

Liberty For Us! (1931)

Directed by René Clair

Written by René Clair

Music by Georges Auric

Produced by Frank Clifford

A Films Sonores Tobis Production

Cast overview:

Henri Marchand	....	Emile
Raymond Cordy	...	Louis
Rolla France	....	Jeanne
Paul Ollivier	....	The Uncle
Jacques Shelly	....	Paul
André Michaud (II)	....	Foreman
Germaine Aussey	....	Maud, Louis' Wife
Léon Lorin	....	Deaf Old Man
William Burke (I)	....	Old Convict
Vincent Hyspa	....	Old Orator



Details: Criterion Edition (2002). Running time: 83 minutes (orig. 104); First release: 1931; Country: France; Language: French with English subtitles.

Context

Comedy from interwar France, from the popular French filmmaker René Clair. Two convicts try to make their escape from prison. One goes on to vast financial success as the head of his own company. The other awkwardly tries to readjust to civilian life. What follows is portrait of work and friendship in France on the eve of the Depression. The film is frequently acknowledged as the inspiration for Chaplin's "Modern Times." Plenty of clever dialog tricks, comic and sound effects. Incredible Bauhaus sets from legendary art director Lazare Meerson add to the satire.

The film was produced just as the Depression was spreading across Europe. But France was slow to be hit by the economic downturn. In early 1931 in France, when the film arrived in theaters, unemployment was just 5 to 7%. This would not last for long. Within a few years unemployment in France would reach 20%. (Adapted from IMDB)

Questions

- What does work look like in the film?
- What does the film say about wealth in France in 1931?
- What does the film say about men and women and friendship?
- What does it have to say about happiness?
- What is the fantasy that ends the film?
- How does any of this resonate with the history of the interwar period and the coming of the Depression?