

He was the president of this union,³ and I told him that the union's decision was in fact an infraction of the laws laid down by his father. His father had passed the antistrike laws, which automatically prevented any lockout on the part of the employers; what had happened to me was, in effect an employer's lockout.

SAVIO: What were the reasons for it?

ROSSELLINI: I don't remember, really, I don't remember.

SAVIO: Like some sort of personal attack? It's odd.

ROSSELLINI: Exactly, a personal attack. It happened after *Un pilota ritorna* and *L'uomo dalla croce*, immediately after these two films. Why, I do not know. Reasons were always so hazy then. But the same thing is still going on now. I don't know whether you are aware of all the attacks levelled against me at the Centro Sperimentale, though nobody seems to know what might have prompted them. Still, there they are. Back then, they were expressed in a different way, so I talked about it with Vittorio Mussolini who managed to get me the permission to work. I wasted no time and jumped on a project of Peppe De Santis called *Scalo merci*, and in a month we got everything ready. But then I fell ill, I had tonsillitis, just as I was supposed to begin shooting, and so I was two days late. They had already built the sets at the Titanus, on Monte Mario. I started shooting on July 19 . . . Not a good day to start a movie.⁴

*Radio interview recorded on September 22, 1974;
collected in Francesco Savio, Cinecittà anni trenta,
Rome, 1979, Vol. III, pp. 961-966.*

³ Vittorio Mussolini has no memories of this story, nor does Franco Riganti, who organized the "union"—actually an association of producers aiming to regulate distribution—Rossellini refers to.

⁴ July 19 was not a good day because Rome was bombed by the Allies that day, and the railroad station Rossellini was shooting in was destroyed.

A GREAT ITALIAN FILMMAKER: ROBERTO ROSSELLINI

BY GEORGES SADOUL

Italian cinema has been the revelation at the Cannes Film Festival. If Alberto Lattuada's Il bandito [The bandit], a strong but uneven work, was controversial, everybody admired Roberto Rossellini's Open City.

This film, which has been successfully showing in New York for a year but has unsuccessfully sought a distributor in Paris since the beginning of this year, will at last appear on a Parisian screen. Rossellini's latest film, Paisan, has already been announced and a few film clubs will soon show it to their audiences. Many of those who have seen it have had the sort of revelation that only cinema can, albeit too seldom, bring. As for me, I was as enthusiastic about it as when I first saw Caligari, Potemkin, and Peter Ibbetson.

I am quite sure that, if Italian cinema keeps its promises, it will occupy the same position in postwar Europe that German expressionist films and Swedish cinema occupied in the twenties. With Italian cinema, everyday life invades the screen. There is no subject that Rome or Milan filmmakers won't tackle, and all their topics are current.

Next to these films, contemporary French cinema, still hiding behind history and the novel, smacks of academism, while American film is like a greenhouse plant, divorced from both nature and life.

Rossellini looks like the young Jacques Feyder, and his features have the same delicacy and gentleness as those of the Soviet filmmaker Yutkevitch.

ROSSELLINI: The idea of my first important movie came to me during the historical events that provided me with its subject—which I immediately jotted down with the help of my scriptwriter, Sergio Amidei. We started shooting the film barely two months after the liberation of Rome.

In spite of the almost total lack of film, we shot most of our scenes on location, in the same places where the events we were reconstructing had actually occurred.

In order to have the money to start the movie I had to sell my bed. Then I sold a bureau and a wardrobe with a mirror. Everything else followed suit. I had to borrow money, and quickly realized that if I gave it back on time I could borrow more. And so, with the help of a few friends I was able to get the seven or eight million lira I needed. We were even able to rent a studio for the scenes that were supposed to take place at the Gestapo headquarters.

At the very beginning *Open City* was a silent movie, not out of choice but of necessity. Back then a yard of film cost sixty lira, if we had recorded the sound we would have had to spend hundreds of lira more. Once the film was finished and edited, we asked the actors to dub themselves. And as I am a rather careless technician, I have to admit that there are a few moments where the lip movements are not in sync with the words . . .

As far as I am concerned, I don't like sets, I hate makeup, and prefer to do without professional actors. As you saw, *Paisan* was filmed entirely on location. A foundation cream is enough to alter the real texture of the skin and the lines of a face. I am going to tell you a secret: if, in my films, I have used people who had acted before it was because, more often than not, they were actors without a name, and, often, without technique. However, in *Open City* I have made two exceptions to this rule.

The role of the priest is played by Aldo Fabrizi, a comic actor specializing in monologues. He played a very tragic role admirably. This film also marks the debut of Anna Magnani, a music-hall actress, who had already held a few minor roles in operettas, but had never acted in a movie except as a smart extra . . . I don't know whether you agree with me, but I believe she is one of the finest actresses in the world.

SADOUL: I couldn't agree more. This woman, who is neither very young nor very attractive, has been for many of us—and I am thinking

in particular of our friend Eluard—one of the biggest revelations at this Cannes Film Festival.

ROSSELLINI: To choose my actors for *Paisan*, I placed myself, with my cameraman, in the center of the village where I meant to shoot such and such an episode of the story. The passersby immediately gathered around us and so I picked my actors out of the crowd. You see, when you deal with good professional actors, they never exactly fit your own idea of the character you wanted to create. So, in order to create the character he has imagined, a filmmaker has to engage in a real battle with his actor until he manages to bend him to his will. Since I don't feel like wasting my energies in such a struggle, I only use casual actors. Besides, it's very hard to get a professional to work well with an amateur. So, I've given up working with good actors . . .

Amidei and I never complete our scripts before we get to the locations where we are going to shoot the film. Often circumstances as well as the performers that chance has brought us, force us to change our original plans. Even the dialogue and its intonation depend on the amateur actors who are going to utter it; all we have to do is leave the performers the time to get adjusted to the atmosphere of the shooting.

So, *Paisan* is a film without actors in the proper sense of the word. The black American you found so remarkable in the Neapolitan scene claimed he had played a few minor roles but I knew he had lied in order to get the part. All the monks in the scene of the convent are real monks. The minister and the rabbi of the American army who talk with them are also a real American minister and a real American rabbi. This is also true of the peasants who live in the marshes around Ravenna and speak the dialect of the region, just as the Sicilians at the beginning of the film speak the Sicilian dialect. The English officers are as authentic as the German soldiers I picked out of a group of prisoners. And if you thought that the young American in the Roman episode had some talent, you might as well know that the only camera he had ever faced was that of a photographer who used him for a razor-blade ad.

What strikes one in Rossellini's methods is that they resemble those of the best new movie directors all around the world. This is how, in England, Basil Wright and Paul Rotha make their documentaries, or in

America the great Flaherty, in the U.S.S.R. Yutkevitch and Zguridi, in Switzerland Leopold Lindtberg with La Dernière chance [The last chance], or, finally, in France, René Clément with La Bataille du rail [The battle of the rails], and Georges Rouquier with Farrebique.

I ask Rossellini about his future projects.

I have just signed a contract with a big American company. If I have to work in the United States it will be to shoot a film taken from a novel I find very good: *Christ in Concrete*, or, if you prefer, *Jésus Christ dans le béton*. It is the story of the construction of a building by Italian masons. There is also another subject inspired by the marriages between American men and Italian women. Fifty-eight thousand soldiers have found their wives among my compatriots. It hasn't always worked out. On the other hand I'd much rather go on filming in Italy. There are plenty of contemporary subjects. I am thinking of Naples with its hordes of abandoned children, its beggars, its thieves. One should also do something about that camp near La Spezia where all the Jews not allowed to return to Palestine have been gathered.

We talked for a long time. I told Rossellini about all my hopes for Italian cinema. But he doesn't seem to know the work of other Italian directors very well. He hasn't yet seen Lattuada's latest film, Il bandito; he respects Mario Soldati's later works as well as his intelligence, and he speaks enthusiastically of Il sole sorge ancora [The sun rises again], a film about the Italian partisans directed by his friend, Vergano, and of Sciuscià [Shoeshine], a movie about the life of young Neapolitan shoe shine boys that De Sica has just finished shooting. I don't know whether Italian film, as burdened as French film is by hard commercial contracts with America, will be able to sustain its current impetus in the next few years, but I know that, since its liberation and its resurrection, it has given us four or five of the most original films that have been produced in the world in the last twenty years.

"Un Grand réalisateur italien, Rossellini, qui vendit ses meubles pour tourner Rome ville ouverte, a recruté les acteurs de Païsa parmi les badauds," in L'Écran Français, no. 72, November 12, 1946, pp. 17-18.

GERMANY YEAR ZERO

BY ROBERTO ROSSELLINI

In *Open City* I treated the problem of the occupation of a world-famous capital, the center of Christianity; it was a direct statement of what I myself saw and suffered. I deal with the problem of liberation in *Paisan*. In my opinion, there remained two great themes of modern significance, which derived from the experience of war each people in its own way had passed through: the first, the atomic bombings of Japan, the second, the destruction of Germany. As a European I chose the theme of conquered Germany and made *Germany Year Zero*. For various reasons I have not yet been able to work on the atomic bomb picture.

I made a child the protagonist in *Germany Year Zero* to accentuate the contrast between the mentality of a generation born and brought up in a certain political climate, and that of the older generation as represented by Edmund's father. Whether he excites pity or horror I do not know, nor did I wish to know. I wanted to reproduce the truth, under the impulse of a strong artistic emotion.

Although the story of Edmund and his family was invented by me, it nevertheless resembles that of most German families. Thus it is a mixture of reality and fiction treated with that license which is the prerogative of any artist. There is no doubt that every child, every woman, and every man in Germany would see in my film at least some phase of their own experience.

Germany Year Zero was financed by a major French company and I set up the general headquarters of my filmmaking group in the