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# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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## Films from the Archive

Monday, May 15 (5:30)

Tuesday, May 16 (2:00)

STACHKA (STRIKE). 1924. Directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein. Scenario: Proletkult Collective: Valeri Pletnyov, I. Kravchunovsky, Grigori Alexandrov, S. M. Eisenstein. Assistant directors: G. Alexandrov, I. Kravchunovsky, A. Levshin. Photography by Eduard Tisse, Vassili Khvatov. Sets by Vassili Rakhals. Produced by Goskino and Proletkult (Moscow). ca. 75 minutes.

Cast: I. Kuvki (The Organizer), Alexander Antonov (A Worker), Grigori Alexandrov (The Foreman), Mikhail Gomorov (A W ——— Maxime Strauch (The Detective).

"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. STRIKE 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 debacle. One of the secondary benefits of the preservation of STRIKE is that, aside from a few photographic records, it shows a manifestation of an artistic movement that ended only thirty years ago: 'constructivism' - less in surface design (AELITA supplies that aspect) than in the more important matter of method - building inventions with the essentials of reality. And in this view of the constructivist attitude of STRIKE we can find a vital source for the method of POTESKIN that is otherwise difficult to trace either from painting, sculpture, or theatre. POTESKIN seems so wholly 'filmic' in its materials that we are prone to look in it for the influences of science (particularly physics and psychology) rather than the influences of graphic or theatrical principles. STRIKE warns us to listen more attentively to Eisenstein's declarations of cinema as a synthesis of arts and sciences. STRIKE 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 POTESKIN. 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 Tisse 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 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. Ivor Montagu comments on the two poles of attraction for the makers of STRIKE, the discovery of reality and the appeal of the circus:

'...these two aspects of his career are apparent in every foot of STRIKE. On the one hand, here and there, actual material is arranged with economy and laconism into a realism poignant in its universality; on the other, the fantastic clowning of the circus shows itself in detail everywhere, and in the exaggerated, even hypertrophied, treatment of particular episodes and the plot in general. The twisting of actual material, with an ironic air of naturalism, to express such fanciful, exaggerated, "propaganda-poster" ideas, works often with a confusing, indeed shattering, effect on the spectator that must have delighted the young Eisenstein and flung him passionately into love with the film medium and its potentialities.'

Another English critic, David Sylvester, has characterized STRIKE: 'Its method is closely analogous to that of a poem with which it is almost exactly contemporary - "The Waste Land." It is alike in that it operates through the rhythmic relationship of scattered images, each of them precisely concrete yet also symbolic, the juxtaposition of which startles and surprises...'

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..."

-- Jay Leyda, Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film