
FlickheadFilm Review
By Ray Young

Paul Jones and Paul Jones

The Committee

A lost treasure from the 1960's comes out of hiding

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As a Pink Floyd fan during the 1970's, I was always searching for anything that had to do with the band, especially their film work. Barbet Schroeder's *More* (1969) and *La Vallée* (1972), which featured Floyd soundtracks, became accessible on the midnight show circuit; Ian Emes's animated *French Windows* (1973) was included in *The Fantastic Animation Festival* (1975); and Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970) was still in

limited circulation. But the one movie that eluded me above all the others was *The Committee* (1968). Reference books and magazines often confused it with *A Session with The Committee* (1969), a documentary about the comedy troupe The Committee, which had nothing to do with Pink Floyd. Either way, a soundtrack was nonexistent, and *The Committee* became something of a nagging obsession.

Now, seemingly out of nowhere, *The Committee* has arrived on DVD. And while the selling point may once have been the soundtrack (Pink Floyd's background music is rather slim and spare), what we find is an original and often fascinating parable about independence, conformity, free thinking, and orthodoxy at war within the individual and his place in society. Given some time and enough exposure, it could eventually be acknowledged as one of the key films of the Sixties.

Written by Max Steuer, an author and lecturer in economics and social sciences, the script touches on some of the areas explored in films by Antonioni, Resnais, and Peter Watkins's *Privilege* (1967). That last film's star, Paul Jones (the front man of the pop group Manfred Mann) plays the central figure in *The Committee*. After a surprising episode which illustrates his antisocial impulse, Steuer then transforms the narrative into a hearing on personal desire colliding with what was once called 'The Establishment.' He doesn't limit his vision to critiquing the corporations and corporate-influenced bourgeoisie who control the public through advertising and the economy, but also recognizes the broader spectrum of the committee-minded sensibilities which manipulate us in all phases of life.

Prefacing the film is a quote by economist Joseph Schumpeter (1883—1950), author of *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers; 1942). Schumpeter once analyzed the inherent flaws of capitalism and suggested its evolution into a non-Marxist form of socialism. While his words made a superficial connection to the trends and fashions of the 1960's counterculture—the climate in which *The Committee* was made—they're far more fitting today, as imperialist capitalism systematically cuts back civil liberties and threatens the future and existence of democracy:

What strikes me most of all, and seems to me to be the core of the trouble, is the fact that the sense of reality is so completely lost.

One feels oneself to be moving in a fictitious world. This reduced sense of reality accounts for reduced sense of responsibility and for the absence of effective volition.

One has one's phrases, of course, and one's wishes and daydreams. One has one's likes and dislikes. They do not amount to a will.

For the private citizen musing over national affairs there is no scope for such will and no task at which it could develop.

He is a member of an unworkable committee, the committee of the whole nation, and this is why he expends less disciplined effort on mastering a political problem than he expends on a game of bridge.

As Jones's character discusses his actions to the Committee Director (Robert Lloyd), he trivializes the needs and rights of the man he attacked (Tom Kempinski). All this takes place at the Committee itself, a cushy weekend retreat of croquette, cocktail parties, dancing (to the music of on-screen guests, *The Crazy World of Arthur Brown*), and a bit of soul searching. Steuer's screenplay is rife with oblique references and

metaphors, questioning common lethargy over personal betterment, and the dearth of compassion in a buy-and-sell world. It may be a 60's film, but *The Committee* is still razor-sharp and pertinent. By addressing the truths that are neatly tucked away between the lines of daily drama, it encompasses the lies we manufacture—to ourselves, to others, the charade that's conducted throughout our lives—to create that drama, intentionally or not.

Among the many remarkable things one can say about *The Committee* is that it is Max Steuer's sole endeavor in the cinema. He wrote and produced the picture, and entrusted first-time director Peter Sykes to give life to his vision. (Cinematographer Ian Wilson filmed it in nicely muted black and white.) Clocking in at under an hour, the feature defies simple categorization in more ways than one: Steuer and Sykes were clearly sensitive to the film's thrust and pared down its lofty themes to the bare essentials. At ninety minutes, it could have easily collapsed under its own weight.

Included on the DVD is a fifty-minute documentary offering recently filmed interviews with Steuer and Sykes, who clarify some points in the film while raising still others.

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- Visit [The Committee](#) website.
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