

A letter on *It All Starts Today*

6 September 1999

Dear editor,

It is rare to find a film, in the current intellectual climate, which deals in an honest and realistic manner with the circumstances of one's working life and social existence. Bernard Tavernier's *It All Starts Today*, which screened too briefly at the recent Wellington Film Festival, was therefore an utterly welcome and convincing portrayal of the daily existence of a school teacher in a poor working class school.

No matter that the film and the accents were French, the faces of the children white, and the setting a declining former coal-mining centre in rural France. The themes depicted—the situations and battles faced by the teachers and the students in this school—are universal.

I found myself going into the desperately impoverished households of the school's neighbourhood, and recognising there the plight of my own students, who mostly have brown faces and speak Samoan, but whose economic circumstances are identical. I recognised the same exhausting daily struggles to educate young people in the face of inadequate resources, bureaucratic indifference and political double-talk.

The best thing about this film is that it exposes as the shallow self-serving lies that they are, all the prevailing official notions about educational failure—namely that it is caused by recalcitrant students, under-performing teachers and uncompetitive schools due for a dose of so-called free-market "discipline".

At the heart of *It All Starts Today* is a warmth and humanity that highlights the common cause of students, parents and teachers in the struggle for education.

Regards,

JT

New Zealand



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