

✓ **The Measure of a Man (La loi du marché) (PG) France 2015**      **3 December 2018**

DIRECTOR: **Stéphane Brizé**

Running time: 91 minutes (French with English subtitles)

LEADING PLAYERS: **Vincent Lindon** (Thierry Taugourdeau), **Karine de Mirbeck** (Karine, Thierry's wife), **Matthieu Schaller** (Matthieu, Thierry's son), **Yves Ory** (employment agency adviser).

SCRIPT: **Stéphane Brizé** and **Olivier Gorce**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Eric Dumont**. EDITING: **Anne Klotz**.

The present film belongs in the same universe as the Dardenne brothers' films, such as *Two Days, One Night*, or Laurent Cantet's *Ressources humaines* and *L'emploi du temps (Time Out)*, the latter of which the Society showed in 2002. Like those films, it is concerned with the effects of the modern world of work on the individual and, by extension, on the family unit and society at large.

Vincent Lindon's character is a machine tool operator whose natural inclination on being made redundant is to find a job that uses his particular skill set, and as quickly as possible. That is, his 'dignity of labour', as one might paraphrase the English-language title. However, in the first scene we see him react with exasperation over the employment agency's mishandling of his case, whereby he is sent up for jobs that in his eyes treat his skills with contempt. Ultimately, he takes a job as a store detective for an hypermarché, and we watch as his faith in his employers specifically, but more broadly in the system that produced them, is eroded.

There is a telling scene in which Thierry and his wife negotiate the sale of their mobile home with a couple who clearly just want to get a 'good deal', not a fair deal, but to get one over on their vendors. Thus, whereas Thierry has clearly taken great care of his asset, and no doubt added value through his devoted improvements, the buyers' eyes are on the putative 'market value' and their perceived need for the owners to give them what amounts to a 'discount'. And this is the same trait shown by customers and employees at the supermarket, the one unable to see that in robbing the store in effect robbing other customers; the other harmlessly

using discount vouchers discarded by customers to secure for themselves a meagre bénéfice on top of their salary.

As can be seen, the film's relationship with money is far from simple and one-directional. Critics who synopsise that Thierry walks out because he is disgusted with the company's treatment of its employees are only half right. In many ways the management bends over backwards to treat people 'correctly'. But the fact is that, having been subjected to a series of humiliating confrontations with bureaucracy and the labour market, Thierry has little by little had his self-respect eaten away. 'The law of the market' means that the money motive has infected everyone's attitude to work, employer and employee alike.

*La loi du marché* is, then, essentially a critique of the modern globalized economy, where the possession of a carefully honed skill and an ability to see the fruits of one's labours are taken away from workers, as they become cogs in the capitalist machine. As such, it is impeccably French (remember *Germinal!*). Lindon in many ways plays a variant of the builder he played in *Mademoiselle Chambon* (2009), though the aesthetic is different to either these films or Cantet's, resembling rather the Dardenne brothers' in the way we hang on Thierry's shoulder like a magnet, as he attempts to square the circle of what his job description says he should do, and what his conscience dictates.

**David Clare**