

The Goldman Case [12A]

2023 France

115 mins

UK released **20 September 2024**

Director **Cédric Kahn**

Screenplay **Nathalie Hertzberg; Cédric Kahn**

Cinematography **Patrick Ghiringhelli**

Cast **Arieh Worthalter** (Pierre Goldman); **Arthur Harari** (Maître Kiejman); **Stéphane Guérin-Tillié** (Le Président); **Nicolas Briançon** (Maître Garaud); **Aurélien Chaussade** (L'avocat général); **Christian Mazzuchini** (Maître Bartoli)

"You're risking your head." It is late April 1976, and behind the scenes of the Somme Assize Court in Amiens, a lawyer is angered by the lack of discipline of his client, who replies that he does not need a lawyer to prove his own innocence since the fact is "ontological," meaning of the essence.

Those among us who aren't a philosopher can however rest assured (even if this detail is rather significant): The Goldman Case by Cédric Kahn, isn't an intellectually-minded work, but a tense and captivating trial film that pulls apart the facts in the electric atmosphere of its enclosed space. Indeed, Pierre Goldman's intensely contradictory personality, as well as his journey as a revolutionary turned robber, was at the time the source of an intense fascination for both his admirers and his critics, in an era when ideological confrontations aroused vivid passions. From these real events, the director extracts their pure substance, never straying away from the judicial battle taking place — a battle that is very personal, but reverberates out of frame, outside of the courtroom, through topics that were sending waves throughout the 1970s, just as they do now: prejudice, racism, police methods, the far left, etc.

Defending Pierre Goldman (the excellent Arieh Worthalter) is no easy task for Georges Kiejman (the very good Arthur Harari, almost unrecognisable). His client even tries to fire him only a few days before

the trial, calling him in a letter an “armchair Jew,” among other niceties. However, ultimately convinced by the arguments of his assistants (who see in Goldman “a Jewish brother treated like a scapegoat”), Kiejman does not give up, and declares in the film’s prologue that he will, however, focus solely on the facts. Those are clear: the accused has admitted to three armed robberies, but denies being responsible for a fourth, which took place in a pharmacy on boulevard Richard Lenoir in Paris in December 1969, and left two people dead as well as two wounded. These denials did not convince the law at his first trial, in late 1974, when he was sentenced to life in prison.

What follows is a look at the tormented life of Goldman, who refuses out of principle to bring to the stand character witnesses who could defend his morality. Requisitions, oral arguments, verdict: the case is analysed in every detail and in various ways, depending on the duelling strategies of the defence and of the Advocate General (Nicolas Briçonnet). The whole is intercut with three adjournments and multiple emotional outbursts from Goldman (“gangster: yes. Assassin: no,” “I am a Black person, too,” “this is a police plot with an ideal culprit,” “all the witnesses are racists”) who is loudly cheered on by his supporters and kept calm, as much as is possible, by his lawyers.

Combining the portrait of man and a procedural, Cédric Kahn fashions a film that explores in close up the blurred border between fantasy and memory, heroic myths and institutions’ reality, the weight of the past and of appearances. A compact and uncluttered feature both warm and cold, unfolding at a steady pace and in a straight line from an excellent, no frills script, and bringing its perfect cast the attention necessary to create a film of a truly superior quality.

Fabien Lemercier, *Cineuropa*, 17 May 2023 (abridged).

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