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THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION (1905-1921) EXPLAINED THROUGH THE PROPAGANDA MOVIES OF THE SOVIET FILM DIRECTOR SERGEI EISENSTEIN

Christensen C.S.

The Russian Revolution is probably one of the most important events in contemporary world history. This article is an attempt to mark the centenary of the end of the revolution by setting the record straight. It aims to describe a lived experience of mass democracy and popular revolt that “shook the world”; to show that it was the collective action of millions of ordinary men and women that powered the whole historical process between 1905 and 1921. The revolution will be analyzed based on film director Sergei Eisenstein’s propaganda films, which was produced in the years shortly after the end of the event in 1921. Was the revolution an attempt to show a new generation of people eager for change that “another” world is indeed possible? Does it all depend on what the people, rising from its slumber, choose to do? And was the Russian revolution in these sixteen years an “explosion” of democracy, equality and peace because of the activity from the lower society classes?

Keywords: Sergei Eisenstein, “Battleship Potemkin”, 1917, Vladimir Lenin, “Strike”, “The General Line”, 1921, Bolshevik Party, hunger, “Bezhin Meadow”, Joseph Stalin, “October: ten days that shook the world”, revolutionary ideals, 1905.

РУССКАЯ РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ (1905-1921) СКВОЗЬ ПРИЗМУ ПРОПАГАНДИСТСКИХ ФИЛЬМОВ СОВЕТСКОГО РЕЖИССЕРА С.М. ЭЙЗЕНШТЕЙНА

Христенсен К.С.

Русская революция является, пожалуй, одним из самых важных событий современной мировой истории. Данная статья, написанная к столетию революции, является попыткой поставить точку в этом вопросе. Целью исследования является описание живого опыта народной демократий и массовых восстаний, которые «потрясли мир»; показать, что за всем этим

скрываются коллективные действия миллионов обычных мужчин и женщин, которые в период с 1905 по 1921 гг. привели в движение целый исторический процесс. Ход революции указывается сквозь призму пропагандистских фильмов режиссера Сергея Эйзенштейна, снятых вскоре после окончания революционных событий в 1921 г. Была ли революция попыткой показать новому поколению людей, жаждущих перемен, что «другой» мир действительно возможен? Все ли зависит от того, что люди, пробуждаясь ото сна, вдруг решают действовать? И была ли русская революция за эти шестнадцать лет действительно «взрывом» демократии, равенства и мира из-за активности низших классов общества?

Ключевые слова: С.М. Эйзенштейн, «Броненосец Потемкин», 1917, В.И. Ленин, «Стачка», «Генеральная линия», 1921, партия большевиков, голод, «Бежин луг», И.В. Сталин, «Октябрь: десять дней, которые потрясли мир», революционные идеалы, 1905.

Propaganda, Sergei M. Eisenstein and the movies

In 1921 after sixteen years of political turmoil and civil war the Russian Revolution ended. The revolution was the culmination of a long period of repression and unrest in the vast empire of Russia. From the time of Tsar Peter the Great (1682-1725), the Tsardom increasingly became an autocratic bureaucracy, that imposed its will on the people by force, with wanton disregard for human life and liberty. As Western technology was adopted by the tsars, Western humanitarian ideals were acquired by a group of educated Russians. Among this growing intelligentsia, the majority of whom were abstractly humanitarian and democratic, there were also those who were politically radical and even revolutionary. The university became a seat of revolutionary activity; nihilism, anarchism, and later Marxism were espoused and propagated [3, s. 25-26].

The Russian Revolution was an explosion of power of the people and activity from the lower classes in tsarist Russia. Or was it? Perhaps, in at the very core, it was a democratic thought, but like the French Revolution (1779-1789), it ended up in a

severe authoritarian form of government and later communist regime, where real democracy did not exist. It transformed the millions of people who took part in it, and inspired tens of millions who watched. It shook the world capitalist system to its foundations and came close to bringing it down. It offered a tantalizing glimpse of a radically different world – a world without bosses and police, a world of democracy, equality, and peace, but only a glimpse. In the end, the military and communist forces defending the system – the statesmen, the generals, the military and the state unions made Russia into a communist society [3, s. 50-51; 8, p. 83].

Especially, during the civil war period in Russia (1918-1921), propaganda became a very important weapon. Propaganda is a systematic attempt to influence people by communicating certain attitudes, angles and perspectives. It is used especially about political and religious ideas. An agenda that may not be objective and may be selective in presenting facts to encourage a synthesis or perception or, using loaded language, to produce an emotional rather than a rational response to the information presented. After the civil war, the communist regime with Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) and later Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) perfected propaganda in the Soviet Union to such an extent that the people could not distinguish truth from falsehood [6, p. 22-24].

With one of the world's most important film directors, the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948), propaganda became a kind of science in the public life in Russia and later in the Soviet Union. The Russian director was one of the first film theorist and can be considered as one of the three most important directors in the development of modern movies ever. The Soviet montage theory was leading in the whole cinema world in the 1920s. Sergei Eisenstein was, of course an artist, and the director, therefore, used his movies to develop film techniques and make the film medium a holistic and whole experience as we experience today, when we watch a movie in the cinema. In addition, some film scientists claim that different film techniques were fully developed in Sergei Eisenstein movies and all movies afterwards were using his techniques. By inventing what he called the methods of montage he also invented modern techniques used in advertisements, which you also

could call a bit of propaganda for a certain product. In other words, he played with the movie to seduce the cinemagoers [1, p.17].

However, Eisenstein was also a man of the Russian and Soviet Communist Party. That was where his political heart lay, and Eisenstein was a person who perhaps believed more in the revolutionary ideals than the communist ideals, even though he originally was a moderate Bolshevik. Therefore, his movies were coloured by his worldview. Nevertheless, Sergei Eisenstein's view upon communism and the revolutionary ideals changed during times. He swore more to the revolutionary ideals than to the program of the Communist Party. In his initial movies did not use professional actors. The people were actors in the movies about the Russian society and the class conflicts. The director used groups as characters, and the roles were filled with untrained people from the appropriate classes; he avoided casting stars that represented the mind of the capitalist society [6, p. 66-67].

Sergei Eisenstein's vision of communism brought him into conflict with officials in the ruling regime of Stalin. Mysterious disappearances and indirect censorship of his films in the 1930s were an expression of Joseph Stalin's displeasure with the messages and the growing skepticism about the deviations from the communist ideals and the return to the revolutionary ideals. In other words, he was not only a propagandist but also a kind of social critic. Like many other Bolshevik artists, Eisenstein envisioned a new society which would subsidize artists totally freeing them from the confines of bosses and budgets, leaving them absolutely free to create, but budgets and producers were as significant to the Soviet film industry as the rest of the world. Due to the fledgling war, the revolution-wracked and isolated new nation did not have the resources to nationalize its film industry at first [1, p. 16].

Prologue (until 1905)

The reforms of Tsar Alexander II (1818-1881) brought the emancipation of the serfs, in the so-called Edict of Emancipation from 1861, and opened hereby the way for industrial development. However, emancipation imposed harsh economic conditions on the peasants and did not satisfy their need for farmland. Industrialization concentrated people in urban centers, where the exploited working

class was a receptive audience for radical ideas. A reactionary and often ignorant clergy kept religion static and persecuted religious dissenters. Non-Russian nationalities in the empire were repressed. By 1903 Russia was divided into several political groups. The autocracy was upheld by the landed nobility and the higher clergy; the capitalists desired a constitutional monarchy; the liberal bourgeoisie made up the bulk of the group that later became the Constitutional Democratic Party; peasants and intelligentsia were incorporated into the Socialist Revolutionary Party; and the workers, influenced by Marxism, were represented in the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of the Social Democratic Labor Party. One thing, however, was political theory, an entirely different thing was the reality of Russian society in the early 1900s. The working conditions of the industrial workers were harsh and miserable, and that even though their earnings increased and thereby welfare. Furthermore, the society was ruled with a heavy hand by the Russian Tsar Nicholas II (1868-1918) and the rest of the political elite. If riots or strikes occurred, it was beaten down with a heavy hand by both police and military. There were not many rights or justice for the individual worker or citizens. The ordinary Russian citizen had enough to do with keeping hunger from the door, but as said before the welfare of the individual increased, which provided new opportunities and search for rights and participation in society. Illegal strikes became more common in the factories. Uprisings in the greater cities because of poor living and work conditions, too [3, s. 27].

An illegal strike at a factory in Russia around 1903 is also the plot of Sergei Eisenstein's first film *Strike* from 1925. It depicts life at a factory complex in Tsarist Russia and describes the conditions the workforce experienced. The plot is about the workers organizing a strike which due to repression escalates into a full-blown occupation. The most important scenes are the ones which show the violent measures used by Tsarist authorities. Acting mainly involved members of the First Workers Proletkult theatre [proletarskaya kultura] an experimental movement in the Soviet Union's early years that attempted to replace the importance of plot with the power of performance aided by special effects. Sergei Eisenstein was a member of the

Proletkult theatre before moving onto film and incorporated most of that style into his films. This made the scenes in the factory more real [2, p. 53-54].

If one disregards stereotypes as the police, capitalists and shareholders are mean corpulent men smoking cigars and with a lean feature, the tsarist soldiers as killer machines and the abundance of liquor in the businessman's office, then the problems, the Russian working class struggled with around 1903 were describe quite well in *Strike*. In contrast the workers are shown as possessing an idealized heroic realism, with a definite physical beauty, they are lean, athletic and muscular, unsuspecting and good-natured at the beginning of the film, they aren't immobile like the rich factory owners. An aura surrounds the workers, in the swimming scene, in the peaceful scene after the strike, and in other crowd shots idealizing them. This aura was mentioned by Walter Benjamin in one of his essays, associated with uniqueness in artworks. The point of the film is the introductory sequence of Vladimir Lenin: "The strength of the working class is organization. Without organization of the masses, the proletarian is nothing. Organized it is everything. Being organized means unity of action, unity of practical activity". The government still knows how to divide the workers and peasants. The management brings in spies and external agents. The workers try to work together when one of their colleagues is wrongfully accused of stealing a micrometer, the worth of 25 rubles (three weeks' pay). The worker hangs himself by the neck. Provocateurs recruited from the lumpen and in league with the police and the fire department bring problems to the workers; the spies do their dirty work. The same tendencies towards decay and dissolution of a society were also seen in Iran when the Shah fell in 1979. An uprising is a reality at the factory. The bewilderment and hunger of the population makes the resistance seem scattered and not really reversed are the exact reality of the workers in Russia, at that time. The last scenes of the film, where the tsar's soldiers crack down hard on the uprising and here also on women and children are very famous. The workers are slaughtered en masse in the field, like a bull in a slaughterhouse. However, the scenes also reflect the central power's incomprehension of the changes and new needs that arise in society – raw violence instead of dialogue. Violence breeds violence and it is an untenable

situation. The last scenes, where workers deny cooperating with the elite, show changes in society are inevitable in the Russian Empire. They simple must come because those in power were powerless against the new changes, also because the elite are the minority [11, s. 355-356].

Strike depicts the alienation laborers are submitted to in their workplace, and their struggle to feel human and not be objectified as labor resources through class conflict. Historically the industrial strike was illegal and an action against state authority, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels considered the strike a revolutionary action through which the proletariat could develop consciousness and political identity as a class: it was training for social war. In the 19th century trade unions gained legitimacy in Europe, only in Russia under the Tsar organized workers had no legal status. Like in all Eisenstein's films, the laborers are treated as a collective, not as individuals, who fight against the machine of capitalism, also a collective. All in all, these different moves from the workers made the revolution possible. However, the Russian empire was not able to respond to the required changes in the structure of society, including the introduction of more democracy. In other words, the Russian people must act, especially because living conditions deteriorated year by year for most of the Russian population [2, p. 56-57; 12].

***Battleship Potemkin* and the revolution in 1905**

In 1905 the situation was so tense that the First Russian Revolution took place. The Russian Revolution of 1905 began in St. Petersburg on January 22 when troops fired on a defenseless crowd of workers, who, led by a priest Georgy Gapon (1870-1906), were marching to the Winter Palace to petition Tsar Nicholas II. This bloody Sunday was followed in succeeding months by a series of strikes, riots, assassinations, naval mutinies, and peasant outbreaks. These disorders, coupled with the big disaster of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), which revealed the corruption and incompetence of the czarist regime, forced the government to promise the establishment of a consultative duma, or assembly, elected by limited franchise. Also, disaffected soldiers returning from an appallingly disgraceful defeat against

Japan, who found inadequate factory pay, shortages, and general disarray, organized in protest [3, s. 34-37].

Nonetheless, unsatisfied popular demands provoked a general strike, and in a Manifesto issued in October the Tsar granted civil liberties and a representative Duma to be elected democratically, the growing realization by a variety of sectors of society of the need for reform. The Manifesto split the groups that collectively had brought about the revolution. Those who were satisfied with the Manifesto formed the Octobrist Party (Union of October 17). The liberals who wanted more power for the Duma consolidated in the Constitutional Democratic Party. The Social Democrats, who had organized a *Soviet* or Workers' Council at St. Petersburg, attempted to continue the strike movement and compel social reforms. The government arrested the *Soviet* and put down December the same year a workers' insurrection in Moscow [6, p. 34-35].

According to the American historian, Sidney Harcave (1916-2008), when disregarding the working class problems, three other fundamental problems in Russian society contributed to the revolution and period of Civil war:

1. Agrarian problems – newly emancipated peasants earned too little and were not allowed to sell or mortgage their allotted land. Their earnings were often so small that they could neither buy the food they needed nor keep up the payment of taxes and redemption dues they owed the government for their land allotments. The situation worsened, as masses of hungry peasants roamed the countryside looking for work, and sometimes walked hundreds of kilometres to find it. Desperate peasants proved capable of violence. These violent outbreaks caught the attention of the government, so it created many committees to investigate the causes. The committees concluded that no part of the countryside was prosperous; some parts, especially the fertile areas known as the *Chernozemye* – black soil region, were in decline. But no real political initiatives were taken in the Russian government in St. Petersburg. The paralysis of action in the political process was a severe blow to the stomach of the Russian elite [7, p. 19-21]

2. Nationality problems in the whole country or rather the government's policy towards ethnic minorities – this policy only succeeded in producing or aggravating feelings of disloyalty. There was growing impatience with their inferior status and resentment against the so-called *Russification,* which was a cultural assimilation definable as a process culminating in the disappearance of a given group as a recognizably distinct element within a larger society.

3. The educated class became a serious problem for the tsarist elite – university students developed a new consciousness, after discipline was relaxed in the institutions, and they were fascinated by increasingly radical ideas, which spread among them. The situation disturbed the Russian government. However, it believed the cause was lack of training in patriotism and religion. Therefore, the curriculum was "toughened up" to emphasize classical language and mathematics in secondary schools, but defiance continued. Expulsion, exile, and forced military service also did not stop students. Like the treatment of the working class, violence and punishment were the answers to the uprising. Together with the very bad living conditions, the situation in the empire was a real powder keg [7, p. 19-21].

In June 1905 a crucial event happened and maybe the turning point in the Russian Revolution. The crew at the battleship "Potemkin" of the Imperial Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet made a mutiny not only against the officers and the tsarist fleet but also for showing solidarity with the workers and peasant on ground. This event inspired Sergei Eisenstein to make one of the three most important – maybe the most important movie ever seen from a film technique point of view – *Battleship Potemkin* in 1925. However, a dramatized version of the real events originally supposed to be just a part of a huge epic. The year 1905 depicting the Revolution of 1905 is the story of the mutiny of the "Potemkin" crew in Odessa harbour. The film opens with the crew protesting maggoty meat and the captain ordering the execution of the dissidents. An uprising takes place during which the revolutionary leader is killed. This crewman is taken to the shore to lie in state. When the townspeople gather on a huge flight of steps overlooking the harbor, tsarist troops appear and march down the steps breaking up the crowd. A naval squadron is sent to retake the

"Potemkin" but now when the ships come into range, their crews allow the mutineers to pass through. Eisenstein's non-historically accurate ending is open-ended thus indicating that this was the seed of the later Bolshevik Revolution, that would bloom in Russia.

The film is broken into five parts: "*Men and maggots*", "*Drama on the quarterdeck*", "*An appeal from the dead*", "*The Odessa steps*" and "*Meeting the squadron*". In *Battleship Potemkin*, the officers exert power over the sailors through an old monk with wild hair. He is depicted from a low angle with smoke billowing behind him, his face lit from below to emphasize the shadows on his face and his wide, unblinking eyes. The monk rebukes the sailors with an ornate cross. During the sailors' rebellion, the monk falls, and his cross hits the deck like a knife. The wild, mystic depiction of the monk is allegorical to depictions of Rasputin, the spiritual advisor and mystic of the Tsar and Tsarina, who is said to have had strange power over the ruling family. The defeat of the monk in "Potemkin" is a metaphor for the people's defeat of the mystic's power over the monarchy and the government, and the power of religion as "an opium of the people" [2, p. 64-65].

The genius of the film's action is that the crew does not rebel against the Imperial Fleet, but against the conditions under which they work. The lack of food was gradually the biggest problem in the empire. The country failed to feed itself due to the lack of effective agricultural reforms. The Russian Empire was in total internal disintegration. The most basic internal structures of the empire were in disarray and the state (like the officers) in the film had no real resistance to the revolt of the people primarily because they were starving. The food was bad as well for the seamen as for their officers. Eisenstein was a revolutionary artist, but at the genius level. Not wanting to make a historical drama, Eisenstein used visual texture to give the film a newsreel-look so that the viewer feels he is eavesdropping on a thrilling and politically revolutionary story. The rottenness of the meat is the rottenness of the Russian imperial state. The meat on a hook represents not only the inadequate provisions given to the sailors but also their feelings of being "hung out" and "left to rot" by their corrupt government. Eisenstein intended for this to be the final injustice

that caused the sailors to rebel because it enforces the themes propagated by revolutionaries of rotten leadership with the workers being continuously mistreated and subjugated to inhumane conditions. The food, much like the government, is unpalatable. *Battleship Potemkin* is a film that immortalizes the revolutionary spirit, celebrates it for those already committed, and propagandizes it for the unconverted. It seethes of fire and roars with the senseless injustices of the decadent tsarist regime. The Odessa steps scenes show again, the brutality of the tsar regime. The meaninglessness in the soldiers' shooting of men, women and children running down the Odessa steps heralds the end of the Imperial system. And the end sequence also shows that the officers are helpless and unable to get their marines to obey their orders. In other words, Eisenstein managed to portray the real problems that were the cause of the revolution. Rather than focusing on the fact that the communist ideals were far superior to the ideals of the tsarist regime, which they were not either. One of the reasons for the film is very current today and has not ended in the pile of political films from the various disappeared mass ideologies of the 1900s [2, p. 68-69].

Eisenstein's famous techniques of intercutting, juxtaposition, and montage to create mood and drama. Sometimes cutaways of objects or expressions are inserted to refer obliquely to what the viewer is supposed to think of the person, or the moment being depicted. And in both films the actual history is bent for the purposes of the filmmaker. The massacre on the Odessa steps did not actually happen. In other words, Sergei Eisenstein succeeded in proving that a historical drama can be so manipulative when it ignores the past, a bit like the communists' use of history in the Russian Revolution. Vladimir Lenin succeeded in carrying out and manipulating a major revolution when it ignores the past. What the first decades of the communist regime were proof of. However, film theorists hailed *Battleship Potemkin* as an artistic feat. One critic called for films to romanticize the struggle between the birth of the new and the death of the old. Early in his career, Eisenstein's films fit into the Bolshevik pedagogy of revolution; eventually, romanticism of the revolution would not be enough to meet the Party's needs. He succeeded making a very advances

avant-garde movie into a popular blockbuster. The viewer must, in a way, have felt that he/she was a part of the reality in the movie [13, p. 590-591].

1917 – *October: ten days that shook the world*

By the end of February 1917 most of the workers in Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg) and Moscow were striking and rioting for higher food rations. Many of the soldiers refused to suppress the insurgents; military insubordination and mutiny spread. Tsar Nicholas II ineffectually sought to put down the workers by force and dissolved the Duma on the 26th of February. The Duma refused to obey and the Petrograd insurgents took over the capital. Nicholas II was forced to abdicate March 2 at Pskov after the Duma had appointed a provisional government composed mainly of moderates. Though most Russians welcomed the end of autocracy that was the only point on which they agreed. The provisional government had little popular support, and its authority was limited by the Petrograd workers' and soldiers' Soviet, which controlled the troops, communications and transport. The Soviet furthered the military breakdown by establishing soldiers' committees throughout the army and making officer ship elective [10, s. 44; 14, p. 245-246].

Despite its strength, the Soviet at first did not openly seize power; the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who initially dominated it believed that at this stage of the revolution the bourgeois provisional government should rule. The government's program called for a general amnesty, broad civil liberties and a constituent assembly to be elected by universal suffrage. This failed to address two burning issues/continuation of the war and redistribution of land. The government announced that the question of land distribution could only be handled by the future constituent assembly. In March, the soviet demanded peace. Pavel Milyukov (1859-1943), the liberal foreign minister, was forced to resign in May after demonstrations against his insistence on continuing the war. The cabinet was reorganized and several other socialists, in addition to Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970), were added. In April 1917 Vladimir Lenin and other revolutionaries returned to Russia after having been permitted by the German government to cross Germany. The Germans hoped that the Bolsheviks would undermine the Russian war effort. Lenin galvanized the small and

theretofore cautious Bolshevik Party into action. The courses he advocated were simplified into the powerful slogans end the war, all land to the peasants and all power to the Soviets [10, s. 122].

The failure of the all-out military offensive in July increased discontent with the provisional government, and disorders and violence in Petrograd led to popular demands for the Soviet to seize power. The Bolsheviks assumed direction of this movement, but the Soviet still held back. On the night of the 24th of October, the Bolsheviks staged a coup, engineered by Leon Trotsky (1879-1940); aided by the workers' Red Guard and the sailors of Kronstadt, they captured the government buildings and the Winter Palace in Petrograd. A second all-Russian congress of soviets met and approved the coup after the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries walked out of the meeting. A cabinet, known as the Council of People/s Commissars, was set up with Vladimir Lenin as chairman, Leon Trotsky as foreign commissar, Alexei Rykov (1881-1938) as interior commissar and Joseph Stalin as commissar of nationalities. The Second Congress immediately called for cessation of hostilities, gave private and church lands to village Soviets and abolished private property. Moscow was soon taken by force and local groups of Bolshevik workers and soldiers gained control of most of the other cities of Russia. The remaining members of the provisional government were arrested (Kerensky had fled the country). Old marriage and divorce laws were discarded, the Church was attacked, workers' control was introduced into the factories, the banks were nationalized and a supreme economic council was formed to run the economy [10, s. 227].

In 1928 Sergei Eisenstein's third film *October: ten days that shook the world*, was released. In documentary style, events in Petrograd are re-enacted from the end of the monarchy in February 1917 to the end of the provisional government and the decrees of peace and of land in November of that year. Lenin returns in April. In July, counterrevolutionaries put down a spontaneous revolt, and Lenin's arrest is ordered. By late October the Bolsheviks are ready to strike: ten days will shake the world. While the Mensheviks vacillate, an advance guard infiltrates the palace. Vladimir

Antonov-Ovseyenko (1883-1938) leads the attack and signs the proclamation dissolving the provisional government. The movie represents the pinnacle of the development of his editing technique. It is without a doubt the "greatest" film he had ever made in the sense that it was made with the largest number of extras and the highest budget he had yet to handle. It also goes further into the characterlessness of his previous silent film and is in many ways closer to a documentary than a historical feature. The Assembly in October is being taken to new heights. In an early scene where a machine gun regiment opens fire on a demonstration, incredibly fast editing back and forth between a shot of a gun and the average glance at the shooter's face suggests both action and the sound of the gun. Another aspect of the montage that Eisenstein widely uses in October is to express ideas by editing in shots of objects outside the setting or at least not related to the narrative. For example, pictures of the tsar's clockwork toys are spliced into a scene where the very unpopular interim government ministers meet. In another scene, a series of more and more primitive religious statues from around the world are paraded to ridicule the church. Although often ingenious, this cross-section can sometimes be a little heavy and obvious. E.g. Do we really need to float back and forth so many times between a shot of Kerensky and a statue of Napoleon to understand what is implied? In addition to the allegories conveyed through montage, there are also a few metaphors in shot composition or basic action. When the red guards search, they laugh at each other as they pull a decorative pillow off an ornate chair, a dresser reveals. There are also plenty of Eisenstein's funny trademarks – particularly ugly or bizarre-looking actors have been cast as the people of Eisenstein wanted to seem ridiculous, such as the Mensheviks and the interim government ministers [2, p. 86-87; 5, p. 172-173].

Eisenstein's direction of crowds is, as always, flawless so much, thus in October that parts of it have been mistaken for actual historical footage of the revolution. A very compelling look of Lenin also pops up from time to time, though I have to say that the guy who plays Trotsky looks more like a young Rolf Harris. The events portrayed appear to be largely historically accurate, albeit from an oblique angle. The worship of the Bolsheviks was completely cultivated in relation to their

current significance at the time and Eisenstein constantly promotes the Leninist view that the masses cannot move forward without the guidance of the Party. Yet this was the philosophy of the dictatorship in which Eisenstein operated [5, p. 177].

Like *Battleship Potemkin*, *October: ten days that shook the world* succeeded in being manipulative by ignoring the past. In the film version of the storming of the Winter Palace in October, the scenes involved many more actors, than the actual event itself. Furthermore, even Vladimir Lenin's widow Nadezhda Krupskaya (1869-1939). The movie was more like an advertisement, even a theatrical one. A scene with dead horses suspended over the water, hanging from the shafts of the opening bridge and the murdered woman's hair spreading out, covering the bridge, far too theatrical and not in the spirit of the Soviet Communist Party palpable design. However, from Eisensteins point of view the violence of the Communists are a little like the violence of the former imperial army [1, p.17].

October: ten days that shook the world opens with the people tearing down the statues of Tsar Nicholas II. The people tear down the statue to symbolize tsar's abdication of power and the supposed joy felt by the masses, according to the pedagogical intent of the Party. The Bolsheviks storm the Winter Palace that has been appropriated by the Provisional government. This serves to oust the Provisional government in its search for replacing the monarchy, as alluded in descriptions of Kerensky's character. It also shows that the symbolic strength of the monarchy falls to the ideals and literal, rather than metaphorical, strength of the united Bolsheviks. Tearing down symbolic monuments and statues both undermines the power of the monarchy and didactically serves the revolution in portraying the people as fully supportive of the revolution, with all opposition being portrayed as militaristic and capitalistic, rather than civil [5, p. 171-172].

In October 1917 a Bolshevik accidentally crosses a soldier by the waterfront with his bourgeois girlfriend and older, upper class civilians. Spotting him, they begin to attack. Shots of an elderly aristocratic woman stamping on the pole of the Bolshevik's banner are cut with scenes of a white horse pulling a carriage slipping and falling, then sliding down the street. As the woman's foot stomps down on the

Bolshevik dream, the elegant horse's legs break. The conflict of the two shots results from the destruction of both Bolshevik and bourgeois symbols. As the aristocrat attempts to break the revolutionary fervor, her foot almost appears to be the cause of the horse's leg breaking in the cut between the two images. Eisenstein draws out this tension through the implication that the harder the upper class fought the revolution, the more they damaged their own goals and way of life. Violence breeds violence. The changes were not so clear between the two systems [9, s. 168-169].

In a long montage, Eisenstein displays a baroque sculpture of Jesus, followed by a Hindu God, the Buddha, and numerous pagan idols. This series of images, compared one after the other in close-up, minimizes the differences of each statue and implies that all religions are the same. Christianity is no more correct than paganism. As each idol devolves in the complexity of its artistic form, from the ornate Jesus to the simple humanistic or animalistic, figures of the pagan idols, the importance of all idols diminishes. Military medals are then shown, followed by shots of kings on statues being toppled over in reverse, so that the chairs tip backward to stand resurrected. This again is followed by an animalistic sculpture. The military and state relate to religious fervor. Eisenstein uses juxtaposition to condemn the old ways of religion and loyalty to the monarchy. He further develops theories of intellectual montage to emphasize Bolshevik ideology, which justifies revolution against the monarchy and the provisional government. For the Bolsheviks to create a new Russian culture, it was important to show that the old ways of life were wrong and had been destroyed. Along with getting rid of cultural traditions, the legacies of enemies of the Bolsheviks had to be dismembered. The excommunication not only of the Church but of the faith in general was one of the greatest fictions of the communist era in the Soviet Union. Here Eisenstein tries to identify with the new spirit. In the communist regime both in the Soviet Union and in e.g. Poland and the GDR completely underestimated the religious aspect of the local population. In Poland this was exactly what revolted against the ruling communists [9, s. 322-325].

October targeted Alexander Kerensky, the moderate socialist leader of the Provisional Government in 1917, is compared in one scene to a preening mechanical

peacock. He climbs the stairs of the Winter Palace, shaking hands with and saluting leaders and officers as he climbs. At the top, he reaches a gilded door that does not open. Kerensky holds his gloves behind his back. Suddenly there appears the image of a mechanical peacock. It blinks to life and begins unfolding its prominent tail feather. The scene cuts back to Kerensky holding the gloves behind his back. The images in this intellectual montage imply that Kerensky is a vain, preening man. Kerensky's regime is depicted as an anachronistic restoration of autocracy. This was one of reasons why the Communism never survived. There was no natural political ambience where constructive political ideas could be fostered, and opinions broken. In other words, during Joseph Stalin's regime and his interpretation of Soviet communism, Sergei Eisenstein upon the revolutionary ideas, began cracking [9, s. 324-325].

The Civil war 1918-1921 and the consequences

The Civil war between the Communists and Bolsheviks (so-called Reds) and the anti-Bolsheviks (so-called Whites) ravaged Russia until 1920/21. The Whites represented all shades of anti-Communist groups, including members of the constituent assembly. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken Tsarists. Armed opposition to the Soviet regime centered at first in the south, where the volunteers under general Lavrenty Kornilov (1870-1918) and later under general Anton Denikin (1872-1947) joined forces with Don Cossacks. The catastrophic consequences of the Russians' participation in the First World War meant that the anti-Bolshevik suffered defeat upon defeat. The White army fled to Crimea and later to Istanbul in November 1920. The Civil war in the east was equally fatal to the Whites. Furthermore, as early as January 1920 all Siberia and the Russian Far East were in Bolshevik hands [4, s. 50-52].

The Civil war was complicated by Allied intervention. In North Russia, British, French and American forces occupied (March 1918) Murmansk and later Arkhangelsk with the stated purpose of protecting Allied stores against possible seizure by the Germans; they were evacuated only in November 1919. In the Russian Far East the Allies occupied Vladivostok, which the Japanese held until 1922. The

Bolshevik military victory was due partly to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and partly to the remarkable reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; Russia by 1920 was ruined and devastated. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil war by both sides [4, s. 30-33].

Sergei Eisenstein made no film about the period of the Civil war, but the outrageous violent atrocities from both sides had made its impression on him and film art. Instead, he concentrated on the first decades after the revolution. He made two films about the period: *The General Line (Old and New)* and *Bezhin Meadow*. In these two films the changes in the director's attitude towards the Soviet regime became clear and the changing attitude of the Soviet regime to him too.

The General Line was a project from 1927. Eisenstein's meaning with movie was to celebrate the collectivization of agriculture (new system of *kolkhozes*). A system implemented by old-line Bolshevik Leon Trotsky. The tributes to the Party were to be made edible. The director forsook his usual practice of emphasizing groups by concentrating on a single rural heroine. For more than a year Eisenstein worked with *October: ten days that shook the world*. By the time he was able to return to this film, the Party's attitudes had changed and Leon Trotsky had fallen from grace. As a result, the film was hastily re-edited and sent out in 1929 under a new title *Old and New*. Not only the title changed, but the content did also – especially the manuscript. However, international archivists have restored the different out cuts of *The General Line* and compared it to *Old and New*. Here they found out that in large parts, the director's montage-like imagery was the same in both editions, where modern agricultural vehicles, like tractors, played an important role [9, s. 324].

Millions of peasants were illiterate, poor, hungry. There comes a day when one woman decides that she can live old life no longer. Using ways of new Soviet state and industrial progress she changes life and labor of her village. *The General Line (Old and New)* depicted a poor farmer named Marfa leading her small community into the paradise of agricultural collectivization. Eisenstein's use of visual metaphor at times, made his works less accessible to the

public because of the abstract ideas presented in his early films, visual metaphors are a valuable resource for unpacking Eisenstein's revolutionary credo. Like *October*, the *General Line* also received party scrutiny for the use of complex metaphors. Through a variety of techniques, Eisenstein created visual metaphors that glorified the collective organization of workers as the base of the revolution until his freedom, in particular his use of objects to create visual metaphors, was limited by Party interference [11, s. 275-276].

As well in the *General Line (Old* and *New)* and *October*: *ten days that shook the world*, Eisenstein again used the technique of creating visual metaphors from motifs of the setting to characterize the protagonists. In the first mentioned movie the farmers receive a loan for a machine that separates milk to make butter. The shots of the shiny machine in the dull, low ceilinged house present an allegory for the modernization of the peasants' lives. With their collective power, they have brought in new technology from which they will all benefit together. Collectivism is the tool by which they can access success and the future. The revolution is characterized by utopian dreams. For Eisenstein these dreams were achievable through organization of the working class. And indeed, they were. However, the infectivity of the Soviet regime obtained an even bigger hunger catastrophe than the Russian Empire. The Cultural Revolution began in the spring of 1928 and caused a demand for films about collectivism starring peasants. Eisenstein certainly exhibited the requisite enthusiasm for collectivism in his movie but received criticism from the party for his focus on objects as narrative devices through visual metaphors. In addition, Eisenstein was outspoken against Social Realism until 1929. The weakness of the system Eisenstein exposed by this movie [2, p. 100-101].

Eight years later *Bezhin Meadow* was finished. Eisenstein shot the movie (1935-1937) after his return from Mexico in 1932, which according to Joseph Stalin was a too long stay (three years). Banned and destroyed by Stalin in March 1937 *Bezhin Meadow* is the story of a boy killed by his father for informing on him. The film draws its title from a story by the author Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), but is based on the life of Pavlik Morozov (1918-1932), a young Russian boy who became

a political martyr following his death in 1932 after he denounced his father to Soviet government authorities and subsequently died at the hands of his family. Pavlik Morozov was immortalized in school programs, poetry, music and film. All that survives are the first and last frames of each shot, preserved by Sergei Eisenstein's wife, Pera Atasheva (1900-1965). The 1967 reconstruction by Naum Kleiman of the Eisenstein Museum and Sergei Yutkevich places these frames in order, approximating the original film. Today thirty minutes (still images) of the movie exists. All Eisenstein had saved from the local film studio [15, p. 204].

The scenes already shot were put together by Eisenstein, but the film, which was never released, was attacked as formalistic and harmless because of its poetic interpretation of reality. According to Joseph Stalin and the Soviet regime, collectivization was no poetry, it was the victory of their ideology. The poor structure of the agricultural sector in the Soviet Union was one of the main reasons of dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Eisenstein thus suffered from the same governmental policies toward art that had embroiled the composer Sergei Prokofiev, the writer Isaac Babel and many other artists in difficulties with Soviet officialdom. Like parts of the Soviet population, Eisenstein lost his faith in the communist ideals under Joseph Stalin, whose regime of Gulags, deportation and ethnic minorities was much the tsarist system before 1917. Eisenstein knew where it was going. The rest of his career his was shooting historical movies about Russian Prince Aleksander Nevsky (1220-1263), who defeated Novgorod in 1242 and Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584). Never a propaganda movie was delegated to him again from the Soviet Regime [15, p. 205].

Conclusion

The Revolution in Russia in 1917 sparked an era of uncertainty in which the vanguard of the revolution sought answers about how to implement socialist ideas in society. While it would be an exaggeration to say that all members of the newly created Soviet society completely rethought their existence in new socialist terms, it is no exaggeration that the Communist Party struggled with the task of converting political theory to reality in Russia. The early years of the Soviet Union were

accompanied by radical experimentation in art and propaganda, especially in film. Unlike socialist realism, which became the official artistic aesthetic of the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, the years after the revolution were characterized by discussion and indecision about the true meaning of socialist art.

The work of Sergei Eisenstein exemplifies the uncertainty in artistic aesthetics during this period. Eisenstein proposed a radical new theory of montage, which sought to create rhythm, pacing and meaning in film through the editing and juxtaposition of unrelated theatrical images. The Russian Revolution provided Eisenstein and others with an opportunity to create and expound upon new theories of film that they believed to be distinctly socialist and inseparable from the cultural progress associated with revolution. Thus, Eisenstein sought to create film as a distinct and unique art form that could be used to disseminate the ideals of the revolution. The visual metaphors of Eisenstein's early films effectively inform on the teachings of the revolution through the use of setting motifs that critique and remind people of the harsh socio-economic conditions before the revolution, the deconstruction of the value and symbols of the Russian Empire and the power of the organized masses in affecting positive change.

The dichotomy between wide shots and close-ups allowed Eisenstein to portray the masses as the protagonist and symbolized the toxic individualism of the upper class antagonists Eisenstein used a variety of film techniques to create visual metaphors that conveyed messages of revolution. The characteristics of the settings of each film were allegorical to the worker's struggle and aspirations. The significance of the means of production in revolutionary ideology was emphasized using the landscape motifs serving as characterization for the protagonists, where the hero was the collective proletariat, motifs of industry, agriculture and animals revealed their collective condition. Eisenstein used the juxtaposition of visual metaphors to deconstruct the cultural norms and values of the Russian Empire.

Furthermore, Sergei Eisenstein succeeded in consciously uncovering the real weaknesses of the Russian Empire. And later uncover the lostness of the communist ideals after taking power in 1917. At the very beginning and what depends the

people, the revolution was an attempt to show a new generation of people eager for change that another world was possible described in *Strike*. The code word was organization that is very well explained in Strike by Eisenstein. It succeeded in the second attempt. The result was, however, that the communist regime soon became a copy of the old empire. And several decades after the revolution took place, the eager died out just like in Sergei Eisenstein's movies *The General Line (Old and New)* and *Bezhin Meadow*. Surely, the revolution of the Whites would have ended the same way. Does it all depend on what the people, rising from its slumber, choose to do? It always depends when a people rebel. This had to be true of the Russian Empire in the beginning of the 1900s. Masterfully described in *Battleship Potemkin* and *October: ten days that shook the world*. And was the Russian Revolution in these eleven years an explosion of democracy, equality and peace because of the activity from the lower classes of the tsarist society? The answer is no. Best described with a scene in *October: ten days that shook the world*, where Eisenstein made a comparison between the moderate and possible democrat Alexander Kerensky and a mechanical peacock and he critiqued the norms and character of the government before the Revolution, emphasizing for the audience the fallacy of the old way of living. The Bolshevik Party no longer favored Eisenstein's methods of depicting the masses as heroes through obscure visual allegories. Eisenstein was criticized for his use of visual metaphors for being too complex for the masses to be an effective tool of propaganda for the Party.

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Data about the author:

Christensen Carsten Sander – Doctor of History (PhD), curator of Billund Museum (Billund, Denmark).

Сведения об авторе:

Христенсен Карстен Сандер – доктор истории (PhD), куратор Музея Биллунда (Биллунд, Дания).

E-mail: csc@billund.dk.