

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Those who make tomorrow (1946)

Akira Kurosawa; Hideo Sukigawa; Kajiro Yamamoto: co-directors

OVERVIEW

As part of their process of postwar 'democratization,' in Japan, the Allied Information Sector took on the role of promoting the use of labor unions; such, for instance, as the Japanese Film Studios Union. The underlying value of unions was that by consciously working together, for a common purpose--which could range from the desire for more pay to the desire to excel through cooperation--the newly occupied nation could through unions build something of its own version of the democracy which the West had inherited from the Greeks. As it happened, one of the readymade efforts under way, in occupied Japan: the effort to strike against the nationalized film industry. (Nothing that smacked of nationalism could be tolerated in postwar Japan.) A strike was called in to aid with this unionizing effort, which the Allies saw as an opportunity both to build the collective spirit in Japan and to support an industry which had great potential for spreading the gospel of democracy. Kurosawa, who was eventually to minimize his role in the present 'missing' film, even to omit mention of it in his autobiography, was talked into participating in this unionized creation.

Auteur The studio with which Kurosawa had become associated in his earliest films was the Toho Studio. That studio undertook its first strike effort at the end of 1946. The strike was in fact planned in collaboration between Toho and the Allied Forces' Civil Information and Education Section. The planned film was organized by the Union, produced in a week, and released on International Workers' Day. Kurosawa later deplored the work, declaring that it proved 'that a film made by a committee was worthless,' and refused even to mention the film in his autobiography. The head of the Japanese Communist Party called the film 'too intellectualized and uninteresting.'

Film In the end Kurosawa himself wrote about a week's worth of the present script, and spent the same amount of time in the filming itself. (It is easy to see why he didn't consider the film one of his own creations.) Nonetheless, thanks to the prominence Kurosawa's name was to acquire, as the leading Japanese cinematographer, even his limited degree of participation in the present film has sufficed to render the work part of his opus. Just below we will outline the plot, which is fairly generic left wing propaganda, and as that nestles pretty comfortably in beside the bulk of Kurosawa's work. To call it his work, however, would be confusing both because there is little here that bears a distinctive Kurosawa tone, and because there are two actors in the film--Hideo Sekigawa and Kajiro Yamamoto--whose voices and insights dominate the final product of the work.

Historical background With the blessing of the Allied Civil Information and Education Section, a 'production administration committee was established,' authorizing the union to play an active role in the present film. Accordingly the union planned and prepared *Those who make tomorrow*, and produced the film in a week, in time for release on International Workers Day (May 1, 1946). Not surprisingly, considering the inherent obstacles to group cinematography, the initial audience reaction to the present film was highly critical. (The Chairman of the Japanese Communist Party, as we have said, found the film 'too intellectualized and uninteresting.')

It will not seem surprising that Kurosawa himself, noteworthy for vigorous individualized cinematic portraits, will have found the present film unworthy of his private canon. Nevertheless, there it is.

PLOT

To retail the plot outline is simple enough, but to find the film still eludes us, for the script remains only in paraphrases from such texts as *Mr Smith goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American*

Occupation. (This text provides the basis for the rough plot outline we proffer below, remembering that Kurosawa has only contributed a week or so--one third of the total shooting time--to the script--which third that is we don't know--and that we know virtually nothing of the inter relations or strategies of the three co-operating directors.)

The essence of the plot holds few surprises, given the union mandate that launched the project. Here is a compressed version of the plot: Two sisters are working at a big film studio--Chieko is a script girl, editing text, while Aiko is a dancer; their father, Jintaro, is a serious Capitalist. The workers at a nearby railway company go on strike, and Chieko decides to join them, as well as to claim new financial benefits for her own film studio. (Unionization and strikes were routine occurrences in postwar Japan). Meanwhile Aiko and her dance group decide they need to get organized in order to wrestle higher wages from their stingy stage manager. When the girls' father finds himself fired, along with a number of employees at his company, he begins to see the value of his daughters' actions. He joins the unionists, impressed by their behavior.

CHARACTERS

Given the nature of the above synopsis, it stands to reason that characterization is a minor concern of the present film. (Group creation, as we have to imagine Kurosawa thinking, goes for conceptual argument outlines, rather than for the nonlinear richness of character.) The characters in the present film could only have played the stock roles required by the points they represent in the argument design of the whole, and yet we should mention that the roles of the two sisters, Chieko and Aiko, were played by stars of the Toho Studios. In fact one of those stars, Hideko Takamine, was honored by a retrospective of *Those who make tomorrow*, screened as part of a larger retrospective honoring Hideko at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, in 2004.

THEMES

Collective work The value of collective labor seems barely a theme in Kurosawa's whole oeuvre. The heroic--*Yojimbo*, *Kagemusha*, *Red Beard*, or *Sanjuro*--makes its importance felt, while the social collective is only occasionally validated. (Instances of the latter turn strike us in rare cases, returns to the agricultural social collective, as we see it in the conclusion of *No Regrets for our Youth*, or *Seven Samurai*.) Where Kurosawa subscribes to the collective, it is a question of the already declining agricultural foundations of rural Japan.

Labor interests The position and defense of the labor movement obviously occupy a central place in the present collective film, but hardly in the oeuvre of Kurosawa, which would seem to indicate that Kurosawa's place in the depiction of labor interests, in *Those who make tomorrow*, is limited. *The Most Beautiful* is the point at which we most vividly experience Kurosawa's understanding of the collective laboring condition.

Modern economic conflict Does this kind of conflict, which lays claim to define the character of modern society, lay claim to Kurosawa's central thought? Is Kurosawa likely to have been the author of this economics-centered portion of the present propaganda film? Hard to say. What do we discover at the center of Kurosawa's understanding of the human condition? Is it a tragic sense of history, which sweeps up the miniature life of the individual? (The theme of *Throne of Blood* or of *Kagemusha*?) Is it class conflict, as in *The Hidden Fortress*?

SCENES

(The skeletal plot, for this film we no longer have--though we know it was screened at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo as recently as 2004, part of a retrospective on the actress Hideko Takamine--is as given above, in our section on plot; this is all we have to go on.) The best we can do for a screen analysis is the following:

Anti-union man of business, Jintaro, fathers two daughters. One young lady, Chieko, is an editor and script writer working at a large film studio. The other young lady, Aiko, is a dancer with a performance troupe.

The workers at a nearby railway company go on strike. Chieko and her co-workers go on strike out of solidarity, and in hope of improving their own working condition.

Aiko and her troupe decide to unionize in order to extract more wages from their stingy theater manager.

Girls' father, Jintaro, is eventually fired, along with many other employees of the company for which he works. Jintaro observes the effects of his daughters' unionization and decides to follow their path.