# THE ORGANIZER

Directed by Mario Monicelli. Produced by Franco Cristalli. Screenplay by Age, Scarpelli and Monicelli. Director of photography, Giuseppe Rotunno. Editor, Ruggero Mastroianni. Music, Carlo Rustichelli. Art director, Piero Tosi. A Lux-Vides production, distributed by Connoisseur. Italian. English subtitles. Original title *I compagni*. Cert. A. 126 mins:

*Sineaglia*, MARCELLO MASTROIANNI; *Raoul*, RENATO SALVATORI; *Niobe*, ANNIE GIRARDOT; *Martinetti*, BERNARD BLIER; *Maestro Di Meo*, FRANCOIS PERIER; and *Pautasso*, FOLCO LULLI.

Giuseppe Rotunno, the director of photography who worked on Visconti's *The Leopard* and Zurlini's *Cronaca familiare*, has given *I compagni* a gradation of greys, sometimes sharply etched, sometimes softened, and the effect, as these images flow and merge, is refreshing to behold. Almost any frame could be plucked from the film to stand in its own right in a photographic exhibition. Workers and their machinery in a textile mill, a man and a woman beneath a bridge, a train at a station, moments of violence or of humour or of squalor, provoke an urge to stop the projector and simply gaze for a time. Yet since movement is there, and is of the essence, we cannot pause; what we are watching is cinematography of the highest order.

Of course, there is a perpetual argument, which will probably never be resolved, as to how much of what one actually sees in the cinema can be credited to the director and how much to the lighting cameraman (a gawky term for which a substitute must be found whenever some lighting cameraman has time to think of one). I am inclined to favour Rotunno in this case. Monicelli, the director, has had a deal to do with the extraordinarily clever groupings, no doubt: neither realistic nor theatrical, they make a tricky compromise that never quite accords with the subject, which is a strike that took place in Turin toward the end of the nineteenth century.

There is no earthly reason why a man like Monicelli, who is concerned with such obvious commercial propositions as *High Infidelity* and *Casanova '70*, should not take time in his career to tackle something as uncommercial as this, and to do it in a manner far removed from what we are accustomed to expect of the Italian cinema. However, the conflict between labour and capital is not set forth in the full-blooded dramatic spate that the

Italians more than any others could justify. Instead it is subdued, restrained, sad, and so untypical that one could easily admire it too much. Because, necessarily, it does become a terrible bore in time: collective action is never as likely a dramatic theme as individual rebellion, and the only asset in *I compagni* is the dim-wittedness of the strikers, who are so imposed upon that one's heart bleeds for them automatically.

Actors, and good ones, are involved, snatching individual reactions from the broader pattern of injustice. French and Italian, they pull their familiar and welcome weight: Annie Girardot, Bernard Blier, François Périer, Folco Lulli, Renato Salvatori. All the same, the argument is so obvious, the injustice so extreme, that there is no basic drama; merely gloom. Rising, after some thirty minutes, from the dramatic drabness, is Marcello Mastroianni, trying with what looks like desperation to dredge an individual fragment from the depths. He represents a schoolmaster, come from Genoa, scruffy and evidently smelly, removed from life and dedicated to a cause. Inspired but ineffectual, he rallies the workers for a time, but his powers of organisation are limited by his personal blight. It could be a tragic portrait. Mastroianni, good as he is, has been permitted or encouraged to make the mistake of playing it a touch too true. A militant reformer of that period might well have been as wild-eyed and eccentric as this, but the veracity invites a laugh. The tragedy is diffused, the portrait is a showpiece that overwhelms the purpose.

This flawed excursion into awkward territory is not easy to accompany. The conflict is too uneven, the execution too conscious. What remains is what meets the eye, the pictures themselves, and for these Rotunno must be recognised as a master of his craft.

GORDON GOW

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