

20 February 2006

The *Edukators* (Your Days of Plenty Are Numbered), directed by Hans Weingartner, written by Weingartner and Katharina Held

One of the most interesting German-language films to appear in recent years is *The Edukators* (*Your Days of Plenty Are Numbered*), by the Austrian filmmaker Hans Weingartner (*The White Sound*, 2001). A success at last year's Cannes Film Festival, the film has since found distribution in over 40 countries, including Japan, the United States, various Latin American countries, Europe and in Australia.

The film contains elements reminiscent of the German film *Nachtgestalten* by Andreas Dresen (See "Nachtgestalten [Nightshapes]: a new film by Andreas Dresen ... A wind from the East") which appeared six years ago. At that time the liquidation of large sections of industry in the former Eastern Bloc states and in East Germany and the shock of mass unemployment and social decline that resulted were still being actively felt by millions.

In Dresen's *Nachtgestalten*, one felt that the director had not only internally absorbed these events but that he was also personally moved by them. He was thus able to produce a film that did not moralise, but came alive through vivid and natural characters. Homeless youths were not presented as wretched or exotic people from the fringes, somehow "different," but as real and living young people who happened to fall out of mainstream society.

The Edukators is marked by a similar vitality and proximity to reality. Since Dresen's film, the social cracks in German society have only grown larger. Weingartner's film reflects this, portraying an intractable conflict between the poor and the rich. The film's scenes are not melodramatic and adopt the relaxed style of a youthful comedy.

The title of the film itself has had its own dynamic. A German reader commented on the Internet that he arrived at the film's web site because after reading the original German title, "The Days of Plenty are Numbered," he thought it was a slogan for a protest being organised against social cutbacks.

The film begins with the violent dispersion of a Berlin protest against child labour in Asia by baton-wielding police.

One of the demonstrators is Jule. She wants to live wild and free, and is concerned with injustice in the world.

Jule is only 20, however, and her fate has already been more or less sealed. Having fallen behind in her auto insurance payments, she ends up being ordered by a court to pay €100,000 in damages to a company manager after she accidentally hits the rear end of his luxury Mercedes. The high payments cause her to have problems paying the rent and she flees her apartment.

Jule initially views the court's judgement as fair, as she had not paid her car insurance premiums, until she meets Jan, the flatmate of her boyfriend Peter. Jan explains to her that this well-to-do high-flyer has no right to destroy the life of a young woman. He says that the court judgement, which covers up for such a decadent lifestyle, is unjust. Jule had not seen it that way and she is enlightened and influenced by Jan's argument.

Jan and Peter do not participate in protest demonstrations. During the evenings they break into luxury villas in Berlin, rearranging the furniture into heaps and leaving behind notes like: "You have too much money," or the threat, "Your days of plenty are numbered," usually undersigned "The Legal Guardians." With their motto "Meet one, educate a hundred," their actions are designed to set an example and bring forth a mass resistance movement.

However, when they break into the villa of Jule's debtor, Hardenberg, he surprises them by his unexpected return and they see no alternative but to kidnap him. At an isolated hut in the Alps they discover the ice-cold capitalist possesses a humane character. He explains that before he became an executive he was, like them, a critic of capitalism. He was a leader of the German Socialist Student Union (SDS) and was friends with one of the icons of the student movement, Rudi Dutschke. During a session of marijuana smoking beside a campfire, he wallows in the memories.

Like other former would-be revolutionaries, Hardenberg has since come to the conclusion that it is impossible and senseless to reject capitalism, and lectures the new generation in a self-satisfied tone: Experience has demonstrated that in every group there is a leader, and with this oppression begins. The reality is that everyone lives under capitalism and is corrupted by it. It all begins when at

some point you start to crave for a car that runs reliably. The attempt to overthrow the system only leads to the dead end of terrorism. And so forth. The typical justifications of someone who has made peace with the establishment.

Jule is frustrated and feels that she is at the mercy of the system. Her enormous debt has forced her to earn lots of money in a hurry. Jan, on the other hand, views the current protests as remnants of the unsuccessful student movement of the 1960s and describes how he and many others feel like they are doomed from the very beginning.

Hardenberg, correctly, draws parallels between the villa break-ins and the actions of the left terrorist Red Army Faction (Baader-Meinhof group) in the 1970s, and he rejects the perspective of spreading fear and terror. In reality, such issues have not interested him for a long time. He made his choice years ago. More at ease, he cooks for his kidnappers and feels increasingly superior to them, enjoying his kidnapping as if he were on vacation. After getting to know Jule, he withdraws his demand for the repayment of damages.

The Edukators portrays young people who are confronted with far sharper levels of social injustice than in previous decades. These changes impart a new intensity to their process of self discovery, their rebellion against petit bourgeois narrow-mindedness. They yearn for many of the same things as the previous generation: romance, love and anarchistic fun. At the same time, particularly in Jan's case, there is a strong element of social hatred. He calls luxury perverse, because he sees things immediately and directly. Jan exudes an honest straightforwardness and naïveté, without being cynical.

It is a credit to the filmmakers and a strength of their work that a reconciliation between Hardenberg and his kidnappers does not take place, something one feels could have happened in such a film. Although they develop a mutual understanding for one another, Hardenberg is a social type that the young adults do not trust. Their feelings are fully justified, as events pan out: hardly a moment after Hardenberg is free again, an anti-terror police unit storms Jan and Peter's apartment with machine guns.

The film shows a new generation of young people whose protests are more than just the lingering echoes of the 1968 student movement, but have developed out of new and different social conditions. Hardenberg is representative of a significant layer of people who started out as protesters and ended up the most important props for the system. The former leader of the German Greens and former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer is perhaps the most notorious example. The young people in the film have had enough of these so-called '68ers.'

However, behind the actions of the film's main figures lie

conceptions that were popular back in Hardenberg's student days, and continue to find expression today, including in anarchistic circles. Weingartner spent some time as a squatter and *The Edukators* reflects some of his own experiences; however, one must say he has not worked through all the political and ideological issues.

Such a quasi-anarchist outlook leads to the same dead end that faced some members of the '68ers'—those who didn't make their peace with capitalism but turned to terrorism or other acts of despair, such as the Red Army Faction. Their response is played out in futile individual actions (gestures, in fact) against a system, which in their eyes appears able to exert unbroken influence, with the help of the mass media, on the broad masses of the population.

The film ends with an unconvincing *deus ex machina*. Without any apparent way forward, the filmmakers offer up a supposedly positive and healthy message with an optimistic appeal to the uninterrupted energy and restlessness of young people to retain the idea of a possible utopia. However, the trio's next plan is to shut down all of television reception in Europe.

In reality, their actions will lead to nothing. The three would inevitably be snapped up by the security apparatus of the state and locked away without having achieved anything of significance.

Nevertheless, the fact that *The Edukators* has been successful in finding such a large international, predominantly youthful, audience is a indication that many young people identify with the experiences and feelings of the film's protagonists and are asking similar questions.



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