There are two big facts which have set a new stamp on working class life. The one is the advent of the eight-hour working day; the other, the prohibition of the sale of vodka. The liquidation of the vodka monopoly, for which the war was responsible, preceded the revolution. The war demanded such enormous means that tsarism was able to renounce the drink revenue as a negligible quantity, a billion rubles more or less making no very great difference. The revolution inherited the liquidation of the vodka monopoly as a fact; it adopted the fact, but was actuated by considerations of principle. It was only with the conquest of power by the working class, which became the conscious creator of the new economic order, that the combating of alcoholism by the country, by education and prohibition, was able to receive its due historic significance. The circumstance that the “drunkards’” budget was abandoned during the imperialist war does not alter the fundamental fact that the abolition of the system by which the country encouraged people to drink is one of the iron assets of the revolution.

As regards the eight-hour working day, that was a direct conquest of the revolution. As a fact in itself, the eight-hour working day produced a radical change in the life of the worker, setting free two-thirds of the day from factory duties. This provides a foundation for a radical change of life for development and culture, social education, and so on, but a foundation only. The chief significance of the October Revolution consists in the fact that the economic betterment of every worker automatically raises the material well-being and culture of the working class as a whole.

“Eight hours work, eight hours sleep, eight hours play,” says the old formula of the workers’ movement. In our circumstances, it assumes a new meaning. The more profitably the eight hours work is utilized, the better, more cleanly, and more hygienically can the eight hours sleep be arranged for, and the fuller and more cultured can the eight hours of leisure become.

The question of amusements in this connection becomes of greatly enhanced importance in regard to culture and education. The character of a child is revealed and formed in its play. The character of an adult is clearly

manifested in his play and amusements. But in forming the character of a whole class, when this class is young and moves ahead, like the proletariat, amusements and play ought to occupy a prominent position. The great French utopian reformer, Fourier, repudiating Christian asceticism and the suppression of the natural instincts, constructed his phalansterie (the communes of the future) on the correct and rational utilization and combination of human instincts and passions. The idea is a profound one. The working class state is neither a spiritual order nor a monastery. We seek a point of support in this vital human material for the application of our party and revolutionary state lever. The longing for amusement, distraction, sightseeing, and laughter is the most legitimate desire of human nature. We are able, and indeed obliged, to give the satisfaction of this desire a higher artistic quality, at the same time making amusement a weapon of collective education, freed from the guardianship of the pedagogue and the tiresome habit of moralizing.

The most important weapon in this respect, a weapon excelling any other, is at present the cinema. This amazing spectacular innovation has cut into human life with a successful rapidity never experienced in the past. In the daily life of capitalist towns, the cinema has become just such an integral part of life as the bath, the beer-hall, the church, and other indispensable institutions, commendable and otherwise. The passion for the cinema is rooted in the desire for distraction, the desire to see something new and improbable, to laugh and to cry, not at your own, but at other people’s misfortunes. The cinema satisfies these demands in a very direct, visual, picturesque, and vital way, requiring nothing from the audience; it does not even require them to be literate. That is why the audience bears such a grateful love to the cinema, that inexhaustible fount of impressions and emotions. This provides a point, and not merely a point, but a huge square, for the application of our socialist educational energies.

The fact that we have so far, i.e., in early six years, not taken possession of the cinema shows how slow and uneducated we are, not to say, frankly, stupid. This weapon, which cries out to be used, is the best instrument for propaganda, technical, educational, and industrial propaganda, propaganda against alcohol, propaganda for sanitation, political propaganda. any kind of propaganda you please, a propaganda which is accessible to everyone, which is attractive, which cuts into the memory and may be made a possible source of revenue.

In attracting and amusing, the cinema already rivals the beer-hall and the tavern. I do not know whether New York or Paris possesses at the present time more cinemas or taverns, or which of these enterprises yields more revenue. But it is manifest that, above everything, the cinema competes with the tavern in the matter of how the eight leisure hours are to be filled. Can we secure this incomparable weapon? Why not? The government of the tsar, in a few years, established an intricate net of state bar rooms. The business yielded a yearly revenue of almost a billion gold rubles. Why should not the government of the workers establish a net of state cinemas? This apparatus of amusement and education could more and more be made to become an integral part of national life. Used to combat alcoholism, it could at the same time be made into a revenue-yielding concern. Is it practicable? Why not? It is, of course, not easy. It would be, at any rate, more natural and more in keeping with the organizing energies and abilities of a workers’ state than, let us say, the attempt to restore the vodka monopoly.

The cinema competes not only with the tavern but also with the church. And this rivalry may become fatal for the church if we make up for the separation of the church from the socialist state by the fusion of the socialist state and the cinema.

Religiousness among the Russian working classes practically does not exist. It actually never existed. The Orthodox Church was a daily custom and a government institution. It never was successful in penetrating deeply into the consciousness of the masses, nor in blending its dogmas and canons with the inner emotions of the people. The reason for this is the same—the uncultured condition of old Russia, including her church. Hence, when awakened for culture, the Russian worker easily throws off his purely external relation to the church, a relation which grew on him by habitat. For the peasant, certainly, this becomes harder, not because the peasant has more profoundly and intimately entered into the church teaching—this has, of course, never been the case—but because the inertia and monotony of his life are closely bound up with the inertia and monotony of church practices.

The workers’ relation to the church (I am speaking of the nonparty mass worker) holds mostly by the thread of habit, the habit of women in particular. Icons still hang in the home because they are there. Icons decorate the walls; it would be bare without them; people would not be used to it. A worker will not trouble to buy new icons, but has not sufficient will to discard the old ones. In what way can the spring festival be celebrated if not by Easter cake? And Easter cake must be blessed by the priest, otherwise it will be so meaningless. As for church-going, the people do not go because they are religious; the church is brilliantly lighted, crowded with men and women in their best clothes, the singing is good—a range of social-aesthetic attractions not provided by the factory, the family, or the workaday street. There is no faith or practically none. At any rate, there is no respect for the clergy or belief in the magic force of ritual. But there is no active will to break it all. The elements of distraction, pleasure, and amusement play a large part in church rites. By theatrical methods the church works on the sight, the sense of smell (through incense), and
through them on the imagination. Man’s desire for the theatrical, a desire to see and hear the unusual, the striking, a desire for a break in the ordinary monotony of life, is great and ineradicable; it persists from early childhood to advanced old age. In order to liberate the common masses from ritual and the ecclesiasticism acquired by habit, antireligious propaganda alone is not enough. Of course, it is necessary, but its direct practical influence is limited to a small minority of the more courageous in spirit. The bulk of the people are not affected by antireligious propaganda; but that is not because their spiritual relation to religion is so profound. On the contrary, there is no spiritual relation at all; there is only a formless, inert, mechanical relation, which has not passed through the consciousness; a relation like that of the street sight-seer, who on occasion does not object to joining in a procession or a pompous ceremony, or listening to singing, or waving his arms.

Meaningless ritual, which lies on the consciousness like an inert burden, cannot be destroyed by criticism alone; it can be supplanted by new forms of life, new amusements, new and more cultured theaters. Here again, thoughts go naturally to the most powerful—because it is the most democratic—instrument of the theater: the cinema. Having no need of a clergy in brocade, etc., the cinema unfolds on the white screen spectacular images of greater grip than are provided by the richest church, grown wise in the experience of a thousand years, or by mosque or synagogue. In church only one drama is performed, and always one and the same, year in, year out; while in the cinema next door you will be shown the Easters of heathen, Jew, and Christian, in their historic sequence, with their similarity of ritual. The cinema amuses, educates, strikes the imagination by images, and liberates you from the need of crossing the church door. The cinema is a great competitor not only of the tavern but also of the church. Here is an instrument which we must secure at all costs!

There is only one method for making any film. A moment abstractions. To know what this is, and why—see the book “Today.” In that book my approach to the construction of film is laid, although, to be sure, in a rather confused and abstruse way.

Our class orientation is set out:

1) in a definite purpose for the work—in a socially useful and psychological effect on the audience, emerging from a choice appropriately directed stimuli. This socially useful effect I call the class of the work.

Thus it is possible to define the content of the film “Are youList” Moscow?” The maximal tension of aggressive reflexes of social protest the film “Strike” is an accumulation of reflexes which do not allow relief (satisfaction), that is, the concentration of reflexes of struggle (the potential class tone).

2) in the selection of irritants themselves. In two directions, correct appraisal of their inevitable class nature; that is, certain irritants capable of evoking a specific reaction (effect) only in an audience of specific class character. For a more detailed work there must be an more unified audience, perhaps by profession. Any director, for exam of a “living newspaper” in clubs knows how different audiences, say n workers and textile workers, react completely differently and at different places to one and the same work.

Class “inevitability” in questions of action is easily illustrated by amusing failure of one attraction, which was felt very strongly by makers in the circumstances of a workers’ audience. I have in mind slaughterhouse scene [in the film “Strike”]. The effect of its concentration on a certain stratum of the public is rather well known. Crimean censor even cut it, together with—the latrine scene. (’ inadmissibility of such sharp effects was pointed out by an American at seeing “strike” he said that this scene would have to be cut for foreign audiences). The “bloody” effect, however, was not produced by a slaughterhouse scene on a workers’ audience, and for the simple reason that for workers a steer’s blood is associated first of all with the process.

* From the journal Kino, August 1, 1925, as republished in S.M. Eisenstein. Izbrannye proizvedenia, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1964, pp. 17-19.