A black and white photograph of a man and a young child. The man, on the left, has a mustache and is wearing a cap and a collared shirt. The child, on the right, is looking up with a curious expression. Both are looking towards the upper right of the frame.

THE WORKER PHOTOGRAPHY MOVEMENT [1926-1939]

ESSAYS AND DOCUMENTS

**THE WORKER
PHOTOGRAPHY
MOVEMENT
[1926-1939]
ESSAYS AND DOCUMENTS**

**MUSEO NACIONAL
CENTRO DE ARTE
REINA SOFIA**

TF. EDITORES



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The introductory heading for this exhibition, *A Hard, Merciless Light*, is surprisingly apt to describe what the worker photography movement represented during the 1920s and 1930s. Only the immediateness offered by photography and its direct relation with light could capture the exact moment when the most radical consequences of the different industrial revolutions became evident: working conditions that would take decades to improve, but also collaboration and collective awareness of a growing social class.

Likewise, this exhibition captures the moment when international photography detached itself from its historical debt to painting to become autonomous, turning each new image into a double manifesto: first an ideological one, as described, and then an artistic one, as photography claimed a space of its own and demonstrated a firm desire to be seen as an art form.

This immense international mobilization filled the daily lives of citizens with new icons depicting the human landscape before the groundwork was laid for the welfare state, which would not become fully developed until after the Second World War. So it was that from Germany to the United States and from Spain to the then Soviet Union, photographic magazines, posters, books, clubs, and collectives created a tableau of the working class that would take a different direction in each region of the world. It is only from the distance afforded by the passage of time that we can enjoy, as the show's curator Jorge Ribalta suggests, a comprehensive view of this set of very diverse realities and uneven socio-political conditions.

Consequently, this book goes beyond the standard role of an exhibition catalogue to position itself as a primary reference work on this subject, not only on account of the absence of significant publications in Spanish and the exhaustiveness of the research behind it, but also, and in particular, owing to the application of new methodological tools and lines of thought to this exciting area.

A particular example of the interest this subject arouses is the extraordinary attention received by the international seminar *The Worker Photography Movement: Towards a Political History of the Origins of Photographic Modernity* held at the Museo Reina Sofía in 2010. That initiative gave life to this exhibition and book, which are accompanied by a series of films on show at the museum's auditorium that will bring the members of the public into contact with those images made from "a hard, merciless light," this time in movement.

Ministry of Culture

Presentation The success of the seminar *The Worker Photography Movement: Towards a Political History of the Origins of Photographic Modernity*, held at the Museo Reina Sofía in January 2010, testified to the extraordinary interest awakened by new ways of seeing the worker photography movement. It has placed us at the forefront of theoretical interpretation, which is what this exhibition, taking place a little over a year later, offers: a review of the concept of modernity in a style of photography that combines avant-garde art and political thought. By bringing the two together, it gives the public privileged access to a perspective which, instead of being reductionist, provides a comprehensive view of different geographic spaces, tangent lines, and minority movements that make up the corpus of the so-called worker photography. More than a mere sub-genre, this movement proved to be a genuine *Weltanschauung*: a way of seeing and experiencing the world that left its mark on a great part of the twentieth century.

As an alternative to the historiographic hegemony exercised by the *Neues Sehen* (New Vision) movement, we propose a view of the photography movement in the middle years of the first half of last century starting from the basis of the exhortation by the critic Edwin Hoernle to use “a hard, merciless light.” This proclamation revealed a strong political component and firm class awareness as opposed to the humanist, classical, and bourgeois view of the compassionate (and therefore superior) artist and his model. Moreover, without taking away from the undeniable predominance of the German and Soviet schools, this exhibition draws attention to the part played by the peripheral movements in the Mediterranean and Central Europe. This gesture reflects the significance that the Museo Reina Sofía gives in its discourse to the role of the *other*, to the part that is left behind by the approach of the powers that be.

Given that the museum’s new phase began with reflections on the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, followed by an extensive retrospective of the work of Rodchenko and Popova, it is logical that we should continue to delve into one of the sources of sustenance for the seeds that would become the divided world of the post-war period—the worker movements and their double (and indivisible) artistic and political facets.

In the wake of the different industrial revolutions, the machine became identified with man (in this case with the man operating it), an idea that had already been introduced by Duchamp and Picabia a decade earlier. Consequently, human beings were identified with the means of production, no longer from a utopian point of view like futurism, nor from an ironic perspective, unlike that of the artists mentioned; rather, it came from the growing awareness of the latent danger that a whole social class was becoming alienated. Thus, the analysis of the means of production, the core of the Marxist system of thought, is associated through this exhibition with

the study of the means of reproduction, more specifically with photography and film (not coincidentally means that were also machines), to reach the Gordian knot of the discourse: self-representation. "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented": Marx's words in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* regarding imperialism are perfectly applicable to the origins of the worker movement. The series of photographs that visitors will enjoy here present a discourse that leads to a moment when the working class begins to represent itself, once again from the binomial that is art (for the first time, it takes control of the means of reproduction) and politics (it organizes trade unions and other association mechanisms, and publishes magazines and books).

It is no coincidence that the double icon of early cinema is made up of elements related to industrial development: the machine (the train arriving at a station) and the working class (workers leaving a factory). The latter element is present in our collection in both the primitive film by the Lumière Brothers and in the reinterpretation of this archetypal image by Harun Farocki in the course of eleven decades. Between the former and the latter lies the decade of the 1930s, a time about which multi-faceted political and philosophical debates remain still unresolved and inflamed, and the theme of the recent international seminar *Encuentros con los '30* (Encounters with the 1930s), which, in a way, is a forerunner to this exhibition, preparing our eyes for it.

In this way, the creation of invisible lines of connection, of contact points between public activities, the exhibition program, and the Museo Reina Sofía collection (growing in size and significance) continues to be part of our project. This set of intersecting points is multiplied through the series of films that accompany this exhibition and, more particularly, through this publication, a comprehensive guide to the worker photography movement that is a milestone in historiography, providing a vision that, although distanced in time, in some way, becomes deeply involved in order to restate the lives and discourses illuminated by that hard light.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel
Director of the Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

This book is dedicated to the memory
of Jo Spence (1934–1992)

Preface and Acknowledgements

To this day, the worker photography movement remains a largely unexplored chapter in the history of photography. This book forms part of the research process undertaken for the exhibition *A Hard, Merciless Light. The Worker Photography Movement, 1926–1939* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, April–August 2011), which intends to make up for this lack. Rescuing the movement from oblivion, marginalization, repression, and returning it to the limelight form part of an attempt to probe into the canonical description of the emergence of photographic modernism during the interwar period. The dominant narrative is still strongly determined by the postwar formalist and humanist discourse. By showing the structural relationship between the artistic and the political avant-gardes and at the same time focusing on a trans-national artistic culture we hope to foster a new kind of historiography. It is no longer a matter of surveying individual artists and works, but rather of narrating the formation of public spaces through photographic means, what we could call the constitution of a “photographic public sphere.”

This movement must also be understood in the context of the documentary practices in film and photography that emerged on an international scale towards 1930, and whose main goal was to represent the economic crisis and its social effects, particularly among the underprivileged. The documentary discourse surfaced as such at that precise moment for the purpose of giving visibility to the emerging popular classes in the era of mass democracy. However, this genre should not be seen as a homogeneous field, for within it there was a structural conflict and antagonism, mainly between revolutionary and reformist positions, motivated by the double catalyst of solidarity and dread towards the potential of those popular metropolitan masses. It is also necessary to interpret the rise of documentary within the framework of mass propaganda technologies, which originated during that incipient stage of modern visual culture.

It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that the worker photography movement attracted renewed attention and became the subject of a historical rereading.¹ My first contact with it was through the work of Jo Spence and, specifically, her edition, together with Terry Dennett and other Photography Workshop collaborators, of the seminal book *Photography/Politics: One*, published in 1979, which continues to be an essential reference.² The work of Spence and Dennett obviously drew from

1. For more on the reception of the movement in Germany, see the article by Walter Uka, “Zur Rezeption der Arbeiterfotografie in Ost und West nach 1945,” in Diethart Kerbs and Walter Uka, eds., *Fotografie und Bildpublizistik in der Weimarer Republik* (Bönen/Westfalen: Kettler, 2004), 209–20.

2. Terry Dennett and Jo Spence, eds., *Photography/Politics: One* (London: Photography Workshop, 1979).

Marxist photography theory and practice, feminism, and post-May '68 micro-politics, in tune with the New Art History project of the 1970s, whose photography section loosely included such crucial authors as John Tagg, Allan Sekula, Martha Rosler, or, later, John Roberts and others. However, at that time Spence and especially Dennett were receptive to the first recovery of the movement that had taken place at an earlier date in Germany, particularly in the German Democratic Republic in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, and which brought forth the first monographs on the magazines *AIZ* and *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf*, as well as on photographers Walter Ballhause, Erich Rinka, and Ernst Thormann.³ Equally receptive to the German revival, Colin Osman, editor of the British magazine *Creative Camera*, dedicated a monographic issue of the magazine in 1981 to the German and British movements.⁴ In addition, certain historical texts by Willi Münzenberg and Edwin Hoernle were published in David Mellor's important anthology, *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-1933*, published in 1978.⁵

Beyond the educational exhibitions on laminated panels produced by Spence and Dennett's Photography Workshop, it was not until 1991 that the first and, as far as I know, only exhibition on the movement organized to date, entitled *Camera as Weapon: Worker Photography Between the Wars* and curated by Leah Ollman, was put on show at the Museum of Photographic Arts of San Diego before traveling to a series of exhibition venues in American universities, of which there is a small and well-documented catalogue.⁶

Subsequently, from the 1990s onwards, attention to the movement appears to have fallen into lethargy, and it was not until the first decade of the twenty-first century that the contributions of a new generation of photography historians—eager to shed light on some of the dark areas and alternative routes of photographic modernism—began to appear. The work of authors such as Erika Wolf, Devin Fore, Maria Gough, Wolfgang Hesse, or Matthew Witkovsky has, significantly, brought a renewal of the proletarian photography experience.

To begin with, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to these authors, who paved the way for this research and were always accessible and willing to collaborate, and in particular to Terry Dennett, who for years now has been one of the most generous and unconditional sources of information and guidance I have had access to. I would also like to recognize the pioneering work of Naomi Rosenblum, Diethart Kerbs, Daniela

3. Walter Uka, "Zur Rezeption der Arbeiterfotografie . . ."

4. *Creative Camera* 197-198 (May-June 1981).

5. David Mellor, ed., *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-1933* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978). This book includes Edwin Hoernle's "The Working Man's Eye" (originally "Das Auge des Arbeiters"), 47-49, and Willi Münzenberg's "Tasks and Objectives" (originally "Aufgaben und Ziele"), 51-53, both of which are included in this volume on pp. 108 and 110, respectively.

6. Leah Ollman, *Camera as Weapon: Worker Photography Between the Wars* (San Diego: Museum of Photographic Arts, 1991).

Mrazkova, Anne Tucker, and Walter Uka, who recently passed away. Some of these authors have participated in this project, while the rest could easily have done so.

Special thanks must also go to the participants in the conference *The Worker Photography Movement: Towards a Political History of the Origins of Photographic Modernity* held at the Reina Sofía museum in January 21–23, 2010, as part of the process of this research. Their involvement in this venture makes it, in a way, a collective work: Erika Wolf, Maria Gough, Devin Fore, Olivier Lugon, Wolfgang Hesse, Christian Joschke, Matthew Witkovsky, Flip Bool, Duncan Forbes, Jordana Mendelson, Simon Dell, Cristina Cuevas-Wolf, Emilia Tavares, John Raeburn, Anne Tucker, and Naomi Rosenblum.

Erika Wolf has been a major and invaluable source of assistance in this process and my main guide in the complex territory of Soviet photography during the period of the Cultural Revolution. It is no exaggeration to say that when her study on that period is adequately published, it will mark a turning point in photographic historiography.

The contributions of the authors published in this book have been crucial. The selection of sources and historic documents has drawn from the essays and proposals by Erika Wolf, Flip Bool, Duncan Forbes, Josef Seiter, Anne Tucker, and Simon Dell. Béla Albertini's input of Hungarian documents has been especially valuable.

I received important help in locating evidence and documentation that were not easily accessible from Jindrich Toman, Clement Cheroux, Damarice Amao, Françoise Denoyelle, Christian Bouqueret, Eric Rémy, Donald Johnson-Montenegro, Kaira Cabañas, Helena Chávez, Jesse Lerner, Malcolm Polfreman, Didier Schulmann, José Antonio Rodríguez, Vaclav Macek, and, especially, from Monika Faber.

During the several trips made throughout the research process, I had access to the uniquely helpful assistance and valuable advice of Michael Ponstingl, Anton Holzer, Michaela Pfundner, Péter Baki, Tóth Balázs Zoltán, Daniela Mrazkova, Diethart Kerbs, Doina Popescu, Jürgen Matschie, Mason Klein, Elizabeth Manzi, Jiří Patek, Etelka Baji, Katalin Jalsovzsky, Peter Badel, Bodo Von Dewitz, Peter Vier, Ian Mloch, Isabel Ortega, Merche Fernández, David Balsells, Rafael Levenfeld, Javier Herrera, Horacio Fernández, Patricia Molins, Miguel Valle-Inclán, Rosario Peiró, Josep Vicent Monzó, Sandra Fraser, Alex Lachmann, Larry Zeman, Howard Garfinkel, Howard Greenberg, Aude Raimbault, Franck Knoery, Ute Eskildsen, Gabriele Conrath-Scholl, Rajka Knipper, David King, Xosé Luis Suárez, Margaret Williams, Ulrike Staroste, Paul Harbaugh, Sarah Schleuning, Peter Zimmermann, Antje Keller-Hanack, Roland Gretler, Maia Sutnik, Sophie Hackett, Thierry Gervais, Megan Feingold, Erika Gottfried, Julia Tulovsky, Johannes Faber, Agnes Sire, Sylvie Pitoiset, Helga Cechal, Peter Badel, Wolfgang Hesse, Jiří Pikous, Marhata Delenk, Andrés Mario Zervigón, Myriam Rubio, Andrea Glawogger, Barbara Wurm, Katerina Clark, Oksana Sarkisova, Steve Edwards, Gijs Kessler, Cristina Zelich, Roland Tim Heienbrok and Christopher Phillips.

I am particularly indebted to Fiona Dejardin, Alison Nordstrom, Anne Tucker, and Cynthia Young for their generosity.

Iven Paschmanns collaborated intensely and decisively in the first stage of the project. Cristina Bonet has always been an incomparably intelligent and perspicacious interlocutor.

It is not easy to transmit the complexity of this expedition into relatively uncharted territory and against the grain of a peaceful account of modernism. This intricacy stems not only from the difficulty in locating and accessing materials and documents, when records actually exist (let us not forget that this is the story of the prosecuted and the repressed), but because it encompasses a very broad arena made up of numerous and multifarious micro-scenes in different geographic and linguistic contexts. Each of these micro-scenes requires expert knowledge. Thus, this task exceeds the capacities of a single researcher, and a great deal of ingenuity is needed to embark on such an enterprise. Much remains to be done. In these circumstances, the participants in the January 2010 conference and the authors of the essays in this book have been perfect fellow travelers in this sailing across rough seas, and for which we often had no maps or the ones we had were misleading. I would like to express here my admiration for their work and, at the same time, my appreciation for their generous help and company. It has been a privilege to work with them. I trust that this joint effort will start to shape a new cartography and narrative of photographic modernism that helps us to better understand the different historic forces involved in its formation and that changes existing power relationships.

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The Difficult Conjunction of 'Worker' and 'Photographer' in France

Simon Dell

Nos Regards: Illustré mondiale du travail (Our View: World of Work Illustrated) was the first forum for communist photography in France; launched in May 1928, this photojournal ran for only eighteen issues before ceasing publication in October 1929, its closure in part the result of repression exercised by the government of Camille Chautemps. The month the journal folded, and doubtless occasioned by the same repression, the internal bulletin of the Parti communiste français (PCF) published a review of the role of the factory newspaper. The *Carnet du militant* reiterated the view that the newspaper had to:

... reveal the slightest sign of exploitation, from the filth of the washrooms to even a hint of dissatisfaction, and to remind the work force, including female workers and laborers who have arrived from the colonies and other foreign lands, to occupy their place on the work committees and thus take up the fight based on a list of demands, without ceasing in their constant endeavors to raise the political awareness of the workers, or to associate the struggle waged with their employers for even the most insignificant pay rise with the conflict over the rationalization plan and the bourgeois preparations to do battle with their socialist leaders and reformers.¹

In this context the injunction is not to show alienation but to clarify it. "Repression must be explained by starting from the situation in the factory."² Here the worker's perspective is taken to be that of the shop floor and the task of the party is to link this viewpoint to others, to explain how re-

sistance to the filth of the factory washrooms is ultimately linked with the campaign to defend the Soviet Union. The factory newspaper was a tool to forge these links. But what of *Nos Regards*? What role could photography have in these campaigns? What was the relationship between workers' experience and their representation of that experience? At the close of 1929 there were no clear answers to these questions and a history of worker photography should not pretend otherwise. A description of how workers used photography should offer some account of *Nos Regards* but also acknowledge the conditions described in the *Carnet du militant*. For worker photography did not and does not belong in any straightforward sense within the history of photography; it is a subaltern history, structured by alienation as is the history of the working class. Thus the practice of worker photography needs to be located in the vicissitudes of the relationship between workers, the party, and the various organs the latter used to address the former. What follows is an attempt at location for the French workers and the French party. Their case is, I believe, a special one. While the PCF, like the Communist parties of other countries, was committed to the defense of the Soviet Union, in France this international project could be related to a national tradition; the revolution of 1789 could be held to prefigure those of 1917. The distinctive paradox of the French case is that the PCF only came to embrace this interpretation of its national heritage once it had been made subservient to international control. Embracing this legacy served to consolidate the position of the PCF in the broad political alliance of the Popular Front and thus led to the party's greatest elec-

total successes in the interwar period, yet the further irony I shall explore is how this success was the condition for the failure of worker photography in France.

The French Communist Party

The relationship between the PCF and the working class was shaped by forces both national and international, and the tergiversations of the party in the interwar period may fairly be ascribed to the shifting balance of these forces.³ The play of these forces was already evident in the creation of the French party, a political group brought about through division. At the party congress of the French socialists, held at Tours in December 1920, the majority voted for affiliation with the Communist (Third) International; thus the *Section française de l'internationale ouvrière* (SFIO, French Section of the Workers' International) was reduced to 40,000 members while the newly formed PCF counted 140,000. The new party was shaped by the conditions for affiliation established by Lenin at the Second Congress of the Comintern in July and August 1920.⁴ Here Lenin set a course between opportunism and anti-parliamentarianism; in France this entailed steering between the socialism of Léon Blum and the syndicalism of the *Confédération générale du Travail* (CGT, General Confederation of Labor). Thus the creation of the PCF came about not only through the division of the SFIO; at its inception the new party leadership was to be divided from the traditions of the French labor movement.

The division could not be made by fiat or by ballot; the process of Bolshevization and then Stalinization would take more than a decade. Many of those who had campaigned at Tours for affiliation would resign or be expelled. Ludovic-Oscar Frossard, the first secretary general of the party, resigned in 1923 in the wake of the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, which had effectively reorganized the direction of the PCF. The control

exercised by Moscow increased after the Fifth Congress, when the term "Bolshevization" was coined. Next to be excluded were Victor Delagarde, Alfred Rosmer, and Pierre Monatte, and then Boris Souveraine; with them went important chapters from the history of French militancy.⁵ And while these exclusions were part of a series of struggles within the French party, they were also part of the conflict in Moscow between Trotsky and Zinoviev. That fight was brought to an end in 1927, when Stalin engineered the expulsion of both, first from the Central Committee and then from the party itself.⁶

In France the Central Committee of the PCF greeted with approbation the measures taken against Trotsky and Zinoviev and also approved the new policies of the "Third Period." Social democrats were now denounced as "social fascists" and electoral alliances with such groups prohibited; as such the policy of the Third Period was of a piece with the other policies whereby the French party was reshaped. The result was that in the elections of April 1928 PCF presence in the Chamber of Deputies was reduced from twenty-six seats to fourteen. By the standards of a parliamentary party, then, the new tactics could not be judged a success. But the PCF was a proletarian revolutionary party, one prepared to fight campaigns on different fronts. Certainly, the pages of *Cahiers du bolchevisme* were replete with justifications for the new policy; yet Bernard Pudal has argued that rather than view it narrowly in terms of the Chamber, it should be considered as the final means of implanting the proletarian party and insuring its reproduction.⁷ The leader of this Stalinist party was to be Maurice Thorez, who secured his position as secretary general in 1931. In July of that year, just as a final round of denunciations began with the censuring of Henri Barbé and Pierre Célor, Thorez made a series of statements denouncing sectarianism.⁸ Thus the ground was prepared for a transformation of the relationship between the party and its members.

From the Third Period to the Popular Front
Thorez assumed leadership of a party that was newly disciplined, internally reorganized and, finally, under the control of a new generation. Born in 1900, Thorez, like Barbé and Célor, had issued from the ranks of the Jeunesses communistes. This generation was able to embrace elements of a French tradition the Comintern had spent a decade uprooting. Yet this espousal was not simply the result of a change of heart. There was also a shift in the object of affection, that is, the Third Republic.

On February 6, 1934, demonstrations against the new government of Edouard Daladier led to riots and, the following day, to Daladier's resignation. His was the first government of the Third Republic to be brought down by violence. However, the PCF and the SFIO could not respond effectively to this situation; in both parties the leadership failed to grasp the full significance of events and were initially unable to define the terms of an antifascist struggle. This task was assumed by a new organization, the Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes (CVIA). The manifesto of the CVIA, "Aux Travailleurs," was drafted by Pierre Gérôme and André Delmas, who persuaded Paul Rivet, Paul Langevin, and Alain to be signatories. The latter three represented a spectrum of the left; Rivet was a member of the SFIO, Langevin was known to be sympathetic to the communists and Alain to the Radical Party. At a symbolic level, the manifesto performed the task of uniting the left in the aftermath of February 6 and as such it came to be presented by the CVIA as the first realization of the Popular Front. The manifesto was a declaration of support offered to the workers by intellectuals. It begins:

United before the spectacle of the fascist riots in Paris and the popular resistance which was the single response offered to them, we set aside our differences and declare to all workers, our comrades, our resolution to struggle with them

in order to save from fascist dictatorship all the rights and public liberties which the people have conquered.⁹

In this formulation of events, the liberties previously won by "the people" are protected by the most dynamic class, that of the workers. The intellectuals now recognize and support this action. This formulation differed in important respects from those offered by the party organs; whereas in the aftermath of February 6 the PCF persisted in calling for a Republic of the Soviets and the SFIO a Republic of the Workers, the manifesto of the CVIA refused to maintain a privileged link between the Republic and a class.

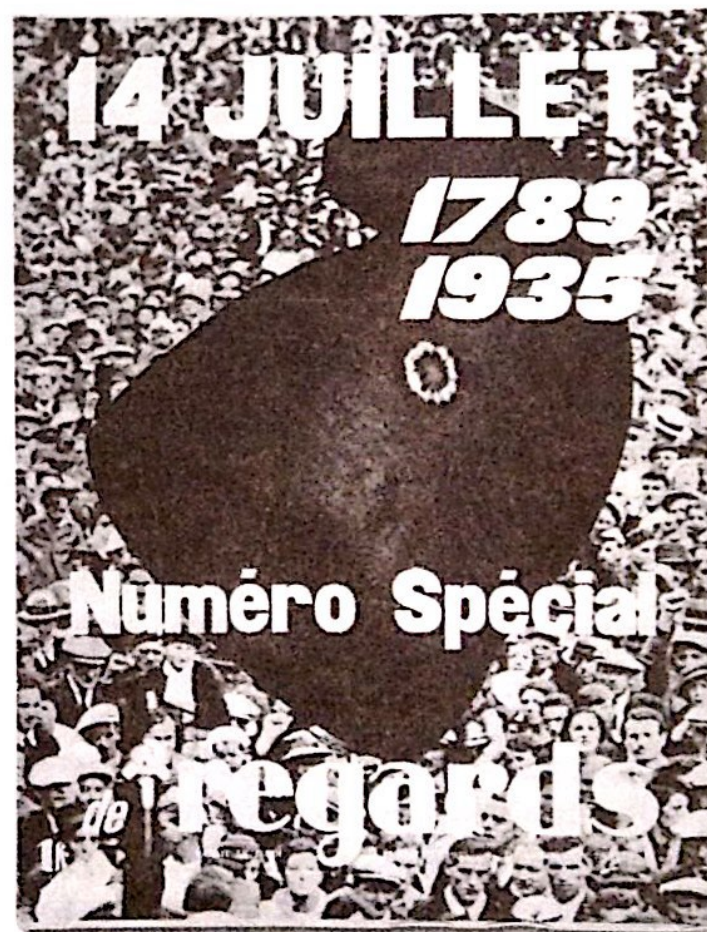
Once these terms were established the PCF and the SFIO began a process of reconciliation that led to the signing of a pact on July 27, 1934; on October 9, Thorez called for the pact to be widened to become a "Popular Front" against fascism. This was to be a front organized "from above," at the level of the parties' leadership rather than through "the base." Thus negotiations now began over a program which would be acceptable to the Radical Party. The Popular Front was sealed when the radicals agreed to participate in rallies celebrating July 14, 1935.¹⁰ Thus the PCF turned from the intransigent militancy of the Third Period, and in the months following February 1934, the language of revolution was superseded by that of antifascism; calls for the overthrow of the rotten democracy were gradually replaced by protestations of loyalty to the Republic. Thorez took to appearing in a tricolor sash, declaring that "the communists ... love their country."¹¹

The turn of the PCF to a Jacobin tradition enabled it to address a far broader constituency than that defined for the Third Period and this had direct consequences for the cultural policies of the party. These after-effects may be traced most readily through *Commune*, the organ of the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (AEAR, Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers).

This group followed the line of the PCF and thus was initially critical of the CVIA; however, as the party moved towards the policy of the Popular Front the stance of *Commune* shifted. In the summer of 1934 the editors of this journal staked a claim not only to a popular culture of folklore and traditional song but also to that which the bourgeoisie had usurped: "the legacy of Rimbaud and of Zola, the legacy of Cézanne and of Courbet."¹² Their aim was to revive a national heritage not only of folklore but also of fine art, the art "that dies in museums . . . of the bourgeoisie."¹³ On October 23, 1934, Paul Vaillant-Couturier, the general secretary of the AEAR, issued an open call for support for the association; he echoed the call of Thorez for a Popular Front by appealing for a broad defense of "culture."¹⁴ The task now was not to create a proletarian culture but to restore and defend that which had been appropriated by the bourgeoisie. Yet this undertaking was to fall to those who already had professional competence; just as the Popular Front was to be organized from above, so would the defense of culture.¹⁵ This shift of policy necessarily conditioned the activities of the base, and thus was to prescribe the activities of French worker photographers and the group organized as the Amateurs Photographes Ouvriers (APO, Amateur Worker Photographers).

Communist Press and the Amateurs Photographes Ouvriers

The first association of worker photographers was established in Germany by Willi Münzenberg. In March 1926, his journal, *AIZ*, announced a photographic competition, envisaging every worker as a potential photo correspondent. The response to the competition was such as to lead to the creation of an association, the Vereinigung der Arbeiter-fotografen Deutschlands (Association of German Worker Photographers), with its own publication, *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf*. Thus the Vereinigung



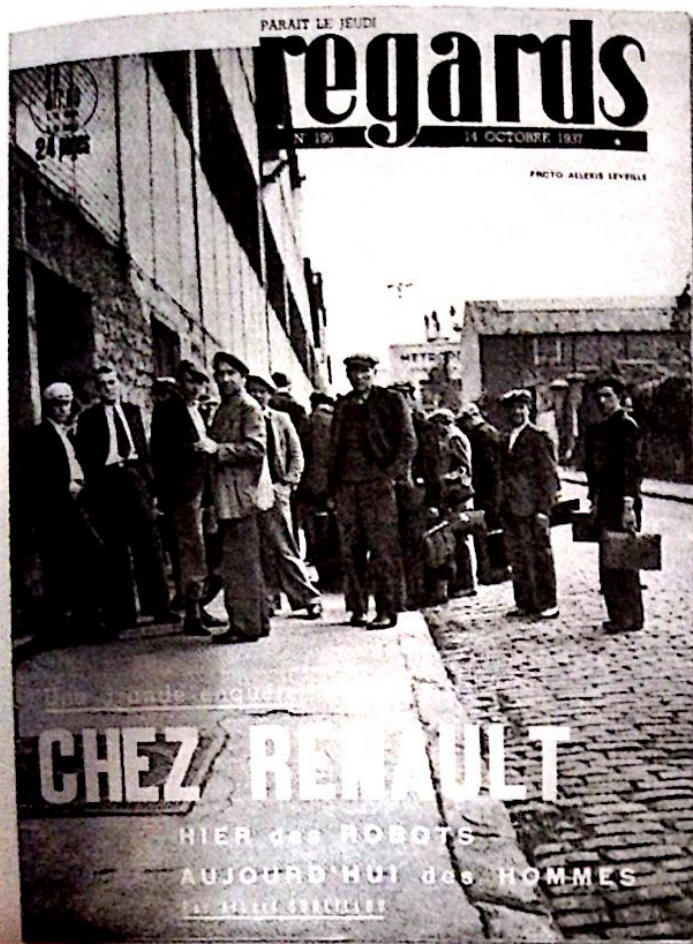
Figs. 1 and 2 Special Bastille Day issue, *Regards*, 1935 cover and back cover

emerged as part of Münzenberg's propaganda activities and developed platforms within his publishing empire, the so-called "Münzenberg Konzern." Yet while the German organization was a model for the French one, there is a divergence in their histories due to the different trajectories of communism in each country. Nevertheless, Münzenberg deserves credit for the development of French worker photography, which was in part a result of his endeavors to develop a visual propaganda in France. His first attempt was *La Russie nouvelle: Revue ouvrière internationale illustrée* (The New Russia: International Illustrated Workers' Magazine), published between May 1924 and October 1925; this became *Le Monde du travail: Revue internationale illustrée* (The World of Work: International Illustrated Magazine), which appeared only for the months of November and December 1925. The next project was launched through the agency of Lily Corpus and Münzenberg's wife, Babette Gross. These two were sent to Paris in the spring of 1928 to organize the publication of *Nos Regards*.¹⁶ Their attempt was to recreate the success of *AIZ*; what is significant is their failure. In Germany, creating an alternative to the dominant culture could be an effective part of Third Period policy; in France this was not the case. Andreas Wirschung has argued that the "professional and mental dividing lines within the working class, which in France remained for the most part insurmountable, faded away in Germany under the impact of collective experience of expensive and scarce provisions, unemployment, and housing problems."¹⁷ In Germany, therefore, "to a much greater degree than in France, the paradigms of the 'Third Period' seemed to be plausible in terms of past experience."¹⁸ Thus the militant worker photography developed in Germany could not be readily transplanted to France. The spring of 1928 and the emergence of the Third Period could seem an auspicious moment to found a French photojournal, but this was a perspective from Berlin, not from Paris. Yet while the French project could not flourish

under the Third Period, it could, suitably transformed, have a limited development once that moment was past.

The history of the *Amateurs Photographes Ouvriers* was closely tied to that of the PCF; just as the language of the revolution was eclipsed in the party so it seems were the ideological tasks of the APO; both the larger and the smaller organization were transformed by the task of republican defense. Established in 1930, the APO had its first headquarters at 28 rue Boyer.¹⁹ Discussing the emerging international network of worker photographers in 1931, Münzenberg was compelled to acknowledge that the groups outside Germany were embryonic and indeed the French organization was not institutionally prominent.²⁰ By 1932 the group had a home at 8 avenue Mathurin-Moreau, along with other workers' pedagogical organizations, yet it does not feature at this date in the communist *Almanach Ouvrier-Paysan* (Worker and Peasant Almanac), an important register of such bodies.²¹ By late 1933 the group had moved to 13 rue du Faubourg Montmartre, where it became part of the *Confédération Culturelle Ouvrière*, the confederation which also sheltered such groups as the *Fédération du Théâtre Ouvrier de France* and the *Radio-Phono Union Ouvrière*.²²

To be sheltered thus was to take a place within the cultural initiatives of the PCF, characterized most clearly by the AEAR, which was also housed at this date on Faubourg Montmartre. Yet as I have indicated, by the time the APO had found this home, the cultural policy of the PCF had turned away from the militant activism which had defined the earliest phases of worker photography. This turn may be traced most clearly through the history of the relaunched *Nos Regards*, which appeared as *Regards sur le monde du travail* from January 1932.²³ The journal was presented at first as a potential forum for worker photography and thus its attitude to its readership as both producers and consumers is an index of the status of photographic practice within the PCF. While the first issue of the



Regards 196, 1937, cover

new journal curiously lacks any editorial statement, the second has a declaration in which the journal is defined as an "organ of mass collaboration."²⁴ This collaboration was to involve worker correspondents and also photographers, as elaborated in the third number, when a more detailed invitation was issued to readers. Here older aspirations were restated: "We want to clearly reflect the difficult existence, the tiresome labor, of the proletariat battle."²⁵ This much recalls the language of the factory newspaper and in presenting this proletarian perspective as a counter to that of the bourgeois press, *Regards* aligned itself and its collaborators with the German model. The editorial policy of the journal initially matched these aims; calls for collaboration were issued and in a "Boîte aux lettres" criticism of photographic practice was provided. Yet such invitations indicate the desire for collaboration rather than its fact; the frustration



Fig. 4 *Regards* 53, 1935, cover

with their readership which the editors sometimes expressed suggests that despite the existence of the APO there was not an extensive network of photographers in France comparable to that of the German organization.²⁶ The call for photo correspondents was renewed when the editors launched a new rubric, "Regards en avant," in April 1934. Yet this regular feature soon became devoted to collaborators who served by supporting the diffusion of *Regards*.²⁷

This is not to say that the potential for collaboration was never exploited; there were a few occasions when the workers came to represent themselves. On April 20, 1934, *Regards* carried an announcement of a competition to photograph the antifascist demonstrations organized for the next month.²⁸ The results were published in the issue of May 25; if the demonstrations were a form of public resistance to a reactionary politics, this

included were professionals, and mostly members of the AEAR; alongside their work was included a section devoted to "documents" of fascism and antifascist struggle. In this division photographic practice was defined by existing institutional and professional norms and there was no place for the amateur. This should not be surprising; the culture the AEAR wished to reappropriate might have been revolutionary, but its forms and media were, in important respects, traditional. Ironically, this is most clearly revealed in a photograph taken by Chim just weeks before the AEAR exhibition opened. This image shows the May Day parade of that year and members of the crowd carrying portraits on placards; Vallès is prominent but Zola and Courbet are also present. Other representatives of the culture to be defended include Diderot and Signac. Photographers will not have a place in this pantheon. Photography has a role, as Chim's image and its publication in *Regards* attest, but it is to reproduce the cultural work of others. This seems the best role which could be imagined under the Popular Front.

Victory and Defeat

On May 3, 1936, the parties of the Popular Front won an election victory at the second round of voting. A few days afterwards Georges Sadoul interviewed the writer Jean-Richard Bloch for *Regards*, to hear his thoughts on the meaning of this transformation. Bloch noted that the bourgeoisie was now in decline, and in fear, as a result of the election. The Popular Front had gained access to power, or at least occupied power, and Bloch felt that similar demands for access should now be made on the cultural front. This was the opposite of the situation which had confronted Münzenberg during the Third Period; rather than attempt to create an alternative culture, Bloch wished to confront the capitalist forces which made culture an exclusive preserve.³¹ That photography was not a stake in this struggle was finally made ex-

plicit by Jean-Baptiste Severac writing a few days later in the organ of the SFIO, *Le Populaire*. Severac persisted in viewing the book as the "instrument of true culture"; accordingly he quoted with approbation Georges Duhamel to the effect that the image in the press was open to abuse, for to the extent that the image makes text unnecessary, so photography makes man lazy.³² Unwittingly, this language recalls that of Münzenberg in one of the manifestos of worker photography: "Photography works upon the human eye; what is seen is reflected in the brain without the need for complicated thought. In this way the bourgeoisie takes advantage of the mental indolence of the masses."³³ For Münzenberg, this meant that photography was a weapon to be seized and turned against the bourgeois class; Severac drew the opposite conclusion. Of course, Severac was a socialist, not a communist. But he was a representative of the attitude with which the communists had to contend and cooperate in order to maintain the unity of the Popular Front. This marked a limit to the practice of worker photography.

In retrospect, the limits of this practice were defined not only by the boundaries of legitimate culture but also by its inverse, mass culture. When Duhamel and Severac wrote of their fears of a public grown idle they were also expressing anxieties about the technologies of leisure. From this perspective French worker photography belongs to a specific interval, between the emergence of new technologies of reproduction in the late 1920s and their expropriation by capital in the period following the Second World War. Worker photography belongs, then, to the prehistory of "the everyday," to that moment when media such as photography had different kinds of potential, before the spectacle was fully established.

NOTES

1. Comité central du Parti communiste français, "Campagne du XII^e anniversaire de la Révolution d'octobre-novembre 1917," *Carnet du militant* 4 (1929); reprinted in Nicole

- Racine and Louis Bodin, eds., *Le Parti communiste français pendant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972), 178–82, 178.
2. Ibid., 179.
 3. The most detailed narrative for the interwar period remains Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste*, vol. 1 (Paris: Fayard, 1980). An indispensable biographical source is Jean Maitron, ed., *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français: Quatrième partie 1914–1939* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1982–93).
 4. The twenty-one conditions and the corresponding resolutions are reprinted in Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure*, 554–66.
 5. For the significance of these figures see the entries in Maitron, *Dictionnaire biographique*. For their fall see Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure*, 183–218.
 6. For an overview of the Soviet history and its international dimensions, see Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).
 7. Bernard Pudal, *Prendre parti: Pour une sociologie historique du PCF* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1989), 144–58.
 8. See Maurice Thorez, *Oeuvres: Livre 2e, Tome 2, juin 1931–février 1932* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1950).
 9. Alain, Paul Langevin, and Paul Rivet, “Aux Travailleurs,” *Commune* 7–8 (March–April 1934): 859–64, 859.
 10. This is a brief summary of complex developments. For the PCF during this period, see Denis Peschanski, *Et pourtant ils tournent: Vocabulaire et stratégie du PCF, 1934–1936* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1988).
 11. Thorez cited by Jacques Duclos, *Le Triomphe du Front populaire: De la Conférence Communiste d'Ivry (juin 1934) aux Assises de la Paix et de la Liberté du 14 juillet 1935* (Paris: Les Publications révolutionnaires, 1935), 20, ellipsis added.
 12. AEAR, “L'AEAR salue le premier congrès des écrivains soviétiques,” *Commune* 11–12 (July–August 1934): 1153–57, 1156.
 13. Ibid., ellipsis added.
 14. For this turn and the cultural politics of the period the work of Pascal Ory is indispensable: see *La Belle Illusion: Culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire, 1935–1938* (Paris: Plon, 1994).
 15. In October 1934 the AEAR had eight hundred members in all, including one hundred and sixty painters and sculptors, and sixty-five architects. For the composition of the organization, see *ibid.*, 119. There seem to have been twenty photographers: Boiffard, Breitenbach, Cartier-Bresson, Chim, Fuld, Feher, Jamet, Krull, Kertész, Lemare, Lothar, Man Ray, Moral, Papillon, Paris, Parry, Ronis, Verger, Vigneau, and Zuber. See Natalie-Aurelia Pommier, *Photojournalisme et agences photographiques dans les années trente en France* (Paris: unpublished dissertation, 1989), 32.
 16. Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg: Eine politische Biographie* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1967), 165–66.
 17. Andreas Wirschung, “French and German Communism: A Comparative View,” in Norman Laporte, Kevin Morgan, and Matthew Worley, eds., *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–1953* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 89–104, 98.
 18. Ibid.
 19. The address given in the first bulletin of the APO, of October 1930, reprinted in *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 4, 12 (1930).
 20. Willi Münzenberg “Aufgaben und Ziele: Der Internationalen Arbeiter-Fotografen-Bewegung,” *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 5, 5 (1931): 99–101. See translation on p. 110.
 21. The address is given in “Photographes ouvriers ... collaborez à *Regards*,” *Regards* 3 (March 1932): 11. It was shared with the Internationale des Travailleurs de l'Enseignement and the Université ouvrière, among others.
 22. *Almanach Ouvrier-Paysan* (Paris: L'Humanité, 1934), 11.
 23. *Regards sur le monde du travail* was initially a monthly; in January 1933 it became a fortnightly, and in February 1934, a weekly. It then ran until September 1939. It was retitled simply *Regards* as of September 1933.
 24. Anon., “A Nos Lecteurs,” *Regards sur le monde du travail* 2 (February 1932): 11.
 25. Anon., “Photographes ouvriers ... collaborez à *Regards*,” *Regards sur le monde du travail* 3 (March 1932): 11.
 26. See for example the appeal for photographs of recent demonstrations in “Boîte aux lettres,” *Regards* 8 (March 9, 1934): 14. The following issue contains a reprimand to those whose submissions were sent too late to be included.
 27. The last appearance of “Regards en avant” is in *Regards* 30 (August 10, 1934): 14. By this date the feature had effectively been supplanted by one entitled “Le coin de la diffusion.”
 28. Anon., “Regards offre un concours aux amateurs photographes,” *Regards* 14 (April 20, 1934): 15.
 29. The first text was “Chômeurs sans secours,” *Regards* 6 (February 23, 1934): 6–7.
 30. Chim could hardly be described as a secure professional in 1934 but he was attempting to make a career as a photographer and had received training at the Akademie für Graphische Künste und Buchgewerbe in Leipzig. See Catherine Chermayeff et al., eds., *Chim: The Photographs of David Seymour* (London: André Deutsch, 1996), 15–17.
 31. G. S. [Georges Sadoul], “Jean-Richard Bloch nous parle du destin de la culture,” *Regards* 122 (May 14, 1936): 16, 20.
 32. J.-B. Severac, “A travers les Revues: L'image et la presse,” *Le Populaire* (May 19, 1936).
 33. Münzenberg, “Aufgaben und Ziele,” 99. See translation on p. 110.

Why an Association of Working-class Photographers
Amateurs Photographes Ouvriers
"Pourquoi un groupement de photographes
ouvriers," *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 3
(March 1931): 53

Is photography known, recognized, and practiced as required among the working class? Certainly not, we could reply without hesitation.

The mere posing of the question and its response highlight what we strive to achieve and the strategy that we have set out for ourselves. Some of us think that ignorance of this incomparable means of expression is, for our comrades, a weakness and a fault. Not to react would be an inexcusable negligence.

Generally, there are—proportionately—three times more amateur photographers in England, Germany, and America than in France. Moreover, we could say that the practice of photography is non-existent among the working class here.

This is the case because many believe the photographer's costs to be prohibitive considering their budget. Others, regarding this art as a simple game, similar to a pastime, have abandoned it at the first setback—after having ruined some film rolls—since we only truly become attached to what we know and understand perfectly.

Moreover, amateurs here seem to know nothing about the pleasure and power of association, whereas in our neighboring countries, numerous societies provide their members with the means to improve.

We wish to provide our comrades with the same opportunities; we would like photography to occupy the position it deserves among workers. It should be, at the same time, a proletarian weapon and art, as our German comrades have understood perfectly.

Photography has a place in all homes, between all hands, in all circumstances.

The colossal source of documentation it provides must capture the attention of workers who, through it, have the means to eloquently trans-

late their suffering, the exploitation to which they fall victim, to expose their lives and its dangers.

It is all too easy to say that success is dependent on equipment and accessories. Nothing could be further from the truth. For those who know how to use it, any equipment is adequate. Even with the most modest [of cameras], we can obtain the most beautiful results.

Far from our minds is the thought of coercing our members into undertaking dry technical studies, forcing them to carry out experiments that do not allow them to explore their hobby or their tastes. However, it is necessary for everyone to be convinced that it is essential to know—at least summarily—the whys and hows of the gestures he must master. In all cases, success depends solely on the operator.

In photography, like in T.S.F.¹ for example, the role of the amateur is of great importance. It constitutes the mass and, if he is skilled, his constant control is borne out in the results.

But it is only through constant practice, by means of close collaboration with the best practitioners of the association, that our comrades may earn the title of skilled amateurs, and that they may contribute, in turn, to the training of other members.

It is as part of the association that they will be able to truly realize the value of their contributions; it is there that they will learn to be sufficiently hard on themselves; a harshness essential for progress.

NOTES

1. French term for *télégraphie sans fil* or radio. [Ed.]

An AIZ in France?

E. Dutilleul

"Un AIZ en France?" *Regards* 11 (November 1932): 2

The French bourgeoisie has published numerous illustrated journals and periodicals for the purpose of defending class distinction and poisoning proletarian minds.

The French proletariat does not yet have an *illustrated working-class weekly*, a powerful tool eliciting agitation, propaganda, and revolutionary education.

However, since *Nos Regards* came into existence, a venture eliciting much interest, not a week has gone by without us receiving requests or suggestions for our illustrated version to appear in heliogravure.

The current issue of *Regards*, published by the SOI¹ and *L'Humanité* on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution, and containing the AEAR's² competition, provides an example—though still far from perfect—of what can be achieved.

Considering *Nos Regards* of a few years ago and the two more recent issues of *Communiste*, published by *L'Humanité* (the first on the occasion of the elections with over 175,000 copies sold, the second on August 1, 1932) has shown that such a newspaper catered for a need.

Nos Regards had to suspend publication due to lack of funding following the attack of the Tardieu government against *L'Humanité* and *La Banque ouvrière et paysanne*.

Communiste was, and could only be, an illustrated book published by *L'Humanité* under certain stipulated conditions and intervals.

Regards, in its usual format, layout, and frequency—appearing monthly—cannot overcome the significant technical handicap of not being able to turn to heliogravure printing due to its limited run.

The French working class want and deserve better. The only illustrated newspaper likely to respond to its legitimate expectations is a weekly, printed and manufactured using the most modern technical processes, as in the case of *AIZ*, a weekly illustrated publication for the German revolutionary proletariat, which could be considered to meet requirements.

Each week, *AIZ* prints over four hundred thousand copies. Besides this magnificent journal, German revolutionary workers also have at their disposal several other illustrated periodic publications.

Will the French working-class be denied a similar propaganda tool forevermore?

No, certainly not!

The first issue of *Nos Regards* was well received; in 1928, this working-class illustrated publication already responded to a need. In 1932, during the disintegration of the former capitalist world, where the most solid structures are weakening against a Soviet Union that continues its march towards communism with proletarian enthusiasm and heroism—on the eve of decisive battles of the proletariat—*Nos Regards*, a new weekly, is no longer a requirement, it is a necessity.

Why, one might ask, a weekly and not a monthly?

Why aim so high from the start?

There are two responses to this question:

The first is political in nature: for technical reasons, a monthly is not characterized by bearing the *latest news* and consequently provoking the *agitation* that we have the right to evoke.

The second is of a commercial nature: a monthly publication does not interest sellers much in that its sale is only occasional. Sellers are more interested in a weekly, as it brings in regular, legitimate funds.

NOTES

1. Secours Ouvrier International, the French branch of the Workers International Relief [Ed.]

2. French Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists. [Ed.]

Worker Photographers . . . Collaborate with *Regards*

"Photographes ouvriers . . . collaborez a *Regards*," *Regards* 3 (March 1932): 11

Today, we are calling upon our readers for their collaboration.

The two APO photographs selected from a collection some amateur photographers sent us should illustrate the stance that we want the *Regards* "world of work" journal to take.

We want to differentiate ourselves entirely from the illustrated reviews that the bourgeois newspapers publish. We want to clearly reflect the difficult existence, the tiresome labor, of the proletarian battle.

What could be more expressive than an image, a snapshot of real life?

Not a pose, even if it is original, but the very expression of what we are: workers.

Fellow readers, imagine the pose of a star, which all the illustrated magazines, published in millions of copies, boast about. It's a distraction, some would say, publications just to be leafed through. The bourgeoisie knows that it is a way to lead workers astray and a means to do "brisk business."

Readers of *Regards* have risen above this quagmire. They are not abandoning their class. Better still, it is their duty to remind numerous workers, their friends, of this; it is their duty to improve their journal even further by offering their collaboration to it.

Today, we are starting out; we are still finding our feet with this collaboration, but the only proletarian organization of photographers is working with us already.

How many of you own a camera? Many of you, we should think. But how many know how to take a good picture—good, both in terms of technical aspects as well as the expression of its subject? Many need advice in this regard. Although poor, our friendly organization owns a laboratory, arranges trips, screens projections of magnesium shots, prints, and [organizes] events. Our collaborators are in contact with numerous partners in the provincial areas and in foreign countries, particularly Germany and the USSR.

Supplying materials is good; but to learn to produce them yourself, to benefit from the experience of those who have known how to take quality photographs for a long time—that is the APO's aim. We must therefore assist them.

We will have the opportunity to revisit this subject, but let us recall that in *L'Humanité*, the APOs made their presence felt on May Day, the (textile)

strike of the North, the Communards' Wall, various protests, the conference of the CGTU,¹ certain meetings, etc.

We need a definitive break from the bourgeois style that unfortunately still influences us, to align ourselves with the world of work of which our *Regards* review must be the living expression.

Yes, we must denounce exploitation, poverty; but also set in motion the ground-swell of the proletariat's aspirations, which does not place anything in front of the lens, but of which we must still seize every moment.

Let us progress then, reader friends, let us write, send us photos so that *Regards* may become even better and more widely distributed.

Enter into contact with the APOs, 8, avenue Mathurin-Moreau, Paris-19th.

NOTES

1. A French trade union federation. [Ed.]

The War . . . that is Being Prepared for and Carried out

"La guerre . . . qui se prépare et qui se fait," *Regards* 4 (April 1932): 14

To photograph is good . . .

When the lens knowingly orientates itself towards the great industrial labor camps where thousands of workers are being exploited while our bourgeoisie is feverishly preparing for war. This is a task undertaken by the organization of the APOs, 8, avenue Mathurin-Moreau, Paris (19th).

. . . but to expose is better!

However, if the image carries the weight of an entire article, as it often does, it deserves to be completed. Factories must be explored, exploitation and war in them exposed. This is the task undertaken by the worker correspondents (*Rabkors*).

The amateur working-class photographers and the *Rabkors* form part of the revolutionary proletariat army. Readers of *Regards*: join this army!

Photography, a Class Weapon

Henri Tracol

"Photographie, arme de classe,"

Cahier Rouge 1 (1933): 6

No one contests anymore the force given to photography by its power of immediate evocation and its appearance of an almost scientific "document".

The direct, subconscious influence that photography may exert—or rather exerts—on millions of people has not gone unnoticed by the ruling class: in its hands, this "disinterested" means of investigation has been transformed, like many others, into a formidable weapon.

We do not question a photograph: we consider it an exact, faithful, impartial reproduction of reality. This is an essentially superficial, lazy attitude rendered all the more dangerous given that the bourgeoisie does not miss the opportunity to make the most of it.

In fact, the art of "captioning," which every journalist must know and practice to perfection, takes advantage of this truce conceded by the critical spirit of readers to feed them the most biased commentaries under the pretense of innocent explanations. The more subtle art of photographic rigging has been practiced for several years, particularly by certain widely-distributed bourgeois newspapers.



A proletarian reply is required to these systematic lies of the capitalist press.

A class weapon, photography should, in return, serve the interests of the exploited against the exploiters. In France, as in Germany, working-class photographers form groups, tackling certain subjects from the outset—poverty, unemployment, police suppression, mass demonstrations, etc.—of a type voluntarily ignored up until now.

Fulfilling its task, the photographic department of the AEAR intends to collect all revolutionary photographs and establish a close collaboration with the working-class press; it is in the process of building up photographic archives where all pictures likely to

illustrate aspects of a wide variety of subjects are filed.

Members of the department consider that their role is not only to multiply the images of a clearly revolutionary nature, but also to find a revolutionary use for photos of all categories.

The photographic department of the AEAR is calling on all sympathizer photographers—both amateur and professional—asking them to stand together with those who wish to provide the proletariat with a powerful organization of revolutionary photographers.

Amateur Photographer Competition

"Concours des amateurs photographes," *Regards*

16 (May 11, 1934): 15

Regards is organizing a photography competition on the subject of demonstrations, meetings, and protests organized on the occasion of the national antifascist rally on May 20.

We wish for our amateur photographer friends to send us their images (prints and plates or films).

Our editors will select and reproduce the best of these pictures.

This competition will have two categories:

The first is open to amateur photographers of the provincial areas. The competition is open from today onwards and will entail the allocation of twenty prizes. It will close on May 20.

The second will be open only to amateur photographers of the Parisian region (Paris, Seine, and Seine-et-Oise). The competition offers ten prizes and will close on May 22, at 9 o'clock in the morning.

Moreover, any published photograph will be paid for at the rate approved by the APO of Paris, which is 20 Francs per photo.

Films and plates will be returned upon request. Starting today, send your images to *Regards*, indicating on the package "for the amateur photographer competition."

THE FIRST PRIZE WILL BE
A Lumière Dialux camera
6x9, anastigmat lens f/6.3

AEAR

ASSOCIATION DES ECRIVAINS
ET ARTISTES REVOLUTIONNAIRES

La section photographique de l'A.E.A.R.
organise une exposition de
Documents de la vie sociale

du 21 mai au 21 juin
à la galerie de la Pléiade
73, bd Saint-Michel

Vernissage le 21 mai à 16 h.

LISTE DES EXPOSANTS

Yves Allégret, J.-A. Boiffard, Pierre Boucher, Brassai,
Breitenbach, Henri Cartier, Cama, Yvonne Chevalier, Chim,
Clavel, Doméla, V. H. Elenbaas, Fehér, Fuld, John Heartfield,
Joris Ivens, Klotz, Germaine Krull, Kertész, Lavrec, Jacques
Lamere, Roger Livet, Eli Loter, Makovska, Man Ray, Martell,
Moral, Monnier, Nicoll, Roger Parry, Gaston Paris, Margo Van
Rees, Roness, Semo, Henri Storck, Tracol, Verger, Vigneau,
Wechsler, Zuber, Collection Dignimont, Archives: Humanité,
Populaire, Regards, Info, Associated Press

Les documents immédiats comme la plus recherchée des
compositions prennent toute leur valeur dans l'évocation
sociale

Touchant à coup sûr chacun, la photographie revêt alors une
dignité intégrale d'où l'on peut bannir l'esthétisme sans rien
amoindrir. D'expression courante et méprisée sous le nom de
reportage qui lui donne pourtant son maximum d'émotion, la
forme anecdotique a séduit les plus purs des réalisateurs: ces
dernières années on a vu dans tous les pays du monde où
la photographie fait partie de la vie, leur réussite magique dont
nous pourrions ici contempler quelques exemples.

JEAN PAINLEVÉ

Documents de la vie sociale exhibition organized by the AEAR, 1935, brochure

Offered by the Lumiere company, the great French
manufacturer of Lumichrome camera plates, paper,
and film.

Documents of Social Life

Jean Painlevé

Brochure of the exhibition organized
by the photographic section of the AEAR
at Galerie La Pléiade, May 1935

Immediate documents, like the most sought-after
compositions, take their value from social evoca-
tion.

Touching everyone, photography thus assumes
an integral dignity from which we may banish aes-
theticism without diminishing it. With despised
common phrases used in the name of reportage
which do provide, however, great emotion, the an-

ecdotal form has attracted the purest creators.
These past few years we have seen, in all coun-
tries of the world where photography is part of life,
their magical success, of which we can witness some
examples here.

A Photographic Exhibition

Louis Aragon

"Un salon photographique,"

Commune 22 (June 1935): 1189-92

The photographers exhibiting at the Pléiade han-
dled the issue of the social content of the photo in
a frank manner. They solved it, each in their own
way, with varying degrees of success, but this did
not undermine the exhibition's passionate display
of photographs, several of which were unusual.
Most of the exhibitors translated here their sym-

pathy for the humble, their interest in man's sorrow, in the children of these people, in the more menial jobs, in characters from the streets, factories, and fields. Some of them contented themselves with photographing an archaic or modern machine, with a man standing next to it; this did not, however, detract from the revolutionary realism characterizing the show, as next to these photos—at times beautiful but devoid of interpretation—are others which, by their very subject matter and without any influence from the photographer other than the choice of scene, comment on old women, fishermen hauling in nets, peasants in fields, children playing in the streets.

The exhibition at the Pléiade is successfully rounded up with images of the February protests in Paris, from the Joan of Arc city, with photos of strikes and uprisings in Cuba and the two Americas, of Vienna 1934, the Spanish October, the war in Morocco, the exploitation of the Chinese proletariat, and the European suppression of their revolts. Let us highlight the group of closely placed photos by Verger dedicated to China, at the center of which is an admirable portrait of a young Chinese man, surrounded by traits of the poverty of his race. Let us note in passing that here is one of the best attempts in the use of photography *to say something*. Among the images of Spain, comment must be made on the images by Margo von Rees, with unsettling walls covered in graffiti portraying the passion of the oppressed, their love for Lenin, a little boat from a small port in Catalonia where, painted side by side are the sickle and hammer and a heart pierced by a sword. Also, an agency photo in the American section of a dead worker on a hospital table, completely white, clean, aseptic: the body slashed, bloody, hideous.

Mention needs also be made of Parry's photos of February 12, and of the Malakoff children at the protest of the Wall that year.

This real imagery of the Revolution is successfully completed by a table that displays on one side montages by Heartfield which we already saw at the Maison de la Culture (recall the sur-

prising "Nazi Christmas Tree"), to which a series of very strange photos taken by Zuber these past months in Berlin at the "Museum of the National Revolution" set up by Hitlerites have been added. These show a series of market stands, museum tables where the Nazis decided to display incriminating evidence of Bolshevism to shock visitors. There is the exhibition of Young Communists, the display of communist propaganda, a corner with a photo of Clara Zetkin, Karl, and Rosa; elsewhere, one finds pilloried together a picture of Delacroix, le Daumier behind which the AEAR paraded the other day at the Wall (Transnonain Street), the portrait of Lenin, sickles, stars and hammers, as well as the bust of Professor Magnus Hirschfeld. There is a pile of Marxist books next to a rack of weapons taken by the workers. Thus, in a museum of Hitler, these items still indicate the desire to fight, the revolutionary desire of the German proletariat. They continue to show a pledge of great hope.

We found, much to our pleasure, the photos of Joris Ivens's film *Komsomol* and of Ivens and Storck's film *Borinage*. Dignimont's collection is included among the very rare photographic materials of the Commune; we particularly liked the group of the first red army, at the foot of the Vendôme Column which was still standing, and the moving image of Louise Michel in her room in 1895.

There are only a few photomontages at the exhibition. Apart from those by Heartfield, there are hardly any montages other than those of Domela¹ for Malik Verlag's book covers and a couple of attempts, one being Léo Nicole's highly successful montage against the asphyxiating gas industry.

Generally speaking, the exhibitors preferred the technique of juxtaposition over that of the montage process. Thus Martell assembled two photos of the unemployed queuing up at a soup kitchen or at an employment bureau with that of a "splendid" dog's grave, witnessing—in all its richness—a sensitive soul. We are also shown, side by side, tramps on a bench and a large display of apartments to rent, artists' studios, etc. Willy Ronès combines the two genres under the heading "We Are

Working for the War" by placing side by side two versions of the same photo of factory chimneys, the second version of which is positioned horizontally, whereby the chimneys take on the strange appearance of cannons.

Several exhibitors felt the need to include a commentary with their photos, delivered in a direct manner, without any special effects, without montages, without juxtaposition; this is what led Gaston Paris, whose contributions are excellent, to write above the photo of a prison: "Temporary Asylum for the Young." But the heading is only a means others did without. It is undoubtedly what weakened the intent of many, even though we still sense where their sympathies lie. This is true of the very engaging photos of Nora Dumas, Yvonne Chevalier, P. Boucher, Sems, Grutenbach, Boiffard, Yves Allégret, Laudan, among several others less talented.

On the other hand, several exhibitors managed to successfully create a synthesis of the direct photo and the subject they sought to express. Let us point to the photos of Henri Cartier: Saint-Cyrians looking at a poster inciting war, cops on bicycles in front of a poster where we read in large letters SAFETY, and especially that of some unemployed workers, one wearing a hat, the other a cap, back-lit in front of a presented table. Similarly the photo of Kertész, a bistro in the rue de Vanves at the corner of the street where film posters are on display advertising a movie entitled *The Kiss of Death*. Or another by Chim, in which we see a man having his shoes polished in front of a huge inscription: "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, for eternity." The photos of Makovska (a type of dormitory containing a Paris Kabyle, a tramp keeled over with fatigue above an ominous fence where the torn remains of a poster of the Nicolas store lie, and an abandoned truck on a construction site where we read "Monday, general strike"); toys showing a gas alert photographed by Tracol, the "Patronage during excursions" and its workers, so young and enthusiastic, climbing up a lamppost to wave at a demonstration, exposed by Roger Livet—all of this may be contained in this same series.

I have kept aside four photographers among those who best fulfill their task, who put it to very

different uses. Firstly, Brassai, whose mastery is undeniable. However, I would say that the indifference with which he takes good photos of a Negro surrounded by bottles of Perrier water in Montmartre, or children disguised for public disorder in the style tradition of the third Thursday in Lent, seems to indicate to me more skill than imagination in this technical expert. Deep down, this is terribly *consistent with something*: American cinema, films of the "Gigolette" genre, the fashion of the pre-war period, vulgarity becoming tasteful, etc. I thought of Pola Negri in front of the very strangely shaped whores he photographed on a street corner. And I only say this on account of the conviction I have, knowing the works of Brassai, that he has a—very different—deep conscience of reality, of life.

Germaine Krull is undeniably one of the best photographers of this period. Her participation in this exhibition is, however, disappointing, despite the great sorrow of the worker refectory where we have so little desire to eat. Several images of women working in factories, next to machinery, hardly say anything more than what the photographer intended.

Jacques Lemare, less well-known, is noted for two photographs: "Puits sur la route de Marrakech" [Potholes on the Road to Marrakech] and, in particular, a view of one of the Seine's banks where, on the cobblestones, from behind a tree, protrude the bare feet of a homeless person. There is more poetry in this photo than that undoubtedly imagined by the person who took it.

Eli Lotar, finally, evinces once more a talent that has not yet had its final say, and which leaves room to hope that he will be able to make more use of it. Of his entire contribution, my favorite photograph is the one showing building laborers at rest, the disarray of fatigue, the randomness of the earth and of fallen objects. Hard labor in one of Algeria's ports (surely?), the dreadful shacks of the Seville area, a scene of Billancourt, reveal Lotar to be one of the men who make the best use of light. That is why we can only command him to learn how to make something of it.

It is lamentable that the contribution of Man Ray in no way represents this true master of modern photography, the worthy successor of the old Nadar. I continue to believe that he has words to say on a social level, though he has yet to say them.

Such as it is, the exhibition at the Pléiade is a brilliant collection of that which is most alive in the art of photography and it indicates a step forward, an assured desire to link issues where modern life is totally immersed in black and white art, which is no longer a child's game, an amusing physical experience.

NOTES

1. The attribution of Malik Verlag's book covers to Domela is dubious: perhaps the author meant Heartfield, who designed several covers for this publishing house.

Regarding an Exhibition

Eugène Dabit

"À propos d'une exposition,"

Regards 73 (June 6, 1935): 11

As soon as the good weather arrived, you could see the advertisements of the Kodak Company on the back page of the main daily newspapers. "With a Kodak, keep your holiday memories alive..." Landscapes, the happy days of your beautiful youth. No hassles, no surprises, perfected equipment, thanks to which you can capture life "from real life." And if that is not enough, you now have Kodak and Pathos films. What wonders! The cinema at home, within everyone's reach and budget, it seems. In short, today anyone can take photos and even make films!

That is also what the AEAR photographers, who have arranged this exhibition, could well think. But for them, these are not pleasant memories, landscapes that they strive to capture. "Keep the memories..." They have not stopped doing the amateur work, the personal work, which we, ourselves, can do, if we listen to the enticing advice of the Kodak Company. In this company's view, photography is no longer an amusement, and if

it is a means of expression—physical research—it is even more so a weapon. You and I sometimes witness scenes that our eyes do not always know how to store in our memory, to record. A person skilled in mechanics could compensate for these weaknesses. Held between the hands of determined men, such as the AEAR photographers, cameras—mysterious black boxes—could serve to record the most furtive, the most surprising scenes from daily life.

"Social subjects": all these photographers are silent, cruel witnesses who do not succumb to lies, whether of money or of art. They carry out, with expedient science, with disinterest, with passion, their photographic task—more precisely that of "accuser." They document a fabulous process in progress. These are images of Vienna-la Rouge, massacres in Cuba, scenes of police suppression elsewhere, or landscapes of working class areas and zones, somber views of the proletariat, as well as mines, factories.

"Pleasant memories..." As regards memories, we find some dating back to the Commune. Vague, yellowed, moving photographs bearing painful and admirable witness. With every step, the visitor will be plunged into the atmosphere of misery and drama that characterizes our times.

However, here and there, joy, beauty. Yes, AEAR photographers also know how to be sensitive to life, to offer us some perfect images: naked children, young bodies...

The AEAR Exhibition Galerie de la Pléiade

"L'exposition de l'AEAR, Galerie de la Pléiade,"
Photo-illustrations 13 (1935): 47-48

It is young. Often sincere. Always striking in expression. We are, once again, in the presence of the extraordinarily evocative dynamism that photographic materials acquire when they are presented together in equilibrium and in a series with the purpose of making a demonstration, carrying out propaganda, expressing an ideal.

We owe it to ourselves, in France, to pay particular attention to the collective persuasive force of photography; it is still relatively unknown here, whereas beyond our borders, among the nations that surround us, near and far—except in England—doctrinal photography has been, for many years, a state body, one that generates general and orthodox thought, polarizing minds.

The AEAR exhibition consists of two parts: the first, of general and sentimental order, one could say, is the most important, the most interesting as well, the one in which special artists such as Brassai, Yvonne Chevalier, Yves Allégret, Parry, and Kertész collaborate. The second corresponds to journalistic reporting: *L'Humanité*, *Populaire*, *Regards*.

The first is the most moving. The reason for this? It consists of choice events, where men—or better said—where artists, who know how to look, have made use of all the tools of their trade. They know how to surround themselves with optimal conditions of vision, lighting, typical details, to optimally bring out all the painful bitterness crystallized in a social “fact”: from the miner who, body bent over his wooden support, semi-naked and sweating, smashes the coal face, hands fractured by the vibrations of his jackhammer, to “kids,” pitiful, mournful worms whose frieze of misery is found on the left entrance to the gallery.

The second part takes us to see the war in the streets of Vienna in 1934, next in Spain at the beginning of 1935, then in Cuba, followed by Germany. Although perhaps more poignant, it seems to have less impact than the other. It is a matter of presentation . . . and a matter of format as well. Finally we come to miserable montages—one of them is the cutting up of Renger-Patzsch's beautiful book on Hamburg—or old schmaltz, rather hackneyed, like a German skeleton, helmeted and booted up, brightly colored with iron crosses, black eagles, decorated with his medal of bravery.

A little retrospective of the Commune is added to this, borrowed from the substantial collections of Dignimont. It groups together well-known figures: Flourens, la Cecilia, Rossel, Louise Michel, Pascal Grouset, Rigaud, etc.

An exhibition that is strange, violent, bitter, yet not devoid of a certain candor. It involuntarily elicits an old saying already in use for more than a century, uttered by a man who took part, weapon in hand, in five successive coups d'état: “If one is not revolutionary by twenty, one has no heart. If one remains that way after forty, having gone through [a host of] experiences, one only has the fierce selfishness of his ideas to support him.”

Striking Workers Send Their Photos to *Regards*

“Les ouvriers en grève envoient des photos a *Regards*,” *Regards* 126 (June 11, 1936): 7

It is with great pleasure that *Regards* received, during the course of last week, numerous photographs that were sent in from the factories of workers on the breadline. They bear witness to the growing attachment that workers and employees of this country have towards a review which, we are proud to say, has gone to every effort to try and faithfully translate, in text and images, the magnificent protest movement in which we are participating. We warmly extend our gratitude to those who have collaborated actively with us by sending us material. Due to limited space, we apologize to all those whose photos could not be included. This page of *Regards* is entirely composed of photographs—and a drawing—sent in by strikers. A collaboration that we hope to see renewed on other occasions.