

## LÉON MOUSSINAC AND THE SPECTATORS' CRITICISM IN FRANCE (1931-34)

Between November 1931 and January 1934 the readers of the French communist daily *L'Humanité* were invited to become their own film critics. Over the years more than 100 films were critically examined in print by "ordinary" cinemagoers. Bert Hogenkamp tells the story of this rare experiment, which briefly gave a voice to those many who may make history but seldom get a chance to write it.

**In accomplishing the necessary destruction of the bourgeois cinema the spectators' groupings have, before working towards the creation of a real cinema such as they can realise it in the USSR, already an important and magnificent rôle to play in the various capitalist countries that produce films and especially in France.<sup>1</sup>**

– Léon Moussinac (1929)

IN HIS WEEKLY COLUMN 'Notre point de vue' (Our point of view) in the French communist daily *L'Humanité* of 30 October 1931 the film critic Léon Moussinac published an interesting review of the newly released film *Marius* (1931), based on Marcel Pagnol's popular play. Moussinac explained his readers that he had the habit of viewing films as a 'spectator', that is by actually buying a ticket and assisting to an ordinary screening in a cinema. The cinema that showed *Marius* had a pricelist announcing that tickets were from 12 to 15 Francs for all places. Moussinac bought a ticket of 12 Francs, but saw himself obliged to take a seat 'either in the first three rows of the orchestra or in those of the highest balcony.' When he complained to the management, he was refused reimbursement. Moussinac, as a result, never saw *Marius*, but judged that 'our comrades themselves are capable enough to make a critical decision whether they have to applaud or whistle down this film in their local cinemas. I propose them a little exercise, now that the occasion presents itself, to send us a few lines with their observations. Real spectators' criticism, at last! A week later, *L'Humanité* published a 'Postbox on *Marius*'.

From this grew a regular column, entitled 'La critique des spectateurs' (Spectators' Criticism), that lasted for nearly three years.

The following article describes the circumstances under which the column came into existence and analyses the contents of the reviews sent in by the readers of *L'Humanité*. Its starting point is that the Spectators' Criticism column was a special French 'deviation' of the Comintern 'Class against Class' policy. Whereas this policy resulted elsewhere in the establishment of proletarian cultural movements with a focus on film production (for example the (Workers') Film and Photo Leagues in the United States and Great Britain) and film exhibition (workers' film societies), in France it rather led to activities in the domain of film reception. The article will try to find the reasons for this 'deviation'. It will pay close attention to the rôle of film critic Léon Moussinac, the author of such celebrated books as *Naissance du cinéma* (1925) and *Le Cinéma soviétique* (1928), that made him an authority to be reckoned with in the French Communist movement. Although Moussinac has been the subject of a number of studies, notably a recent article by Timothy Barnard, his rôle in starting and maintaining the 'Spectators' Criticism' column has passed unnoticed.<sup>2</sup>

### Film censorship

Film censorship was a much debated issue in France in the 1920s and 1930s. By a 1928 decree all films had to be submitted to a censorship committee, composed of 16 officials, eight being representatives of the film corporations and the

other eight being especially chosen for their competence. Exempted from the need to obtain a visa were newsreels with at least two-thirds of French footage. Local and prefectorial authorities had their powers limited to the possibility of banning a screening 'because of local police measures taken in view of the maintenance of the public order.'<sup>3</sup> The decree meant a departure from the existing situation in that it acknowledged the existence of a French film industry (that needed some kind of state protection against foreign competition) and that it made room for representatives of the film trade on the censorship committee. Still the results remained the same, hitting films from the Soviet Union and films with a non-conformist character such as Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* (1928).

In *L'Humanité* Moussinac warned his readers about any illusions that they might have with regard to the new committee:

The real word is: *agents*. With respect to all this mastery of combining against the public and especially too against the Soviet cinema, what can one do effectively? At last, *organize* the spectators, so that those among them who love the cinema, because they understand, because they realize its prodigious power of expression, have a means to wreck the tricks and a means to see those films that, from all over the world, and especially from the USSR, contribute to the real birth of the cinema.<sup>4</sup>

**Left** The success of the *Marius* film is derived from the success of the *Marius* stageplay. The inverse would be impossible. **Right**: *Un chien andalou*: banned by the French censor for its non-conformist character.

The film critic of *L'Humanité* had a simple solution to offer to his readers: all they had to do was join 'Les Amis de Spartacus' (The Friends of Spartacus), a newly founded film society that Moussinac personally had helped to establish. For the new film censorship decree had left a loophole (or what looked like a loophole at the time): films screened to members of a private society did not have to be submitted to the censorship committee.

Les Amis de Spartacus was founded in March 1928. Registered as a 'society for documentary studies in order to improve cinematographic production', its aim was 'to allow members of the Society to appreciate and judge the censorship measures taken against Russian films like *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*, 1925), *Mother* (*Mat*, 1926), German films like *The Weavers* (*Die Weber*, 1927) and many others that are an honour to the cinema...'<sup>5</sup> Its base was the Casino de Grenelle cinema in Paris, which had been bought the previous year by a company that was controlled by Communists.<sup>6</sup> The film society was a huge success. Within two months the Parisian section had 8,000 members and it had to draw up a complicated scheme to give all of them the opportunity to attend one of the five or six screenings at the 1,500 seat Casino de Grenelle.

Jean Lods, the secretary of the society, later recalled: '... outside the cinema some Rolls-Royces were stationed, belonging to an aristocracy eager to get to know the young Soviet Republic and its cinema, but there was a real depot for bicycles in front of the cinema.'<sup>7</sup> Among the films shown were *Battleship Potemkin* by Eisenstein and *Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg* (*Konyets Sankt-Peterburga*, 1927) by Poudovkin. These three films proved particularly successful in the Parisian suburbs where one section after another of Les Amis de Spartacus was established in the summer and early autumn of 1928. By October there were more than fifteen such suburban sections. The recollections of Jean Lods may be exaggerated but give a good impression of the hectic character of that period:

... we went by taxi from cinema to cinema, from suburb to suburb, from Villejuif to Vitry. The same print had to be shown at various places on the same day. Therefore, as soon as the first reel was shown, it went to another cinema, and so on. I had only one fear: that the taxi would break down.<sup>8</sup>

Eisenstein's *October* (*Oktyabr*, 1928) was selected as the opening film for the 1928-1929 season of

Right *The Weavers*: a German classic to be revived by Les Amis de Spartacus.

Les Amis de Spartacus. Like the other Soviet films shown by the society it had been banned by the censorship committee. After one screening on 4 October in the Casino de Grenelle Les Amis de Spartacus were forced to cancel further screenings, for Jean Chiappe, the redoubtable Paris chief of police, had decided to ban the exhibition of uncensored films to the members of the film society altogether. The management of the Casino de Grenelle was threatened with forceful eviction of the cinema, if it allowed the show to go on.<sup>9</sup>

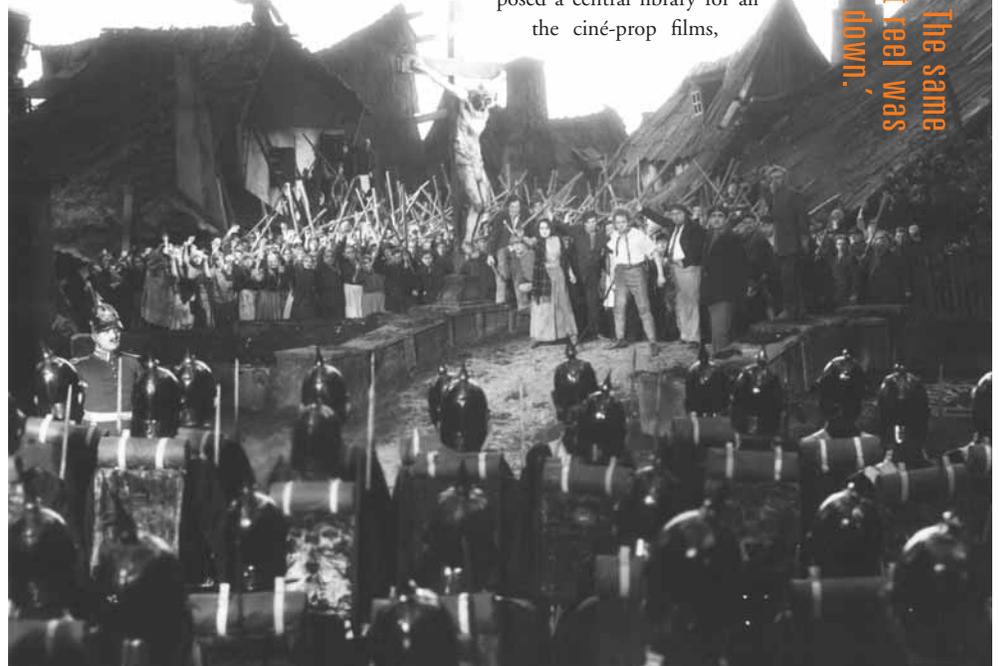
It was obvious that there were political motives behind the decision. The authorities had been worried about the popularity of the society and the ease with which it had been able to skirt the censorship regulations. But contrary to what many film historians have led us to believe, the society was not banned or disbanded immediately after Chiappe's decision.<sup>10</sup> It could continue its activities, provided that it showed films with a censorship visa. It did indeed put a new programme together, featuring Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (1923). But this was not the type of film that members had joined the society for. Interest waned quickly and the film society ceased its activities by the end of 1928. The 'Class against Class' policy may explain why the society, that enjoyed such a mass membership consisting not only of workers but of middle-class (and even upper-class) *cinéphiles* too, was so easily given up. A more likely explanation is that the debts incurred with the purchase of the Casino de Grenelle, the society's base, were so heavy and the chances at amortization in the short term so slim that it was considered wiser to sell it on.<sup>11</sup>

### Applaud or whistle

One course that lay open to the French Communist movement was what was later coined

by Heinz Lüdecke and Korea Senda 'the agit-propagation of the cinema'.<sup>12</sup> They proposed a left cinema movement that made use of the simple and relatively cheap 16mm equipment and organized screenings at locations where working class people could be found, instead of using existing cinemas for people to go to. Their example was the agit-prop theatre that had abandoned the professional stage and instead performed on street corners or at factory gates. In France V. Barel, secretary of the Alpes Maritimes region of the French Communist Party (PCF), proposed a similar solution, which he called 'ciné-prop'. In 'How to attract people to our meetings for sympathisers', an article in the *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, Barel advised the purchase of Pathé-Baby 9,5mm equipment.<sup>13</sup>

He described its aim rather bluntly as 'to contaminate the audience with the bolshevik virus'. He suggested that public meetings could 'start with a documentary film, that sets the pace. Then the speaker makes his *point*. It is up to him to be adroit enough that the visitors do not regret to have come or wish the other film to start: he has to excite his audience with a well-prepared and clearly pronounced speech. Then another *serious film*, preferably a social film, and a *comic* to conclude.' Arguing that 'everybody can film', Barel envisaged 'a documentation on film [that] can be established: shots of demonstrations, open air meetings, strikes, workshops, quarries, mines, work at sea, agricultural work, work in factories, etc.' He proposed a central library for all the ciné-prop films,



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which would include prints of the most important Soviet films too.

Léon Moussinac however was vehemently opposed to Barel's propositions. He called the Pathé-Baby 'not an *instrument*, but a *toy*.'<sup>14</sup> Having referred to the loss of quality and the fact that prints of Soviet films were not available on reduced format, Moussinac concluded ominously: 'the use of amateur equipment remains to me a dangerous experience for the party.'<sup>15</sup> Not only was Moussinac convinced that a film could only be appreciated if it was seen on a large screen, he firmly believed that the cinema was the real arena where the battle for good and against bad films had to be fought out. This conviction had been strengthened by the lawsuit brought against him by Jean Sapène. In a review in *L'Humanité* Moussinac had written about the American film *The Sea Beast* (1926), released in France by Sapène under the title *Jim le harponneur*, that it 'constitutes a characteristic example of the cinematographic spectacle one has to whistle down without hesitation.'<sup>16</sup>

Sapène decided to sue Moussinac and *L'Humanité* for 100,000 Francs damages. In March 1928 the critic was condemned to 500 Francs damages in a verdict that acknowledged

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the claims made by Sapène. Despite the protests made by many film critics and their professional association, it took more than two and a half years before Moussinac was acquitted by a Court of Appeal. His comments on the outcome of the case, that actually granted film critics freedom of expression, were: 'Our comrades will understand that from now we shall take up again our slogans: Never go to a cinema every week out of habit, but only to applaud or whistle down a film. Demonstrate: by applauding the good films, by whistling down the bad ones. Remark: you will have, at the present time, more occasions to whistle than to applaud.'<sup>17</sup>

### Class against class

The audience, or the spectators as Moussinac preferred to call them, formed a crucial concept in the kind of film criticism that the *Humanité* critic practised. In May 1929 he had even proposed the establishment of a union 'strong enough to organize a strike in case of insufficiency or virulent propaganda in certain programmes, a union that will have in every important city certain squads of "whistlers" will have a direct influence on the

production.'<sup>18</sup> The 'Class against Class' line of the Comintern offered various ways for Moussinac to achieve his aims. As we have seen *Les Amis de Spartacus*, based on the model of the workers' film society, derived from the French 'cinéclub', that was applied with considerable success in Germany (Volksfilmverband), United Kingdom (Federation of Workers' Film Societies) and the Netherlands (Vereeniging voor Volks Cultuur), had to be discontinued despite its popularity. 'Agit-propisation', that is the establishment of a Communist amateur film movement, was something that Moussinac opposed.

At the constituent congress of the Federation of Workers' Theatre in France in January 1931, an appeal was launched to all groups interested in other forms of art to emulate the example of the workers' theatre groups and organize in an effective way. An initiative was taken by the French section of the Workers' International Relief (WIR) to set up a Workers' Cine-Photo Federation. The WIR was a proletarian relief organization (also known as the Workers' Red Cross) with headquarters in Berlin. Its leader Willy Münzenberg had successfully adapted modern mass media such as the illustrated press (the famous *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*) and the

cinema (the Mezhrabpom Studios in Moscow) for propaganda purposes. But this initiative of the French WIR section failed, for, as one observant put it, there had been 'a vice in the constitution': 'Instead of letting it see the light in a meeting that was as big as possible, one met in a small committee and decided the creation of the federation.'<sup>19</sup> After the summer of 1931 no more was heard of this federation.

But it were the photographers who provided Moussinac with an example of what was possible. The Amateurs Photographes Ouvriers (Workers' Amateur Photographers), better known under the acronym APO, were providing the Communist press with pictures made from a working-class point of view. The APO's considered themselves workers' correspondents that were using a photo camera instead of a pencil or typewriter. The workers' correspondence movement too was a result of the 'Class against Class' policy. It was modelled after the movement of workers' and peasants' correspondents in the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> The workers' correspondents – or rabcor after the Russian, as they were known in France – were considered to be 'the nerves of the working-class movement. They not only send news of local hap-

penings to be published in the workers' press; their reports serve as a guide and check in shaping the day-to-day policy of a workers' party.'<sup>21</sup>

A definite change in the status of the workers' correspondents took place at the Second International Congress of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers in November 1930 in Kharkov, where they gained recognition as literary producers. In France a network of workers' correspondents had been built up by 1931. They had their weekly page in *L'Humanité* and provided much of the miscellaneous news. In order to prevent identification (that could lead



to victimization) each rabcor had his or her own number. Moussinac had occasionally published correspondence with rabcors, and their reports on demonstrations against reactionary and anti-Soviet films in working-class cinemas regularly reached the pages of *L'Humanité*. But their potential as film critics had never been used. It was Moussinac's review of *Marius* and his appeal to the readers of the Communist daily 'to send us a few lines with their observations' that would change this.

The column would last from November 1931 to January 1934. In all some 100 films were subjected to a critical examination by the readers of *L'Humanité*. It is difficult though to find out who these 'spectators' actually were. They were only indicated by their initials (sometimes with their first name in full) or their rabcor number. Clearly most of them were men and originated from the Paris region (with Marseille as a runner-up). Only on rare occasions were the occupations of the spectators mentioned: a 'student of medicine', 'teacher', 'woodworker'. What mattered though was whether the spectator was a Party member



Battleship  
Potemkin

('comrade') or a 'sympathiser'. In two articles Moussinac elucidated his own rôle: 'The task of the editor-critic is restricted to the co-ordination and direction of the efforts of the workers' correspondents, the organization of the documentation in view of its presentation in the newspaper.' Moussinac stressed that it was 'his real task' to compliment the reviews written by the spectators with his own 'more profound knowledge' of cinematography.<sup>22</sup>

A few weeks later he wrote: 'It is out of the

question now, in view of the abundance of reviews received, ever more and more, to continue their integral publication in *L'Humanité*.<sup>23</sup> Indeed from this moment onwards the guiding hand of Moussinac is constantly present, commending certain spectators for their opinions and giving others a talking-to for 'confusion'. In the summer of 1932 he made one exception and published a review written by a rabcor on the film *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1931) in its entirety, 'because it is an example of what the spectators' criticism could be. It is more a systematic than a polemic review, but (...) it shows how it is possible for every conscious revolutionary to make an exact judgement of a film and not fall into the trap of bourgeois propaganda.'<sup>24</sup> Using quotations from Marx' *The Holy Family* and *Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy* the rabcor argued that *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was not only technically deficient, but that it also suffered from an anti-marxist ideology.

### The *Marius* debate

The column kicked off with a debate about the film *Marius*. Based on the Pagnol play and closely controlled by the playwright, the film takes place

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in a café owned by Marius' father César. It tells how the love affair between Marius and Fanny is broken up, because of the former's irresistible desire for the sea, for adventure. Commercially it was highly successful, bringing in so much money that Pagnol could produce two more films that were, like *Marius*, based on his own plays: *Fanny* (1932) and *César* (1936). As Moussinac had confessed that he had not seen the film himself, he could not take on the authoritative rôle that would become characteristic for his future engagement with the column. A week after he had asked the readers for comments, he published two letters 'that oppose each other'. The first came from 'a worker' who wrote: '*Marius* is exactly the type of film that pleases and that one should not condemn excessively... Here are good actors who do not seem to play, but live; who, thanks to Pagnol, do not utter silly-talk every time they open their mouth; who at times are even moving.' This 'worker' humbly apologized at the end of his letter: 'Don't take these few comments that don't go very deep, too seriously. It is only a worker who writes to you...'<sup>25</sup> The second letter was more critical of the film, consisting of a critique of the film as an industrial product and of a critical summary of its contents.

Later reviews were largely concerned with the relationship between the theatre and the cinema. The Parisian comrade Albert S for example plainly stated: '*Marius* is no cinema. It is filmed theatre, but I confess that I was more satisfied seeing the film than the play on which it is based. (...) *Marius* is opium. The mirage of the sea and the "magic" of Pagnol's text make one enchanted and desperate. Let our comrades experience it. We are trapped. We are body and soul with Marius. The islands-under-the-wind look a paradise to us. The adventure is in us...' He tried to arm himself against these feelings by keeping in mind the misery among the fishermen of Brittany, among the indigenous in the East. He ended his review with 'the conclusion that we shall have to fight more than ever for the screening of Soviet films...'<sup>26</sup>

Comrade C from Marseille felt compelled to respond to the notion of 'romantic voyages' that Albert S. had entertained and wrote 'these marvellous voyages have never existed, except in the imagination of poets and writers. In reality all the expeditions to distant places have only led to crimes, massacres, slavery.'<sup>27</sup> The comrade teacher M C-F from Gennevilliers, the first woman to react, went even one step further: 'I was not able

to restrain myself, while leaving the cinema, and cried: "This is mere imperialism". (...) *Marius* makes us remember immediately the big painted posters in stations, offices and registration centres: "Join the Navy".'<sup>28</sup>

Comrade Guy D from Paris took up the point of the theatricality of the film: 'One needed a film that was able to create a link between the cinema and the theatre-going publics, different as they may seem at first sight.' He considered the film a bastard work with its 'base use of sound (that has so often been condemned on these pages). (...) All this is the work of Pagnol, it is only the work of Pagnol, but he has not created a film: he has written scenes, tirades, rejoinders...'<sup>29</sup> Comrade H Bouvier from Paris criticized 'the exteriors that are of a poverty that reminds one of the early days of the cinema. The sea, the harbour, the lighthouse; it makes one think of children who write on their clumsy drawings: this is a ship, this is a house, this is a tree. To make one believe that one is in Marseille? One does not succeed. False acting because the accent is missing; even more false because one tries to imitate it. (...) The success of the *Marius* film is derived from the success of the *Marius* stageplay. The inverse would be impossible.'<sup>30</sup>

The debate about *Marius* revealed two tendencies. By stressing the relationship between the stageplay and the film, the readers of *L'Humanité* proved that they had learned the lesson taught to them by Moussinac: most sound films are simply filmed stage plays. The film's lack of realism was another point of criticism. The second tendency focussed on the ideology of *Marius*. It was seen as a vehicle for ideas like troubled love, adventure

women were weeping. While in Brive the film was shown in such a mutilated version that it was impossible for the audience to follow. L.D. made an interesting remark on the problem of reacting normally during the screening of a sound film, without annoying the majority of the audience.<sup>34</sup> Comrade J L from Leforest saw positive and negative sides in *Westfront 1918*.

The moving realism of the film appealed very

returns with a rather favourable judgement. Not that this film has unsurpassed value, but its general

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and colonialism, that were essentially bourgeois and therefore had to be condemned. It was this tendency that would slowly gain the upper hand in the column.

### War or anti-war films?

Starting with Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) a series of war (or anti-war) films made their way into the cinemas. As the memories of the devastating bloody First World War were still vivid, these films often provoked violent reactions. Asked for his opinion writer Henri Barbusse, author of the famous war novel *Le Feu* (*Under fire*), stated: 'If one would impartially show the war as it is, in all its truth, the censor would never pass such a film.'<sup>31</sup> A similar sort of suspicion was expressed by Moussinac: 'the experience proves that the exhibition of war films made by the bourgeoisie only serves the interests of the bourgeoisie, because the audience falls into the trap of sentimentality.'<sup>32</sup>

But as the readers of *L'Humanité* were endlessly intrigued, moved or irritated by them, the Spectators' Criticism column was full of reviews of war films. These included Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (1930), Victor Trivas' *No Man's Land* (*Niemandsländ*, 1931) and the French production *Les Croix de bois* (*The Wooden Crosses*, 1931). Due to the film trade's intricate release system, with exclusive runs, first runs, neighbourhood theatres, etcetera, it turned out impossible to focus the debate on single films within a certain time-span. A film that was a novelty for one reader, could be a distant memory to another. But at least the debate was not restricted to Paris and the Red Belt.

Comrade PC from Paris wrote 'that *Westfront 1918* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* have a powerful anti-war tendency, if only they are supported in certain parts by demonstrations from the audience.'<sup>33</sup> Comrade L. D from Brive had seen *Westfront 1918* twice. During a screening in Colombes the audience was moved by the film,

much to him: the atmosphere in the trenches, the field of massacre and the like made *All Quiet on the Western Front* look pale. Still he thought that demonstrations against the imperialist war were desirable where *Westfront 1918* was shown.<sup>35</sup> Lastly a reader from the Vendôme expressed his disappointment: 'No "subversive" words, that would set the audience thinking, no horrible pictures with which one could have reckoned to arouse the public.' He wondered if there were perhaps two versions around, one 'for the big Parisian cinemas', on which the film's reputation was built, 'and another for the provinces, a kind of substitution without value.'<sup>36</sup> The experience of L D from Brive, who had seen two different versions, seems to support this inference. Virtually all the spectators expressed their dislike of a short speech by the writer José Germain, a First World War veteran, with which the French version of the film opened.

The French war film *Les Croix de bois*, directed by Raymond Bernard, was discussed by a rather special spectator, general Lachèvre. The general had expressed his feelings about the film in the *Réveil d'Yvelot*. A reader had passed a clipping on to Moussinac, who decided to quote a passage from the article in the Spectators' Criticism column. Lachèvre was highly critical of the film. He complained that the censorship committee did not understand anything of military matters, otherwise it would certainly have suppressed parts of the film, in which the politicians dishonour the military. Moussinac's comment was completely in line with the Communist position: the general was afraid that the film might disturb the new war preparations, which were directed against the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup>

Comrade CB dismissed *Les Croix de bois* as 'dangerous', although he considered the film to be 'more "honest" than all other French films on this subject, up till now'.<sup>38</sup> Typical for the debate on war films was Moussinac's reaction to a relatively positive review of *No Man's Land* sent in by a 'sympathising student'. His conclusion: 'One generally



*All Quiet on the Western Front*: 'the exhibition of war films made by the bourgeoisie only serves the interests of the bourgeoisie'

idea concretizes the aspirations of all the hearts after the years 1914-18: to outlaw war.' Moussinac was merciless: 'The conclusions of the preceding review are themselves very sentimental, they seem to wish to oppose the *human* to the economic and political character of the problem of the imperialist war.'<sup>39</sup> It confirmed that the *Humanité* critic always made sure that the Communist position on the war films was put forward unequivocally: however commendable some of the films were, in the end they served to conceal the war preparations that were taking place against the Soviet Union rather than to expose the real causes of war.

### Soviet films

Soviet films played a central rôle in all the reflections on the cinema published in *L'Humanité*. To the French Communists they were 'our' films. Therefore they had the right to expose any form of tampering, even if this was done in view of getting a censorship visa for the film in question. The well-known film maker Abel Gance who had 'adapted' a number of Soviet films for its French distributor got a lot of stick from Moussinac for doing this. He compared for example the version of Ilya Trauberg's *The Blue Express* (*Goluboj express*, 1929) that had been adapted under 'the artistic patronage' of Gance with the original one that he had seen a year and a half earlier at a conference in Brussels. It came as no surprise that Moussinac favoured the original version.<sup>40</sup> In fairness it must be said that the *Humanité* film critic offered



*The Road to Life*: 'One sees the result of the energy of the Soviet power with regard to the rehabilitation of the abandoned children...'



*Comradeship*: 'the whole working-class must see and applaud this film'

Gance the chance to reply to these charges. The director of *La Roue* (1922) and *Napoléon* (1927) pointed out that the changes he had made in *The Blue Express* had been demanded by the French censorship committee, while the versions of the other films had been the 'European versions' that had been given to him in Berlin.<sup>41</sup>

Being the first Soviet sound film to reach Western Europe, *The Blue Express* attracted considerable attention from the *Humanité* readers. A rabcor sent in a lengthy review, based on a viewing of the German version of the film, as Moussinac did not fail to mention. He pointed out that Trauberg 'did not class human beings in a simplistic and religious way in "good" ones and "bad" ones, but from a social point of view, in oppressors and oppressed, in capitalists and in proletarians.'<sup>42</sup> A 'correspondent' singled out the changes that had been made by the French distributor, not failing to point out Abel Gance's contribution. He concluded: 'I believe that the film has kept its emotional value, but that that is not sufficient for us. It is thus a beautiful film provided that the spectators are warned and constantly on their guard.'<sup>43</sup>

Comrade P C offered a different approach, stressing 'the application of the dialectical method with regard to the cinematographic problems posed by the film.' He explained: 'The movement in *The Blue Express* is internal and not only external: it is at the same time in the essence – revolt – and in the form – the running of the train. It is one of the reasons which make this film im-

mensely superior to others, like *Shanghai Express* (1932), where the movement is only external, thus artificial. The dialectic of Trauberg demonstrates itself by the affirmation that the economic relationships are the only ones that determine the social, political and other relationships between human beings...'<sup>44</sup> But working-class audiences did not always react favourably to the film, as the young comrade R Z from Aubervilliers had witnessed. He blamed this not only on the 'messing up by Abel Gance', but also on the fact that the audience, 'used as it is to the low vulgarity of the bourgeois cinema, can no longer raise itself to a symbolic level of comprehension'.<sup>45</sup>

Nikolai Ekk's *The Road to Life* (*Putyovka v zhizn*, 1931), about the rehabilitation of a group of street children, suffered less from the problem of incomprehension. This time too the readers of *L'Humanité* felt compelled to compare versions. Rabcor 4068 for example indulged in a comparison between the bourgeois version, that he had seen, and the revolutionary one, that he had not seen, by means of 'his intuition as a revolutionary'. His reproaches concerned among other things the fact that not all the Russian had been translated in the French subtitles and that 'a lot of good will is needed to actually recognise the silhouette of Lenin'.<sup>46</sup>

But comrade Claude D from Paris took issue against these two points of criticism. He wrote: 'Rabcor 4068 exaggerates: he complains about

the fact that not all the Russian of the actors is translated; it is evident that the images of a film count above all. (...) The comrade talks about the silhouette of Lenin. This silhouette, very schematic, it is true, seems to me to represent exactly the figure of Lenin.'<sup>47</sup>

Comrade P R who had seen the film in Moscow during a study trip was able 'to ascertain that it has not been mutilated'.<sup>48</sup> It was rabcor 2291 who summed up the feelings that many a Communist experienced seeing *The Road to Life*: 'Every worker has to go and applaud this film. I have seen it. One sees the result of the energy of the Soviet power with regard to the rehabilitation of the abandoned children... One has to go and see this film, and give, as I have done yesterday, a signal for applause, the moment the figure of Lenin appears on the screen, in order to show the bourgeois among the audience that we are ready to follow the example of our Russian comrades.'<sup>49</sup>

### René Clair and Georg Wilhelm Pabst

Moussinac showed a great interest in the work of Clair and Pabst, as these film makers were able to successfully bridge the gap between working in a commercial environment and still making films that were critical of capitalist society. So it was no coincidence that their films attracted a great number of reactions from the readers of

*L'Humanité*. Two films in particular created a stir: Clair's *A nous la liberté* (1931) and Pabst's *Kameradschaft* (*Comradeship*, 1931). The former tells the story of two escaped convicts, one of whom ends up as a successful industrialist, while the other remains a romantic tramp. The two meet by chance and the tramp gets his taste of modern factory life. In the end the two choose freedom, a life on the road. Moussinac had his doubts about the film's idea that 'freedom' can be found along the road, but otherwise he was quite impressed by it.<sup>50</sup>

Comrade R M from Paris had recognised 'immediately the hand of René Clair. Light, superficial, easy to "digest", ingenious new discoveries. (...) But from a social point of view, it is a completely different matter. Revolt of the individualist spirit against the industrial prisons, the prejudices and so-called temporal obligations, critique of the morals of the rotten bourgeoisie, run for money... and to end with, a sort of vision of paradise.' Moussinac considered the observations of R M 'very incomplete' and was more pleased with the judgement of rabcor 6776, which in his eyes was 'much more coherent'. So pleased in fact that the rabcor in question was given the opportunity a fortnight later to present his ideas on 'colonialism and the cinema' in *L'Humanité*.<sup>51</sup> Rabcor 6776 used Engels' *Anti-Dühring* to attack the concept of liberty that was presented by *A nous la liberté*: 'It is the negation of any discipline and any subordination, without which no society can prosper, and consequently the negation of that society itself.' Still rabcor 6776 had to admit that he did not believe that the film 'could develop a taste for tramping among the proletariat.'<sup>52</sup>

Comrade F M from Marseille had noticed that the people sitting next to him in the cinema had problems following *A nous la liberté*. He had helped to 'put them on the right track'. To him the sound film was to blame: 'The suppression of captions and other indications makes the spectator grapple, adapting himself uneasily to sudden variations of images and to quick jumps from fact to fact. During a sequence he loses direction. The technique of the sound film is different from the silent film. There are therefore allusions, ulterior motives that escape necessarily the attention of many.'<sup>53</sup>

Another inhabitant of Marseille and regular contributor to the column, sympathiser C, remarked: 'To laugh and sing on the road... that is a doubtful liberty. Not only one runs into the cops, but one even ends as a beggar, joins the proletariat in rags (the "Lumpenproletariat" of Marx) that is one of the most despicable forms of parasitism, hardly dangerous to the bourgeoisie in parentheses, because the wandering proletariat is essentially reactionary.'<sup>54</sup> Rabcor 2350 stated that 'from the point of view of the revolutionary workers' move-

ment' the film had 'to be condemned absolutely.' But he did not completely rule out its maker, for 'while we do denounce it, we have to take into account the developing process that takes place within the young generation to which René Clair belongs.'<sup>55</sup>

To comrade L *A nous la liberté* was 'a succession of false images, (...) a caricature of capitalism and of labour, one of the most perfect demonstrations of the anarcho-syndicalist spirit, it is French frivolity, that France where everything ends with songs, and what kind of songs!' It was a view that Moussinac could only qualify as 'one-sided and exclusive'.<sup>56</sup> The last review of *A nous la liberté* was sent in by a rabcor almost a year after it had first been reviewed by Moussinac in *L'Humanité*. It did not receive any editorial comment, probably because it offered a good summary of the opinions expressed by most of the other spectators: 'This film merits to be seen on the condition that it will be commented, because it provides us with some serious elements of criticism of capitalist society.'<sup>57</sup>

While Moussinac had had some reservations about *A nous la liberté*, he expressed his total support for Pabst's *Kameradschaft*: 'The whole working-class MUST SEE AND APPLAUD THIS FILM.' He explained why this film was so important: '*Kameradschaft* shows us above all how the feeling of solidarity can subsist among workers, despite the sneaking jingoist campaigns, the interested exaltation of patriotisms, the systematic propaganda of the bourgeois nationalisms.'<sup>58</sup> The film tells the story of a mine-disaster in a region in France that lies next to the German border. German miners come to the rescue of their French comrades. The original version of the film was bi-lingual: the French talked French and the Germans German. Moussinac was particularly concerned with the subtitling of the prints that were released in France, knowing that most of his readers would not be able to understand the German and that this offered possibilities for censoring important statements.

A week after Moussinac had reviewed it himself, he was able to present the views of three spectators. J F thought that 'this film would have gained in power and truth if it had devoted a greater part to class antagonism.' But the examples given by the spectator were negated by Moussinac, who explained that they were the result of interferences in the original film by the French distributor. Moussinac was evidently not happy with the remarks by comrade R T who considered *Kameradschaft* 'a film that has clearly been released for the needs of pacifist propaganda for the war preparations.' But he agreed with the views of comrade L F who thought that the film was 'very close to us, sober, naked', but was still afraid that it would bring about 'a terrible confusion (...) in the

spirit of the unprepared proletariat.'<sup>59</sup>

A rabcor was able to relate his experiences during a screening of the film: 'Yesterday evening, Monday, during a screening of Pabst's film, some of the spectators demonstrated by shouting "Down with the capitalist system", "Long live the fraternisation of German and French workers", and whistled down energetically the sequence where one sees the capitalists hand out their orders, where one sees the frontier-gate being put in place again. These facts show that among workers of different races the hate disappears and directs itself against the capitalists who want to play the workers off against each other in order to realise bigger profits.'<sup>60</sup>

Moussinac answered in detail the remarks by sympathiser F B from Argenteuil, which according to the *Humanité* critic all had to do with the version of the film that had been released in France. A scene showing German and French school kids playing at marbles and falling out against each other because of nationalist sentiments, that had been added to the French version, was considered by Moussinac as 'one of the worst scenes in the film and the most ambiguous.'<sup>61</sup> Rabcor 3448 totally agreed with him, professing that the scene was 'completely idiotic' and 'had been added to the original', something which Moussinac hastened to confirm.<sup>62</sup> The matter of the French version returned in a number of other reviews. Comrade G W from Lille felt that the translation from the German had been 'what one could call "improved in the bourgeois sense". The plain talk of the German worker therefore loses a lot of its force.'

Moussinac commented that the French bourgeoisie was simply not interested in the plain talk of the German workers.<sup>63</sup> Comrade M D had seen too little of the crowd, waiting anxiously for news of the rescue at the colliery gate. Moussinac explained that 'the French censorship committee had banned several scenes of the struggle of the women against the police.'<sup>64</sup> Finally comrade C from Marseille was allowed to wrap up the debate on *Kameradschaft*. His arguments did not cover any new grounds, but his conclusion was a practical one: 'Leaflets that denounce the faults of such a film, but still underline the partial truth that one can applaud, such leaflets would forcefully favour the work of internal destruction of the bourgeois system.'<sup>65</sup> The organization that comrade C. and many others were looking to for the production of such leaflets was the AEAR.

### Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists — AEAR

In March 1932 the foundation meeting of the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (Association of Revolutionary Writers and

Artists) was held. The AEAR was meant as an umbrella organization for all those who were active in the arts and sciences, 'in view of their effective collaboration in the class struggle, in close liaison with the revolutionary working-class organizations in France and the colonies'.<sup>66</sup> For those who joined unconditional support for the Soviet Union was expected. The association counted some famous personalities in its ranks, writers of such name and fame as André Gide, Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland and André Malraux. Léon Moussinac was one of the founding fathers of the AEAR, but he found it difficult to organize a proper cinema section. It remained relatively small and counted no big names (Jean Renoir would not join until 1935) but only a few film makers working on the fringes of the industry such as Luis Buñuel and Jean Vigo. Many of the demands in an unpublished manifesto of the AEAR Cinema Section can clearly be traced back to Moussinac, such as 'to organize associations of spectators' or 'to defend the rights of the spectators, those working in the cinema trade and the film makers'.<sup>67</sup>

The Spectators' Criticism column makes clear that the readers of *L'Humanité* expected help and guidance from the AEAR. One spectator even used the specific term of 'proletarian censorship' for this.<sup>68</sup> Moussinac himself offered an idea of what the association could do: '[It] has decided to put together "files" on the main films that have been distributed during the last years and to prepare exemplary pamphlets on the most dangerous films (war films, social films, religious propaganda, police films, etc.). A press-bulletin could be issued regularly by this section, a bulletin that all the revolutionary organizations could use instead of the reviews and informations published in the bourgeois newspapers, class-based informations and reviews on the activities of the international capitalist cinema, and news on the development of the Soviet cinema.'<sup>69</sup>

Such an exemplary text was indeed produced and published in the May 1932 issue of the illustrated monthly *Regards*, the French equivalent of the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*. Using a two-page spread capitalist war films ('the pacifist bourgeois films conceal the war preparations') were juxtaposed with Soviet war films ('the Soviet films denounce all the horrors of war'). This is the only example of a text published by the AEAR Cinema Section that has survived. More modestly-designed pamphlets, leaflets and hand-outs may have been produced, but given the recurrent complaints in the Spectators' Criticism column about the lack of them the demand must have surpassed the supply.

The Cinema Section of the AEAR had the opportunity to put its ideas to the test in a cinema that was owned by La Bellevilloise, a Co-op-



*A nous la liberté* : 'one of the most perfect demonstrations of the anarcho-syndicalist spirit'

erative in the 20<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris run by Communists. It was the 500 seat Lenin Hall (Salle Lénine) in the headquarters of the Co-op in the Rue Boyer, where from the end of 1929 film shows were organized.<sup>70</sup> The private screenings of Soviet films that had been banned by the censor were extremely popular, but otherwise the commercial fortunes of the cinema fluctuated, forcing it to close its doors intermittently. Although Moussinac acted as an advisor for the cinema, he did not hesitate to criticise La Bellevilloise if he felt that it had failed in its duties as a Communist organization.

Thus he fully shared the indignation of comrade L who accused the cinema of having shown René Clair's *A nous la liberté* without 'drawing communist conclusions', that is without offering any guidance to the spectators in the form of leaflets, oral introductions or debates.<sup>71</sup> On a number of occasions there was talk of 'moral aid' to La Bellevilloise by the AEAR, but to what extent and in what form remains unclear.<sup>72</sup> In his survey of the films that were programmed by La Bellevilloise, Alain Weber comes to the conclusion that, after an initial film society-like period (1929-1930), they generally covered a wide range: from popular French and American (!) productions of the day to films by 'well-known authors' (Pabst, Murnau, Clair, Gance) of that period to Soviet films that had obtained a censorship visa.<sup>73</sup> One gets the impression that it was simply not commercially feasible to screen only the films that Moussinac would put in the category 'to applaud'. Whether this extended to aversion by the

regular audiences of La Bellevilloise to be 'guided' by means of leaflets, introductions or debates remains unclear.

### Huma-Film

The Cinema Section of the AEAR did not consider the production of its own films a priority. A few actualities were made under its name, but as they were shot on 35mm the opportunity to show them was limited to such cinemas as La Bellevilloise. But there was a handful of PCF members that missed the presence of a French equivalent of the Workers' Film & Photo League and regarded film production the number one priority. The propaganda campaigns that the PCF was organizing for the 1932 elections prompted them to take action. In May 1932 they presented themselves as Huma-Film in *L'Humanité* ('Huma' being the pet name for the Communist daily): 'The cinema is a weapon that we have so far too much neglected: let us now put it at the service of the proletarian cause.' Using the 16mm format, which could be screened 'everywhere, provided there is electricity', Huma-Film announced that it had made four films and that 'a workers newsreel is now being shot and will be released within a few days'.<sup>74</sup> In other words, Huma-Film put the 'agit-propagation' of the cinema into practice.

Moussinac did not react, but instead renewed his now all too familiar appeal for 'our organization of defence and attack, by means of demonstrations, leaflets and the preparation of film screenings that have been carefully selected and

## Moussinac published a retort in a jargon that one can only characterize as a mixture of Darwinism and Stalinism: 'Criticism, as marxist-leninists understand it, is always constructive. It destroys only what does not deserve to live.'

are introduced with a commentary every time that this is possible.<sup>75</sup> A few weeks later he published another appeal, in which he presented such well-known issues as demonstrations against unacceptable films and struggle against censorship, but also proposed the 'production of films for workers' education and revolutionary propaganda.'

What upset many comrades were his remarks with regard to the reasons why such an organization had failed to materialise. Moussinac wrote: 'With every initiative to reorganize activities and means one is held up by personal interests or interests related to certain organizations, and the initiative, although it has no strings attached but that some comrades have the desire to bring it to a favourable conclusion, breaks against a wall of ridiculous suspicion or absolute incomprehension.'<sup>76</sup>

In September 1932 a screening of Huma-Film productions was organized for all those responsible for agit-prop in their district. The titles of the films shown were: *La Guerre est là* ('War is there'), *On n'embauche pas* ('No Jobs available'), *La Terre à ceux qui la travaillent* ('The Earth belongs to those who work it'), *Le Monopole du soleil* ('The Monopoly of the Sun') and *Funeraillies (Fritsch, Camélinat, Briand)* ('The Funerals of Fritsch, Camélinat and Briand').<sup>77</sup> In his column 'Notre Point de vue' Moussinac published a lengthy review of these films. Whereas he had advised against the use of the Pathé Baby (9.5mm) format in 1928, he now considered 16mm as 'the new film standard'. The same went for his previous objections that due to reduction the images would lose quality: '... there is no technical reason why the photographic quality on 16mm should not approach that on 35mm.'

But when it came to the films themselves Moussinac was merciless. He condemned the quality of the camerawork, the editing, the jumping images of the hand-held camera and illegibility of the titles.<sup>78</sup> Answering to the accusation that he had been too severe on the films, Moussinac published a retort in a jargon that one can only characterize as a mixture of Darwinism and Stalinism: 'Criticism, as marxist-leninists understand it, is always constructive. It destroys only what does not deserve to live. Huma-Film will live, because our organizations will use the experience to the best of their advantage. The first step has been made. One only has to take care that the second step won't be in the wrong direction.'<sup>79</sup>

But there was no second step, for no more was heard of Huma-Film after this acrimonious exchange. Moussinac himself was in trouble too, but

for different reasons. He was financially involved in a very ambitious theatre project, the Théâtre d'Action International. It was a gamble to start such a project at a time when the Communist movement concentrated on street theatre rather than the bourgeois theatre with its curtain stage. The project went bankrupt by the end of 1932 and early next year Moussinac decided to go to the Soviet Union as the French delegate of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers.<sup>80</sup> His successor as a film critic for *L'Humanité* was Emile Cerquant.

### Decline

The new film critic of *L'Humanité* continued the column, but Cerquant had obviously less affection for it. None of his leading articles had any bearing on the question of Spectators' Criticism. The most extended debate that took place during Cerquant's reign concerned the French production *La Fusée (Grandeur and Decadence, 1933)*. Cerquant pointed out in his review that 'this film has not been made by us, it has not been made for us. It has been made by a bourgeois production company, that is why it should serve us even better than a perfect film produced by a working-class organization. It is up to us to know how to use it.'

He asked the AEAR to distribute pamphlets and hand-outs 'that would add to this film the conclusions that one cannot expect to find in a film produced in a capitalist country by a capitalist production company, that is to say: the causes of the world economic crisis, and as opposed to the end of the film, as opposed to the "evasion" and the sentimentality of the voyage, offer a solution: the example of the USSR, the country that has no crisis.'<sup>81</sup> The film tells the story of the Girbal family that sees the factory it owns grow from a small enterprise to a large industrial plant. The son longs for a 'free' life as a fisherman and is eventually joined by his father, after the factory has been forced to close down as a result of the economic crisis.

In a long review 'a comrade' remarked that *La Fusée* 'would not satisfy a marxist. I'll be more precise, it can only create dangerous illusions with less advanced minds, because the fundamental idea of the film is to prove that good bosses do exist...' Cerquant pointed out that 'it is not the case to demolish the film, as does our correspondent, but to make up for it, to rectify it.'<sup>82</sup> The *Humanité* critic was supported by a comrade from Paris who thought that *La Fusée* 'is by no means a communist film, but we can put it to good use...' Rabcor

6266 offered a marxist analysis: 'Girbal is a big capitalist, who in his rapid evolution has kept certain traits of the artisanal mentality. Incapable of understanding the capitalist system in its entirety, he believes himself to be strong enough to act on his own, independently of the combines of financial capital, "a captain is the only master on his ship." (...) Because of his eloquent demagoguery, Girbal seems to be the good boss, whereas he is nothing but a backward capitalist.'<sup>83</sup>

A rabcor from Lille had discovered a contradiction: 'In a recent article a comrade has said that *La Fusée* is not a communist film. I think that being a capitalist film it cannot be a communist film. This does not mean that the film has indisputable qualities. (...) The film would have gained, if it had stopped at the moment where the ruined Girbal finds himself at the inner court of the deserted factory. But the bourgeois morals have twisted the arms of the film maker and that superfluous and improbable "return to the earth" has been added.'<sup>84</sup> C.J. from Paris considered *La Fusée* 'dangerous, because it is imbued with a "strong" fascist ideology.' Cerquant had to point out that this was not the case and that the film's ideology was 'neither strong nor exactly fascist'.<sup>85</sup> The last review of the film was co-written by Simone and a rabcor from Marseille. What bothered them was the moral of the film: 'the equivalent of what the priests and the fascists are preaching: the return to the earth.'<sup>86</sup>

### End

*La Fusée* was the last film to spark off a proper debate among the readers of *L'Humanité*. It revolved around recurring issues such as: can a 'bourgeois' film be of service to the 'revolutionary working-class movement'? And, what does it take to 'see through' a film's bourgeois ideology? The very last letter under the heading 'Spectators' Criticism' was published on 26 January 1934. It dealt with the Soviet film *Okraina* (1933), directed by Boris Barnet. Rabcor 6732 described how he had witnessed that 'a bourgeois mass was captivated, mesmerized by it, to the point of applauding.' Of course, he appealed to the workers to go and see the film, but it was just as if this rabcor anticipated the Popular Front policy that would soon replace the 'Class against Class' line and that reached out to the 'bourgeois mass' to join forces with the working-class in the struggle against fascism. It was during the era of the Popular Front that the organization of spectators that Moussinac had been so desperately calling for was established in

the spring of 1936 and appropriately named Ciné-Liberté (Cine-Liberty).

It was clear that the spectators primarily judged the films that they saw in their local cinemas with the marxist conceptions that they learned at the courses organized by the PCF. Thus they discerned a spirit of adventure, closely connected with colonialism, in *Marius*, the preparations for a new imperialist war in *All Quiet on the Western Front* and other war films, a false idea of liberty in *A nous la liberté* and backward capitalism in *La Fusée*. Occasional references to marxist classics such as *The Holy Family* and *Anti-Dühring* bore witness to their schooling. Moussinac's rôle was two-fold. On the one hand he acted as the guardian of Party orthodoxy, admonishing spectators for their political 'confusion' or 'one-sidedness' and making sure that 'deviations' were not left unanswered. While this attitude engendered the danger that films were purely seen as vehicles for

(false) ideas, he tried at least to provide elements for a more-dimensional appreciation of the cinema, for example the creative use of images and sounds by the director.

Apart from the restrictive French censorship regulations, there is no doubt that what I have called 'the French deviation' was largely brought about by Moussinac's personal interventions. His aversion to the use of sub-standard film (9.5mm or 16mm) by the movement meant that there was no 'agit-propisation' and therefore no spectators' cinema to match the spectators' criticism. Barnard argues 'that Moussinac kept the Party at a distance from his projects, discouraged its involvement in film production, and pursued a critical agenda at odds with Party ideology.'<sup>87</sup>

The existence of the column shows that reality was more complex. The 'Class against class' line offered Moussinac the possibility to tap the network of rabcors (workers' correspondents) that

the Party had established. The Party encouraged the disruption of screenings in ordinary cinemas by whistling or applause (not just a French phenomenon by the way), while it would frown upon such tactics during the Popular Front period, because such interruptions tarnished its image as a political party that respected democracy. In these respects Moussinac did not keep 'the Party at a distance from his projects', nor pursue 'a critical agenda at odds with Party ideology'. On the other hand there is evidence to support Barnard's view that Moussinac was indeed often at odds with the PCF leadership over such issues as the disbanding of Les Amis de Spartacus or the production of sub-standard films. That does not alter the fact that the Spectators' Criticism column was a remarkable achievement. I do not know of any other example of non-professionals taking in their own hands over such a long period of time the matter of reviewing the films that they were seeing.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *L'Humanité*, 5 May 1929, p.4

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Timothy Barnard, 'From Impressionism to Communism: Léon Moussinac's Technics of the Cinema, 1921-1933', in: *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 42, Summer 2000, <http://www.frameworkonline.com/42tb.htm> See also Richard Abel, *French Cinema. The First Wave, 1915-1929*, Princeton 1984. The Spectators' Criticism column in *L'Humanité* has been the subject of an article in the German periodical *Filmfaust* which renewed the call for a 'Zuschauerfilmkritik' in the late 1970s and early 1980s: Brigitte Hervo, 'Zuschauerfilmkritik Anfang der 30-er Jahre in Frankreich', in: *Filmfaust*, no.20, November 1980, pp.35-45

<sup>3</sup> Paul Leglise, *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français. Le Cinéma et la IIIe République*, Paris 1970, p.70

<sup>4</sup> *L'Humanité*, 10 March 1928, p.4

<sup>5</sup> *L'Humanité*, 4 March 1928, p.4

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Jacques Meusy, 'Après le groupe Spartacus et avant Ciné-Liberté: le Cinéma de La Bellevilloise est-il un élément d'une réelle politique du Parti communiste à l'égard du cinéma?', in: Jean-Jacques Meusy (ed.), *La Bellevilloise (1877-1939). Une page de l'histoire de la coopération et du mouvement ouvrier français*, Paris 2001, pp.171-185

<sup>7</sup> 'Brève Rencontre avec Jean Lods, sur « Les Amis de Spartacus », in: *Ecran 74*, May 1974, pp.75-78, here p.77

<sup>8</sup> 'A la Rencontre de Jean Lods', in: *Cinéma 74*, No. 189 (July-August 1974), pp.62-72, here p.64

<sup>9</sup> *L'Humanité*, 12 October 1928, p.1

<sup>10</sup> Even Richard Abel in his otherwise excellent study of the French cinema 1915-1929 writes that because Moussinac and Lods had no legal recourse to the decision taken by Chiappe, Les Amis de Spartacus was disbanded by October 1928. Cf. Richard Abel, op. cit., p.266

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Jacques Meusy, op. cit., pp.176-177

<sup>12</sup> Korea Senda, Heinz Lüdecke, 'Agitpropisierung des proletarischen Films', in: *Arbeiterbühne und Film*, May 1931, pp.8-11. Senda was a Japanese actor and theatre director living in Germany. For his recollections see: Korea Senda, *Wanderjahre*, Berlin-GDR 1985

<sup>13</sup> *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, No.5, July 1928, pp.672-674

<sup>14</sup> *L'Humanité*, 8 September 1928, p.4

<sup>15</sup> *L'Humanité*, 7 October 1928, p.4

<sup>16</sup> *L'Humanité*, 16 October 1926, quoted by Elizabeth Grottle Strebel, 'Le droit à la libre critique et le procès Moussinac-Sapène (1928)', in: *Travelling* No.43, March

1978, pp.17-19

<sup>17</sup> *L'Humanité*, 21 December 1930, p.4

<sup>18</sup> *L'Humanité*, 25 May 1929, p.4

<sup>19</sup> Claude Servet, 'Au pas de charge sur le front culturel!', in: *Almanach Ouvrier et Paysan 1932*, Paris 1931, pp.85-90, here p.89

<sup>20</sup> See Andreas Guski, 'Zur Entwicklung der sowjetischen Arbeiter- und Bauernkorrespondentenbewegung 1917-1932', in: E. Knödler-Bunte, G. Erler (eds.), *Kultur und Kulturrevolution in der Sowjetunion*, Berlin-West/Kronburg Ts. 1978, pp.94-112

<sup>21</sup> *The Worker Correspondent. What-Where-When-Who-Why-How*, London 1928, p.1

<sup>22</sup> *L'Humanité*, 1 January 1932, p.4

<sup>23</sup> *L'Humanité*, 29 January 1932, p.4

<sup>24</sup> *L'Humanité*, 15 July 1932, p.4

<sup>25</sup> *L'Humanité*, 6 November 1931, p.4

<sup>26</sup> *L'Humanité*, 20 November 1931, p.4

<sup>27</sup> *L'Humanité*, 11 December 1931, p.4

<sup>28</sup> *L'Humanité*, 27 November 1931, p.4

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem

<sup>30</sup> *L'Humanité*, 11 December 1931, p.4

<sup>31</sup> *La Revue du Cinéma*, No.22, May 1931, p.65

<sup>32</sup> *L'Humanité*, 8 April 1932, p.4

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem

<sup>34</sup> *L'Humanité*, 11 December 1931, p.4

<sup>35</sup> *L'Humanité*, 22 January 1932, p.4

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem

<sup>37</sup> *L'Humanité*, 8 April 1932, p.4

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem

<sup>39</sup> *L'Humanité*, 26 August 1932, p.4

<sup>40</sup> *L'Humanité*, 4 March 1932, p.4

<sup>41</sup> *L'Humanité*, 25 March 1932, p.4

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem

<sup>43</sup> *L'Humanité*, 1 April 1932, p.4

<sup>44</sup> *L'Humanité*, 17 June 1932, p.4

<sup>45</sup> *L'Humanité*, 21 October 1932, p.4

<sup>46</sup> *L'Humanité*, 28 October 1932, p.4

<sup>47</sup> *L'Humanité*, 11 November 1932, p.4

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem

<sup>49</sup> *L'Humanité*, 25 November 1932, p.4

<sup>50</sup> *L'Humanité*, 25 December 1931, p.4

<sup>51</sup> *L'Humanité*, 11 March 1932, p.4

<sup>52</sup> *L'Humanité*, 26 February 1932, p.4

<sup>53</sup> *L'Humanité*, 25 May 1932, p.4

<sup>54</sup> *L'Humanité*, 3 June 1932, p.4

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem

<sup>56</sup> *L'Humanité*, 8 July 1932, p.4

<sup>57</sup> *L'Humanité*, 6 January 1933, p.4

<sup>58</sup> *L'Humanité*, 5 February 1932, p.4

<sup>59</sup> *L'Humanité*, 12 February 1932, p.4

<sup>60</sup> *L'Humanité*, 19 February 1932, p.4

<sup>61</sup> *L'Humanité*, 8 April 1932, p.4

<sup>62</sup> *L'Humanité*, 15 April 1932, p.4

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem

<sup>64</sup> *L'Humanité*, 20 May 1932, p.4

<sup>65</sup> *L'Humanité*, 23 September 1932, p.4

<sup>66</sup> Paul Vaillant-Couturier, 'Sur le front culturel rouge', in: *Almanach Ouvrier et Paysan 1933*, Paris 1932, pp.94-97, here p.95

<sup>67</sup> 'Manifeste de la Section Cinéma de l'AEAR', undated, in the archives of Henri Storck, in: Henri Storck Foundation, Bruxelles

<sup>68</sup> *L'Humanité*, 21 October 1932, p.4

<sup>69</sup> *L'Humanité*, 1 April 1932, p.4

<sup>70</sup> Jean-Jacques Meusy, op. cit., pp.171-185

<sup>71</sup> *L'Humanité*, 8 July 1932, p.4

<sup>72</sup> *L'Humanité*, 15 September 1933, p.4

<sup>73</sup> Alain Weber, 'Cinéma, concerts, théâtre à la salle Lénine', in: Jean-Jacques Meusy (ed.), op. cit., pp.187-197

<sup>74</sup> *L'Humanité*, 13 May 1932, p.4

<sup>75</sup> *L'Humanité*, 5 August 1932, p.4

<sup>76</sup> *L'Humanité*, 26 August 1932, p.4

<sup>77</sup> *L'Humanité*, 9 September 1932, p.4

<sup>78</sup> *L'Humanité*, 23 September 1932, p.4

<sup>79</sup> *L'Humanité*, 30 September 1932, p.4

<sup>80</sup> Georges Sadoul, 'Préface', in: *Léon Moussinac. L'âge ingrat du cinéma*, Paris 1967, pp.5-23, here p.16

<sup>81</sup> *L'Humanité*, 12 May 1933, p.4

<sup>82</sup> *L'Humanité*, 19 May 1933, p.4

<sup>83</sup> *L'Humanité*, 9 June 1933, p.4

<sup>84</sup> *L'Humanité*, 7 July 1933, p.4

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem

<sup>86</sup> *L'Humanité*, 4 August 1933, p.4

<sup>87</sup> Timothy Barnard, art. cit., <http://www.frameworkonline.com/42tb.htm>

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