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FILM STUDY GROUP -- Program 6: STRIKE U.S.S.R., 1925 Production: Goskino and Proletkult Scenario: Proletkult collective (Valeri Pletnyov, Seggei M.Eisenstein, I.Kravchunovsky, and G.V.Alexandrov) Directed by Sergei M.Eisenstein Assistant directors: G.V.Alexandrov, I.Kravchunovsky, A.Levshin Photography: Eduard Tissé and Vasili Khvatov Designer: Vasili Rakhals Cast includes: Alexandrov, Maxim Straukh, Mikhail Gomarov, Hudith Glizer, Boris Yurtsev, Alexander Antonov.

Out of the film experiments of Kuleshov and Vertov, as well as out of has own experimental innovations as designer and director for the Proletkult Meatre, there...emerged Sergei Eisenstein, whose first film, <u>Strike</u>, triumphantly closes this introductory period [of Soviet cinema]...arbitrarily bounded between February 1924, and February 1925 -- and inaugurates the period of accomplishment and success....

The most advanced group of writers and performers, working at the Central Moscow Theatre of the Proletkult, now deliberated the quest -ion of film work for the entire collective, and decided on the following plan: to make a series of films to be called 'Towards the Dictatorship [of the Proletariat]', to record all the lessons learned by Russian workers in their pre-revolutionary struggles -- in strikes, underground activities, illegal publications, political organization, etc. The collective, supervised by Valeri Pletnyov and Eisenstein, began work on a scenario for the fifth in the series, <u>Strike</u>, the only film of the projected series to be made....

At this moment...another great period was just ending in Sweden -- with Sjostrom already departed for America, and Stiller providing a sort of swan-song with <u>The Story of Gösta Berling</u>. Germany had started to export most of its talent to America, too, leaving Murnau, whose <u>The Last Laugh</u> appeared that December, to wait for a later boat. Soon only G.W.Pabst and Fritz Lang remained to carry on the development of the German film, so important to the whole world during the earlier post-war period. France produced, this year, its best avant-garde cinema, while in America, Griffith was making his last great spectacle, <u>America</u>, Stroheim his greatest film, <u>Greed</u>, and Flaherty his most wonderful, <u>Moana</u>. The film world outside the Soviet Union seemed at a peak. The Soviet film was just beginning its climb.

Beginning too was not only Eisenstein's film career, but the inseparable and harmonious collaboration between the artist-logician Eisenstein and the artist-craftsman Edward Tissé....Between...newsreels and <u>Strike</u>, Tissé photographed other films, but not until he met a director as swift and fearless as himself did his talent display itself fully.

Eisenstein based his film method on his theatrical principle of 'montage of attractions', meaning that every moment the spectator spends in the theatre should be filled with the maximum shock and intensity, within and between each episode. <u>Strike</u> is full of cinematic metaphors and images of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste; it is a deluge of real things and surroundings -- the spying in the latrine, the union meeting in the row-boat, the hosing of the demonstrating strikers, the final débâcle...<u>Strike</u> warns us to listen more attentively to Eisenstein's devlarations of cinema as a synthesis of arts and sciences. <u>Strike</u> is no single experiment in

approaching this synthesis -- it is a whole experimental laboratory. To watch the experimental ideas and tricks that no longer 'come off' (if they ever did) is just as rewarding and fascinating as to see the bubbling retorts all through Strike that were to produce the full aesthetic success of Potemkin. This makes us more tolerant of experiments that often look like youthful horseplay. The precision of photographic expression so notable in the later collaboration of Tissé and Eisenstein is only hinted here in their first work together. but in its place is a wide range of less subtle trickery that often, surprisingly, produces a piercing effect -- changing frame dimensions, an iris used with a maximum of 'eccentricity', dissolves used for almost every reason except the ordinary reason of indicating the MANNANNANNANNANNANNANNANNANNANNANNANNAN passage of time, double-exposures used with stimulating effect, as in the accordion scene (to be later cited with approval by Eisenstein). Even though Eisenstein was always to use some actors in each of his films, the manner of acting in Strike is so 'off-beat' as to awake our curiosity about the 'circus style' in his theatre work that preceded Strike. This grotesquerie of acting is accompanied by a grotesquerie of casting (such as the macabre tangoing midgets in the bribery scene) that points ahead to Eisenstein's typage theory

Once the shocks of experiencing Strike have been absorbed, one perceives values not easily associated with a work so explosive -a broad. deliberate, three-part form, almost symphonic in its division of the powerful first and violent third parts by an idyllic interlude that grows more restless as if modulating into a minor key. in preparation for the harshness and brutality of the final movement. With shots of smokestacks, a bloated factory-owner. his hectic office staff, the enormous shed of a real machine-shop, the first seconds of Strike juxtapose the real and the grotesque, whose combination dominates most of the film. In the factory a strike is under discussion, and the discussions are under observation by the factoryowner's lieutenants, and by detectives who spy on the workers outside the factory. The suicide of a worker touches off the strike. After shutting up the factory the workers experience the unusual sensation of leisure -- strolling, singing, gambling -- but as time goes on and their demands are ignored by the management, hardship and hunger increase. The strikers' last possessions are pawned for food. The police attempt to isolate and divide the strike leaders with bribes and brutality. Provocations are staged, with the employment of the of the city's underworld. Unsuccessful in provocation, the police drop intrigue, invade the workers' quarters and organize a final massacre of the unarmed workers.

> --Jay Leyda, <u>Kino: A History of the Russian ad</u> <u>Soviet Film</u>, London, 1960, pp.180-184.

Members will receive application forms for the second series of the Film Study Group. The second series will commence, next semester, with a double-bill:

> <u>Cabinet of Dr.Caligari</u> directed by Robert Wiene. <u>Secrets of a Soul</u> directed by G.W.Pabst.

Additional application forms may be obtained from Gerald Rabkin or Harry Geduld in the English Department, Ballantine Hall.

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