

Images of the Worker in John Heartfield's Pro-Soviet Photomontages

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PHOTOMONTAGES

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IMAGES OF THE WORKER IN
JOHN HEARTFIELD'S PRO-SOVIET
PHOTOMONTAGES

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ABSTRACT

John Heartfield is widely-known for his anti-Nazi photomontages created in Germany during the 1930s and published in the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung (AIZ)*. However, there is a subset of his images in which he celebrates the Soviet Union which are largely ignored in the scholarly literature dedicated to his work. In order to fully understand and analyze Heartfield's artistic practice, these often overlooked images, which tend to depict the Soviet worker as a heroic figure, should be considered in conversation with his images of the German worker.

Introduction

John Heartfield was one of the most important artists to work with photography in the early twentieth century. “Use photography as a weapon” his room at the 1929 *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart announced above the door to its entrance (Fig. 1). The phrase was plastered on the wall next to his photomontages, one Heartfield would repeat again in the pages of the *AIZ* in his first official photomontage published in the magazine to promote the *FiFo* exhibition. The words were juxtaposed with repetitions in varying sizes of his 1928 political poster for the Kommunistische Partei Deutschland (Communist Party of Germany; KPD) *Five Fingers Has the Hand*, depicting a worker’s dirty open hand, fingers spread, extending outward toward the viewer, just shy of grasping at him (Fig. 2). Heartfield himself installed his room at the exhibition, one of the few artists to do so, and designed his installation to mirror the streets of Germany in a time of modernization and overwhelming visual stimuli.¹ In his installation, Heartfield frequently “repeats” his photomontages and book displays, installing the same image or book multiple times next to each other or above and below, mimicking the effect of street advertisements, which were often pasted repeatedly on walls and buildings for pedestrians to see as the *Five Fingers* photomontage was originally, and shop window displays.

The *Film und Foto* exhibition was developed by the Deutscher Werkbund, a government sponsored group of artists whose aim with this exhibition was to “highlight

¹ Andres Mario Zervigon, “The Peripatetic Viewer at Heartfield’s *Film und Foto* Exhibition Room,” *October* 150 (Fall 2014): 30. The exhibition was made up of thirteen total rooms and Ernst Schneider was responsible for the installation of the entire exhibition. El Lissitzky designed the Soviet artists’ room, which followed immediately after Heartfield’s in the floor plan, while Laszlo Maholy-Nagy partially designed room 1.

[photography's] commercial and advertising applications in the West and the Soviet Union."² The photograph was championed in the early twentieth century and here at this exhibition as a medium that offered a "true" representation of the world, capturing life as it was rather than embodying the interpretation of the artist, as was believed to be the case in the more traditional art practices of painting and sculpture. Bauhaus photographer Laszlo Moholy-Nagy wrote in 1927 that the camera could "make visible existences which cannot be perceived or taken in with our optical instrument, the eye" and therefore can reveal a truth that human perception simply cannot uncover on its own.³ While it is unclear whether the traveling exhibition kept all the rooms intact and installed as they were at the Stuttgart location, the installation photographs nevertheless showcased Heartfield's talent for producing and displaying mass media, as well as his attitude toward his own art practice.

Heartfield was and still is regarded as one of the founding figures of photomontage, developing the medium alongside George Grosz, Hannah Höch, and Raoul Hausmann as a young artist with Berlin Dada. While there is still some debate over the invention of the photomontage, Grosz and Heartfield claimed to have been working with the medium as early as 1916, though their earliest dated photomontages did not appear until 1919.⁴ Heartfield's practice evolved throughout the 1920s and 1930s and he is now best-known for his biting satirical anti-Nazi photomontages of the 1930s published in the pages of the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (*Workers' Illustrated News; AIZ*). Within the pages of the *AIZ*, Heartfield developed a visual language with his

² Zervigon, "The Peripatetic Viewer," 34.

³ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film*, (London: Lund Humphries, 1969), 27.

⁴ Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 170.

readers through caricature and photographic manipulations, prompting the viewer to become an active participant in reading these images rather than a passive consumer.

However, one significant aspect of his work for the *AIZ* that has been largely overlooked or only inadequately discussed in the existing literature on Heartfield is his explicitly pro-Soviet photomontages. While this is a much smaller group of images than his satirical photomontages, these images provide a key to understanding Heartfield's larger aim as a political artist. His pro-Soviet photomontages, when considered in the broader body of his work, shift how we understand Heartfield's political position. While Heartfield was indisputably an anti-Nazi artist, these additional images make it more difficult to identify his anti-fascism with an anti-totalitarian attitude. Further, these images provide crucial insight into Heartfield's development of a Communist visual culture.

A Short Historiographic Survey

The status and definition of Heartfield within the canon of modern art is clearly visible in published surveys. In some cases, Heartfield's work does not appear at all or only very briefly. In a few others, closer attention is paid. In the first volume of *History of Modern Art*, H.H. Arnason and Elizabeth C. Mansfield write of Heartfield almost solely in terms of his relationship to Berlin Dada.⁵ They briefly mention his work for the *AIZ* and reproduce his 1934 photomontage *Little German Christmas Tree*, which, while an anti-Nazi image, is not one of his more well-known anti-Nazi images (Fig. 3). Notably, Heartfield only receives a paragraph's consideration while his colleagues, George Grosz and Otto Dix, receive full pages and multiple reproductions in the textbook. Similarly, Heartfield is only briefly mentioned in *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art*

⁵ H.H. Arnason and Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *History of Modern Art: Volume 1*, seventh edition (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2013), 227-230.

between the Wars, though more emphasis is placed on the “overtly” political nature of his art and his work with George Grosz.⁶ *Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography* dedicates its eleventh chapter to a discussion of Dada, beginning with the art style’s inception in Zurich and New York, differentiating Berlin Dada from these two locations by detailing its political nature and ties to the Communist Party. However, Heartfield is not mentioned once through the chapter. A look at the book’s index reveals that his name is not listed there at all.⁷

The most extensive and most sophisticated approach is offered by *Art Since 1900*, a foundational textbook for modern art history. It characterizes Heartfield as an original member of Berlin Dada who “quickly moved away from what he came to criticize as ‘avant-gardist’ dimension of the aestheticizing photomontage model.”⁸ Heartfield would instead go on to develop photomontage’s communicative potential, using the medium to reach a working class audience with a clear narrative and “artificially constructed homogeneity” as opposed to the disruptive and disjointed aesthetic of the Dada photomontage.⁹ The book goes on to call both Heartfield and Soviet artist Gustav Klutsis the first avant-garde artists to “invoke propaganda as an artistic model.”¹⁰ However, very little analysis is given to any of Heartfield’s pro-Communist photomontages, with almost no mention at all of his pro-Soviet images. These textbooks reveal a dismissal of the work of John Heartfield, in favor of his more well-known

⁶ Briony Fer, David Batchelor, and Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 41..

⁷ Sam Hunter, John Jacobus, and Daniel Wheeler, *Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography*, third edition (New York: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004).

⁸ Hal Foster et al, *Art Since 1900: modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2016), 189.

⁹ Foster, *Art Since 1900*, 189.

¹⁰ Foster, 191.

colleagues, especially George Grosz, with whom Heartfield and his brother, Wieland Herzfelde, worked very closely.

More on the subject can be found in the English-language scholarly literature on Heartfield. One might begin with Hubertus Gassner's contribution to the *John Heartfield* exhibition catalogue in 1991. Gassner focuses on Heartfield's time spent in Moscow in 1931 and highlights his workshops and lectures as well as his participation in a photomontage show organized by the OKTYABR group.¹¹ Heartfield's relationship to Klutis and comparisons between their work feature prominently in the essay and Gassner explains how Heartfield's work was used to attack the artwork of artists affiliated with the OKTYABR group, even though Heartfield was originally brought to the Soviet Union on the group's invitation. However, despite his focus on Heartfield's trip to the Soviet Union, Gassner does little to situate his explicitly pro-Soviet photomontages within the larger body of his work.

David Evans's invaluable *John Heartfield: AIZ/VI 1930-38* of 1992 comprehensively reproduces Heartfield's work published in the *AIZ* and later the *Volks-Illustrierte (VI)*. Evans provides an overview of Heartfield's career, devoting an almost three page section to the artist's work in the Soviet Union.¹² However, Evans offers very little analysis of Heartfield's pro-Soviet photomontages and how these images fit within the larger body of the artist's work, focusing instead on his reception in the Soviet Union and his relationships with Soviet artists. While his time in the Soviet Union is integral to

¹¹ Hubertus Gassner, "Heartfield's Moscow Apprenticeship, 1931-1932," in *John Heartfield*, ed. Peter Pachnicke and Klaus Honnef (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1992), 256-290

¹² David Evans, *John Heartfield: AIZ/VI 1930-38*, (New York: Kent Fine Art, Inc., 1992), 33-36. The *AIZ*'s name changed as publication moved throughout Europe and was published under *Volks-Illustrierte* in its last two years of publication.

understanding the development of Heartfield's positive propaganda, Evans offers very little insight into Heartfield's visual development as a result of his Soviet encounters.

In his book *Realism after Modernism*, Devin Fore dedicates a chapter to John Heartfield, positioning the artist in relation to socialist realism as dictated by the Comintern in the interwar period.¹³ While Fore includes Gustav Klutssis's now-famous photomontage *All Men and Women Workers: To the Election of the Soviets!* from 1930 (Fig. 4), he fails to acknowledge any of Heartfield's pro-Soviet photomontages or his work in the Soviet Union, which seems particularly strange in a discussion of socialist realism in regards to Heartfield's work.

Sabine Kriebel dedicates six pages in her third chapter to "Heartfield's Soviet sojourn" in her book *Revolutionary Beauty*, published in 2014.¹⁴ She reproduces both of Heartfield's *USSR in Construction* covers (Figs. 5 & 6), but, again, offers very little in the way of positioning these photomontages, or any of Heartfield's pro-Soviet photomontages, in the larger body of the artist's work. In fact, she positions Heartfield's work in direct opposition to the work of Soviet photomonteurs such as Klutssis and frames Heartfield's positive propaganda as a result of publishing constraints rather than recognize them as fully developed artistic works. The main focus of her book is to position Heartfield as a modernist artist, a thesis built around an analysis of his anti-Nazi photomontages, concluding the book with a chapter on the revolutionary effect of the cathartic laughter Heartfield produces in his satirical images. Considering this, one can not totally fault her for her brief mentions of Heartfield's pro-Soviet work. However, it is a

¹³ Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 243-304. The chapter is titled "The Secret Always on Display: Caricature and Physiognomy in the Work of John Heartfield."

¹⁴ Sabine Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty: The Radical Photomontages of John Heartfield*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 111-116.

mistake to believe that a full analysis of Heartfield's political position as a Communist artist working in the Weimar Republic, who travelled through the Soviet Union and had relationships with Soviet artists, can be formed without any true consideration for and analysis of his photomontages that champion the Soviet Union. In fact, it can even be argued that the full emotional catharsis Kriebel argues for in her final chapter cannot truly be achieved without the visuals provided by the pro-Soviet positive propaganda. Similarly, Sabine Hake's chapter "John Heartfield's Productive Rage" in her 2017 book, *The Proletarian Dream*, focuses on the emotional response provoked through Heartfield's photomontages. Whereas Kriebel focuses on the feeling of catharsis and relief produced by Heartfield's visuals, Hake focuses on the rage produced by images such as *Five Fingers has the Fist*.¹⁵

Maria Gough's article "Back in the USSR," published in 2009, comes the closest to situating Heartfield's pro-Soviet images in the larger body of his work. The article provides an account of the relationship between Heartfield and Klutis as the most eminent photomonteurs of their countries, calling to attention their similarities in their belief that photomontage was the best form of agitational propaganda, though Gough frames Klutis as creating primarily affirmative propaganda, while Heartfield's was predominantly satirical and negative.¹⁶ However, while the article focuses on Heartfield's time in the Soviet Union and his relationships with Soviet artists, with half the article dedicated to a discussion of his two photomontages published in *USSR in Construction*, Gough ultimately fails to successfully establish a lineage from his work in

¹⁵ Sabine Hake, *The Proletarian Dream: Socialism, Culture, and Emotion in Germany, 1863-1933*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017), 301-318..

¹⁶ Maria Gough, "Back in the USSR: John Heartfield, Gustav Klutis, and the Medium of Soviet Propaganda," *New German Critique* 36, no. 2 (2009): 138.

the Soviet Union to the pro-Soviet photomontages he published in the *AIZ* after he returned to Germany or to situate these images in his wider body of work. Nonetheless, she mentions briefly in her concluding paragraphs the impact Klutssis's work may have had on the production of *A New Man* and *Lenin's vision became reality* (Figs. 7 & 8).

In focusing primarily on Heartfield's anti-Nazi photomontages, scholarship on Heartfield tends to characterize his pro-Soviet photomontages as less visually complex. While it is true that meaning in these photomontages appears much more visually straightforward rather than hidden behind layers of meaning, it is a mistake to consider these images as less important to Heartfield's body of work and his development as an artist. It is important to note here that complexity is not synonymous with success in photomontage or in provoking a powerful emotion in the viewer. In fact, it could be argued that the simpler the photomontage, the more successful it can be in reaching a mass audience.

In this thesis, I focus on nine photomontages published in the *AIZ/VI* between the years of 1932 and 1938 and two published in *USSR in Construction* during Heartfield's time in the Soviet Union in late 1931 and early 1932. These photomontages focus primarily on the monumental figure of the Soviet worker or Red Army soldier, while two, one in the *AIZ* and one in *USSR in Construction*, depict the figure of Lenin alongside visual signs of technological production. The reader should note that all of the photomontages that I have categorized as explicitly pro-Soviet were produced during or after his time abroad in 1931. Thus his time in the Soviet Union appears to have had a significant impact on his production of images in support of the Communist regime and the visualization of the USSR's role in a potential proletarian revolution.

The first chapter considers Heartfield's life as an artist as well as his relationship to Communism in Weimar Germany. This chapter can be understood as a political biography of Heartfield, outlining his artistic development. It begins with his participation in Berlin Dada in the late 1910s and early 1920s, then continues with his work for his brother Wieland Herzfelde's left-wing publishing house Malik-Verlag where he continued to collaborate with both Grosz and Herzfelde throughout the 1920s. Most important for this project, however, is the year 1930 when Heartfield began his work with Willi Münzenberg and the *AIZ* in 1930, a "triggering moment" in the artist's career.¹⁷ Because of his anti-Nazi images, Heartfield was forced into exile from Germany in 1933, first moving to Prague, where he continued to publish his photomontages in the *AIZ*, and then later on to England.

The second chapter discusses Heartfield's development of a visual language to communicate Marxist theory to his audience in Germany. I begin this discussion by first outlining a Marxist conception of the figure of the worker and his relation to labor, looking specifically at the writings by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, and V.I. Lenin. From there, I move on to a discussion of the iconography of the worker that was popular in visual media in the Soviet Union since the October Revolution in 1917. The final section of the chapter takes a closer look at five of Heartfield's pro-Soviet photomontages that feature the figure of the heroic worker.

The third chapter focuses most closely on two depictions of Lenin, one in *USSR in Construction* published during Heartfield's time in the Soviet Union in 1931 and the other, *Lenin's vision became reality*, published in the *AIZ* in 1934, ten years after Lenin's

¹⁷ Foster, *Art Since 1900*, 189.

death. *Lenin's vision became reality* is the only depiction of the Russian revolutionary leader in any of Heartfield's *AIZ* photomontages, including the nine that I have identified as his pro-Soviet images. While Heartfield does not shy away from caricaturing prominent Nazi officials in the pages of the illustrated magazine, including Hitler, Goebbels, and Göring, his pro-Soviet montages do not include Soviet officials, save for this one instance of Lenin's portrait, which was published in celebration of the 100,000th tractor manufactured in Stalingrad. Instead, the photomontages tend to focus on monumental figures of the worker or the Red Army soldier, championing the proletarian cause and calling for a Popular Front led by Soviet troops to defeat the Nazis and prevent their spread throughout Europe. Because his appearance is a rarity, with Stalin appearing not at all, I would like to call attention to these two photomontages that include Lenin, using them to further analyze how Heartfield conceived of his own Communist politics and his role as a Communist propagandist in creating a leftist visual culture.

This thesis is an attempt to situate Heartfield's pro-Soviet photomontages within the broader context of his work for the first time. It is my aim here to show that these images provide a key to understanding the broader significance of Heartfield's Communist art in creating a visualization of Communist ideology for an audience that may not have had access to Marxist theoretical literature in Weimar German and how these visual signifiers were used to combat the propagation of far-right fascist ideology.

Chapter 1: John Heartfield: A Political Biography

Avant-Garde Disruption and Revolutionary Politics

Heartfield was born Helmut Herzfeld in 1891, the eldest of four siblings, to an anarchist poet father and a political activist mother. Because of the couple's political inclinations, the family was forced to flee Germany, eventually settling in an abandoned hut they came upon in Austria. The children, including Heartfield, his brother Wieland Herzfelde, and their two sisters, woke one morning to find their parents had disappeared overnight and the children were subsequently taken into foster care, where Heartfield and Herzfelde became extremely close.¹⁸

In 1908, Heartfield enrolled in the Royal School of Arts and Crafts in Berlin to study graphic design, with a particular emphasis on poster design. He was conscripted during World War I and in political protest against the anti-British sentiment running rampant through Germany, anglicized his name, possibly following the lead of his friend and collaborator George Grosz. Herzfelde purchased the rights to the journal *Neue Jugend* in 1916, where Heartfield was in charge of the contents, Herzfelde took on the role of editor, and Grosz had granted Herzfelde the "right to first refusal" on all of his illustrations.¹⁹ Heartfield was discharged from the army due to his mental health, though whether this was fabricated by him or not is unclear. Some sources suggest this was a performance, an early precursor to what Herzfelde would later call his "productive rage."²⁰ Andrés Mario Zervigón posits that Heartfield's and Grosz's communication

¹⁸ Wieland changed the spelling of their family name from "Herzfeld" to "Herzfelde" around the same time that Heartfield adopted his anglicized pseudonym.

¹⁹ Barbara McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party: art and radicalism in crisis, 1918 to 1936*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 21.

²⁰ Wieland Herzfelde, *John Heartfield: Leben und Werk*, (Westberlin: Verlag Das Europäische Buch, 1986), 6.

through postcards during the first World War was the impetus which led them both to begin an exploration of the photograph's communicative potential.²¹

Heartfield joined the KPD as an official member, along with Herzfelde, Grosz, and playwright Erwin Piscator, in the early days of the Party's existence in 1919. The KPD was founded by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht as an alternative to the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), which many on the left felt had betrayed the working class in its support of the First World War.²² While the SPD had supported the war, Luxemburg and Liebknecht opposed it as a tool of capitalism, where the working class were exploited to kill each other in the service of capitalists.²³ The KPD also served as an outpost of Bolshevism in Germany. Because of its ties to Soviet Russia and its "violently disruptive activities," the KPD was targeted by the SPD for disturbing the fragile, new Republic, and Luxemburg and Liebknecht were assassinated by the Freikorps on January 15, 1919, becoming Communist martyrs; many other KPD leaders were imprisoned.²⁴

For Heartfield, Herzfelde, and Grosz, their Communist involvement became integral to their conceptions of both themselves and the society around them. As radicalized members of Berlin Dada, they now sought to identify with the working class, combatting the individualism of bourgeois culture.²⁵ The three had also started their own publishing company by this time, *der Malik-Verlag*, to promote Communism through

²¹ Andrés Mario Zervigón, *John Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of the Avant-Garde Photomontage*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 41. These postcards only survive through descriptions.

²² McCloskey, *George Grosz*, 52.

²³ Helen Scott, *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 25.

²⁴ McCloskey, *George Grosz*, 53.

²⁵ McCloskey, 60.

literature and the visual arts. In 1920, Grosz and Heartfield published their essay “Der Kunstlump” in Herzfelde’s *Der Gegner* journal, in which they claimed that the art of the past, as well as the contemporary art of the Expressionists, was merely a tool in the obstruction of proletariat class consciousness, a valuing of things over workers’ lives.²⁶ The Malik-Verlag became a sort of workshop for Heartfield and Grosz; Heartfield used this space to hone his skills in photomontage, creating window displays as well as dust jackets for books by authors such as Upton Sinclair for a mass commercial audience (Fig. 9).

Grosz and Heartfield also became founding members of Berlin Dada, and the group coined the terms “photomontage” and “photomonteur.”²⁷ With these words, the pair modelled themselves as laborers, members of the working class contributing to society through their productive labor. While the Dadaists tried to align themselves with the KPD, the KPD found it difficult to reconcile Communism with the aesthetic practices of the Dadaists, especially in their use of caricature and visual humor.²⁸ This use of the visual joke is especially visible in works such as Hannah Höch’s *Cut with a Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* (Fig. 10) as well as *Prussian Archangel*, a collaboration between Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter (Fig. 11), both of which were included in the first *International Dada Fair* in 1920. In *Cut with a Kitchen Knife*, Höch includes inside jokes with her fellow Dada artists, including the cyborgian figure of Kaiser Wilhelm II of Prussia, included as a cut-and-pasted reproduction of an official painted portrait. Over his body, machinery elements are

²⁶ McCloskey, 64.

²⁷ Evans, *John Heartfield*, 10

²⁸ McClosky, *George Grosz*, 3.

pasted, including a metal wheel and rubber tire.²⁹ An image of two wrestlers is pasted over the kaiser's face, mimicking the look of a mustache. Over his forehead are the words "die anti-dadaistische," marking the kaiser as well as the figures associated with him, as enemies of the Dadaists, opposed to their artistic practice.

Heartfield and Schlichter similarly caricature a figure considered an "enemy" of the artists: the Prussian officer. *Prussian Archangel* hung above exhibition-goers from the ceiling. The figure was constructed from a stuffed Prussian army uniform, but where one would expect to see a human man's face, instead there is a pig's head. As Matthew Biro explains, in this assemblage Heartfield and Schlichter undermine the "separation between human and animal" to mock the military figure.³⁰ Heartfield and Schlichter also included two signs with the work, one which included lines from a Protestant choral written by Martin Luther which read "From heaven high, I come down to thee," while the other provided the viewer with instructions for viewing the work: "To fully grasp this work of art, one must exercise each day for twelve hours on the Tempelhof field armed for battle and carrying a fully-loaded knapsack."³¹

In this figure, the viewer can see the prefigurations of Heartfield's later critical anti-Nazi photomontages. With a pig's head, this "archangel" is clearly mocking the German army and the military figure in general. Its legs are twisted in unnatural angles while his hands are missing. His twisted body and porcine face imply "that the creature is a merciless and authoritarian taskmaster," a figure that has "degenerated" through his role in the military.³² Here Heartfield and Schlichter are criticizing a mode of warfare the

²⁹ Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 67.

³⁰ Biro, 172.

³¹ Biro, 172.

³² Biro, 172-3

world had never seen before; World War I called for a complete mobilization of society, creating a binary between direct support and what was essentially seen as working to undermine the war effort.³³

In the years after Berlin Dada dissolved, Heartfield worked creating photomontaged book covers for the Malik-Verlag before starting work at the *AIZ*. The *AIZ*, founded in 1925, was born out of an effort to provide aid to the victims of the famine in the Soviet Union that occurred from 1920 to 1921. Willi Münzenberg had become one of Lenin's earliest non-Russian supporters and in 1921 Lenin enlisted him to run operations to raise money for the people starving within Soviet borders.³⁴ To do this, Münzenberg founded the International Workers' Relief, or the IAH, bringing together artists and activists from a wide range of political backgrounds on the Left. Because of this, the *AIZ* was not beholden to the KPD but to the Comintern, which operated out of the Soviet Union beginning in 1919. However, Münzenberg was able to maintain a degree of independence not many others were affording, due to his prominence and his loyalty to the Left, which would later come into question under Stalin's rule. The *AIZ* became the most popular left-wing publication in Germany, with a readership of over half a million.³⁵ Within the pages of the *AIZ*, Münzenberg and his editors shaped the public face of Communism in Germany through a mask of the factual in its utilization of the photograph, capitalizing on its assumed truth value, while hiding

³³ Biro, 178

³⁴ Helmut Gruber, "Willi Münzenberg's German Propaganda Empire 1921-1933," *The Journal of Modern History* 38, no. 3 (Sep. 1966): 289.

³⁵ Gruber, "Willi Münzenberg," 287.

the real editorial agenda of “humanitarian concern for the oppressed” and a “sharp criticism of capitalism.”³⁶

Heartfield produced his first photomontage for Münzenberg’s propaganda vehicle in 1929, before he officially started working for the illustrated magazine in 1930, although his montages had been featured here and there throughout the magazine prior to that point in time. His *Self-Portrait* was designed to accompany a spread advertising his exhibition space in *Film und Foto* (Fig. 12). In the image, Heartfield sits facing the camera, his brow furrowed, staring out towards the viewer. In his right hand is a pair of scissors, which shear through the neck of the Social Democratic police chief Karl Zörgiebel, the individual responsible for Bloody May, an incident that occurred in Berlin on May Day 1929. In December of 1928, Zörgiebel had banned public demonstrations in an effort to crack down on the violent fighting between Communists, Socialists, and National Socialists in the streets of the city.³⁷ He further had extended the ban to include the annual May Day parade, a gesture that the Communists took as a personal affront and in protest they peacefully gathered. In retaliation, riot police attacked Communist demonstrators and placed whole districts of the city under martial law, resulting in hundreds of injuries and thirty deaths. At least half of those killed were innocent bystanders.³⁸ Here, Heartfield models himself as both a photomonteur and a political activist, positioning himself as someone who performs an action within his photomontages and urging the viewer to do the same in their own lives. Photomontage becomes a medium of violence, in which the current order is dismantled in the service

³⁶ Gruber, “Willi Münzenberg,” 288.

³⁷ Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty*, 31.

³⁸ Kriebel, 34.

of the working class. Heartfield, as a representative of the proletariat, the artist as worker, remains untouched and completely whole, sacrificing no part of himself, even while he beheads Zorgiebel.

Socialist Realism in Photomontage

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, many revolutionaries in Moscow considered Germany to be the most logical place for the spread of Bolshevism.³⁹ Avant-garde artists in both Russia and Germany embraced the ideology of Communism and the conception of photomontage as a new means of visual representation for the Left. The Berlin Dadaists were inspired by Vladimir Tatlin, though it's unclear whether they had actually seen any of his work, making him and his art the theme of their first *International Dada Fair* in 1920 (Fig. 13).⁴⁰ However, as K. Michael Hays points out, "what the Berliners could not have known in 1920 was the extent to which the aesthetic negation of Russian Constructivism was accompanied by the positive identification with the political, educational, and industrial reconstruction of a new society in Russia."⁴¹ In other words, while the art of the Berlin Dadaists was an act of rebellion against the horrors of World War I and the senseless brutality that occurred, unlike the Russian Constructivists, they did not seem to be moving towards a political or educational goal. The Russian Constructivists sought to promote the Bolshevik reorganization of society in Soviet Russia by presenting radical abstraction as a form of formal and material experimentation that theoretically could be applied to design problems and industrial

³⁹K. Michael Hays, "Photomontage and Its Audience: El Lissitzky Meets Berlin Dada," in *The Avant-Garde Frontier: Russia Meets the West, 1910-1930*, ed. Gail Harrison Roman and Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 170.

⁴⁰ Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 175.

⁴¹ Hays, "Photomontage and Its Audience," 171.

production, while the Berlin Dadaists were negating traditional artistic values that persisted in modern art, rather than propose “a new order, as did the Russian avant-garde.”⁴² As Heartfield moved away from Berlin Dada and developed a visual language in his photomontages, both through his Malik-Verlag book covers and his *AIZ* covers and spreads, we can see that he adopted these positive associations of the Russian avant-garde, producing images that advocated for the reorganization of Weimar society in the face of increasing destabilization due to the rising popularity of the Nazi Party. Heartfield recognized the increasing importance of the revolutionary power of the photomontage in the class struggle.⁴³

In 1931, Heartfield spent six months in the Soviet Union, particularly in Moscow. On his return to Germany, he wrote about his experience in the Soviet Union and championed both the Soviet model specifically and Communism in general, stating that he hoped his work would disseminate Communist ideology to a wide audience throughout Germany.⁴⁴ While in the Soviet Union, Heartfield held classes and workshops for Red Army officers and workers, teaching them photomontage techniques. One review said of Heartfield’s work: “it speaks the universal tongue of the working class.”⁴⁵ While on this trip, Heartfield contributed to two issues of the publication *USSR im Bau (USSR in Construction)*, which was published in four different languages to reflect the internationality of the Communist Party.⁴⁶ Like Münzenberg’s *AIZ*, the journal capitalized on the assumed truth value of the photograph, relying on its

⁴² Hays, “Photomontage and Its Audience,” 172.

⁴³ Gassner, “Heartfield’s Moscow Apprenticeship,” 260.

⁴⁴ Kriebel, *The Revolutionary Beauty*, 105.

⁴⁵ Kriebel, 113.

⁴⁶ Kriebel, 113.

connotations as a historical document to promote a positive image of the Soviet Union and Communism, seeking to counteract anti-Soviet propaganda. One of Heartfield's photomontages appeared as the cover of the journal (and would later be reprinted in Germany), depicting the figure of the Lenin monument standing over the construction of the Soviet Union, framed by the wings of an airplane. This figure of Lenin is ghostly and transparent. Through him the viewer can see the Soviet construction he promoted. His legs are positioned in an open stance as he looks into the distance, left arm raised in a pointing gesture toward the future.

Heartfield was celebrated in the Soviet Union for the simplicity, clarity, and straight-forwardness of his photomontages. This praise is mirrored in the ways in which contemporary scholars now negatively frame his pro-Soviet photomontages. Heartfield primarily used "negative" propaganda in his montages created in opposition to the Nazi party. However, his photomontages in celebration of the Soviet Union needed to utilize "affirmative" propaganda, to use Maria Gough's terminology, which necessitated a difference in visual signifiers and technique.⁴⁷ Where affirmative propaganda serves to prop up those in power, as we see especially in the photomontages of Gustav Klutssis, to whom Heartfield is often compared, as well as in Heartfield's positive images of the Soviet Union, negative propaganda serves to attack the opponent. Heartfield is often framed as a negative propagandist, defined by his negative images of the Nazi Party and the capitalist class.

Gough argues that Heartfield was received as a sort of celebrity in the Soviet Union as a foreign artist. There, he found ample opportunity to create art and work with

⁴⁷ Gough, "Back in the USSR," 160.

other artists as opposed to the environment he had left in the Weimar Republic. For Heartfield, this was a kind of artistic paradise, where he had access to endless amounts of photographs and was given the opportunity to travel throughout the country and take photographs himself, which then made up his second contribution to *USSR im Bau*. When we think about how Heartfield portrays the Soviet Union in his artwork, we must consider how he found the Soviet Union and how he experienced artistic production while there. As Heartfield's pro-Soviet photomontages in the *AIZ* were not published until after his trip to the Soviet Union, we can begin to draw some conclusions about this trip's impact on his own conceptions of Communism and the Soviet Union.

While Heartfield was travelling, artists had begun the debate between the mythic and the modern.⁴⁸ Modernist artwork, including the Constructivist photomontages of the Russian avant-garde, were being criticized as too "formal" in their conception. Tastes were turning back toward the mythic motifs of traditional artwork and away from the "critical realism" that German and Russian avant-gardists were using in their images. In 1923, Trotsky wrote that revolutionary art comes to depict the "contradictions of the revolutionary social system," inevitably serving as a mirror for the public order.⁴⁹ Avant-garde artists saw politics and artmaking as connected activities, where avant-garde art required a dissolution of bourgeois artmaking in a similar sense as socialist order required a dissolution of capitalist structures.⁵⁰ In opposition to this, socialist realism became the preferred way of spreading Communist ideology in the 1930s. The content of the artwork became of the utmost importance and images where the proletariat was

⁴⁸ Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty*, 112.

⁴⁹ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, Marxist Internet Archive, marxists.org.

⁵⁰ Brandon Taylor, "Realism, modernism, and photography: 'at last, at last the mask has been torn away,'" *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont, (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 146.

depicted as a collective force that served as the “standard bearer of human progress” became the norm.⁵¹ Idealized images of the proletariat and Communist leaders proliferated. Art was now meant to serve in the “complete reeducation” of human society, where socialism becomes the new order and the organizing structures of capitalism must be eradicated.⁵²

Heartfield sought to straddle this line between the mythic and the modern in his photomontages, as we can see from the previously mentioned Lenin photomontage in *USSR im Bau*. His utilization of the ghostly figure of Lenin creates a heroic model for fellow Communists to emulate. Lenin’s pointing finger leads the way to a Communist future. However, Heartfield is able to combine the traditional heroic figure with the visual signifiers of modernism, as seen in the transparency of Lenin’s body and the airplane wings that frame him at odd angles, again, straddling the line between the mythic and the modern. Heartfield himself asserted that he was, in fact, a socialist realist artist, using his work to spread the ideology of Communism to a mass audience.⁵³

While on his Russian sojourn, Heartfield made the acquaintance of many Russian avant-garde artists (and reunited with some he already knew from their work together in Berlin), including Gustav Klutssis, a prolific Latvian photomonteur whose work was positioned by critics in opposition to Heartfield’s photomontages. Klutssis began his artistic career as a painting student, but soon moved on to the mass produced art of the

⁵¹ Andrew Hemingway, “Interrupted Dialogues of realism and modernism: ‘the fact of new forms of life, already born and active,’” in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont, (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 115.

⁵² Taylor, “Realism, modernism, and photography,” 145.

⁵³ Evans, *John Heartfield*, 29.

Russian avant-gardes, using photography to create “politically charged designs.”⁵⁴ Klutssis began working in photomontage in 1918 and his images took on a political nature from the start. However, while Heartfield primarily worked in the realm of negative propaganda images, depicting Nazis in cahoots with capitalists and setting the world on fire, Klutssis’s work remained primarily in the realm of the affirmative, where he transformed pleasure in “highly politicized, mass produced images.”⁵⁵ Like Heartfield, Klutssis focused his work on high-ranking political officials and the figure of the worker, often centering Lenin as the ideological center of the Russian Revolution and the resulting Soviet Union. Unlike Heartfield, Klutssis also often included images of both Stalin and Marx within his photomontages (Fig. 14 & 15).

During the Bolshevik Revolution, Klutssis was an active member of the military, participating in the storming of the Winter Palace in 1917 and then tasked with guarding the relocation of the Soviet government to Moscow and then guarding the Kremlin, often coming into contact with Lenin himself, which seems to have had a significant impact on his production of images.⁵⁶ Klutssis’s first documented photomontage combined both drawing and photography and drew on his experience of the Bolshevik Revolution. Designed for the Fifth Congress of the Soviets held in July 1918, the design was never fully realized in its intended billboard form, but the preparatory drawing of the design, which Klutssis combined with photography, still exists.⁵⁷ In the top right corner of the drawing is a photograph of Tsar Nicholas II, slashed in diagonals that are then mirrored

⁵⁴ Margarita Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutssis and Valentina Kulagina: Photograph and Montage After Constructivism*, (New York: International Center of Photography, 2004), 15

⁵⁵ Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutssis and Valentina Kulagina*, 49.

⁵⁶ Tupitsyn, 16.

⁵⁷ Tupitsyn, 16.

in the fractured forms of the drawing. In the bottom right corner, a capitalist in a bowler hat, an ally of the Tsar, is similarly slashed. In the bottom left corner is the image of a sailor, unviolated, operating a canon, which would have been Klutssis's role in the army.⁵⁸ Meant for outdoor display, the image takes on an explicitly political purpose and maps out Klutssis's own role in the Revolution. The image marks Klutssis's introduction into the medium of photomontage as a political artform.

While Heartfield masked the role of photography in his montages, airbrushing out the places where the different photographic elements would disconnect, Klutssis allowed the fracture to remain visible, creating an image in which the discrete elements remain identifiable. For example, in his most famous photomontage *All men and women workers: To the election of the Soviets* (1930) (Fig. 4), which depicts small hands and worker's faces within the contours of a large hand positioned diagonally across a red background, the places where the artist had severed the elements from their original photographic landscape remain completely visible. The edges around the large hand are not airbrushed smooth, but rather left as they were cut. Similarly, where hands and faces overlap, the disconnect between elements remains visible to the viewer, rather than airbrushed into one image. While he noted the importance of Heartfield and his work, Klutssis felt that the German's photomontages lacked the important formal elements that the Constructivists had developed, especially the fracture which Klutssis utilized in his photomontages. Klutssis eventually fell out of favor with the Stalinist Party and state. He was executed in 1938 after being accused of membership in a Latvian fascist-nationalist organization, despite his loyalty to the Soviet Union and his wide-

⁵⁸ Tupitsyn, 16.

range of artistic work which promoted the Party's goals.⁵⁹ Breaking with his opinions of Heartfield, many other members of the Russian avant-garde believed that Heartfield achieved in photomontage something beyond what the Russian artists had achieved and that his work signaled a progression of the photomontage.

This occurred at a time when Constructivist artists were under attack by other artists groups and Party functionaries, accused of adopting the "left-wing aestheticism of the West" in their artworks.⁶⁰ These artists attempted to distance themselves from the avant-garde and assimilate further into the Party. Heartfield seems to have become the bridge between the realist painters and the avant-garde artists hoping to be welcomed back into the fold during his time in the Soviet Union. The fracturing nature of Constructivist photomontage came to be seen as an inappropriate way to portray Communism and the working class; instead, the only acceptable form of photomontage was modeled after Heartfield's work, where he created a cohesive whole made of disparate parts and where no internal fracture could be detected.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Tupitsyn, 73.

⁶⁰ Gassner, "Heartfield's Moscow Apprenticeship," 271.

⁶¹ Gassner, 271.

Chapter Two: Representations of the Revolutionary Class

While Heartfield is primarily known for his anti-Nazi photomontages, there is a subset of his images that focus on the glorification of the worker and working class unity. Through these images in particular, Heartfield's devotion to Communism and understanding of Marxist thought is especially apparent. It is in these images that a Communist utopia is put on display for the reader of the *AIZ*, a glimpse into a world that could come to be if the working class chooses to act.

The Worker in Marxist Theory

Much of Marxist theory revolves around the agency and revolutionary power of the working class. In the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels called the proletariat the "revolutionary class" which will rise up to break with not only traditional property relations but also with traditional ideas to emancipate themselves from the exploitation enacted upon them by the few. The *Manifesto* outlines how the working class's labor is exploited by the capitalist class, the bourgeoisie who own the means of production, and details how the proletariat's continued exploitation will eventually lead to the bourgeoisie's inevitable downfall by creating an agitated and unified working class. Its authors describe the trauma placed on the human body and spirit in the face of capitalism as the worker is forced to sell his labor power to the bourgeois class, the only thing of value that he possesses. Through the course of modern development and industrialization, that labor power becomes increasingly devalued, to the point where the proletariat provides their services to the capitalist class for next to nothing in return, fearing the repercussions if they do not perform their duties as they are demanded to do. Marx and Engels wrote that under capitalism, the worker becomes an "appendage

of the machine,” where, again, he loses his humanity and individuality and becomes alienated from his larger community.⁶² In order to take back their agency, the working class must engage in a “forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions” and “let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution.”⁶³

While there is a wealth of Marxist theory regarding the worker and his relationship to labor, for purposes of this thesis I will highlight just a few writers with whom Heartfield would probably have been familiar and whose work was likely being discussed in KPD and Soviet circles at the time of Heartfield’s artistic practice. Rosa Luxemburg, in *Reform or Revolution* (1900), wrote that “every legal constitution is the *product* of a revolution” and “in the history of classes, revolution is the act of political creation, while legislation is the political expression of the life of society that has already come into being.”⁶⁴ Here, she affirms Marx and Engels’s thesis that the working class must advocate for themselves through revolutionary action. A society which oppresses the working class can never be reformed into a society which the working class controls; the creation of this society can only be achieved through the revolution of the working class. This sentiment is echoed again in Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), where he highlights the “awakening antagonisms between workers and employers.”⁶⁵

In “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” the outline of a future document he drafted in 1919 but never completed, Lenin defines the dictatorship of the proletariat as

⁶² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Communist Manifesto and Other Writings*, trans. Samuel Moore (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005), 14.

⁶³ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” 41.

⁶⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, “Reform or Revolution,” in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. by Helen Scott (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 89.

⁶⁵ V. I. Lenin, “What Is To Be Done?,” in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1975), 24.

“the destruction of bourgeois democracy and the creation of proletarian democracy.”⁶⁶ Lenin saw this “dictatorship” as the next step in the emancipation of the working class from bourgeois control and the next phase of proletarian class struggle. Marx himself, in a letter written in 1852, commented that the dictatorship of the proletariat was merely a “transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.”⁶⁷ Lenin elaborates on this point, writing that the state will become a weapon in the hands of the proletariat to use in their class struggle in order to suppress the “resistance of the exploiters,” which begins even before the proletariat successfully overthrows them, to initiate revolution and civil war in the place of imperialist international wars, and to initiate the “‘utilisation’ of the bourgeoisie,” using the specialized educations of bourgeois individuals to serve the proletariat cause.⁶⁸

Iconography of the Worker

One cultural byproduct of the accelerating process of industrialization in the nineteenth century was the increasing visibility of the worker, industrial and otherwise, in European art. Sometimes, workers appeared as figures defined by their “hardship and suffering” as seen in depictions of rural labor in the work of French Realists such as Jean-Francois Millet and Gustav Courbet and, later, Vincent van Gogh (Figs. 16, 17, & 18).⁶⁹ Also worth mentioning are the late-nineteenth century prints of Kathe Kollwitz, which show how brutal oppression and exploitation and sexual assault ultimately leads

⁶⁶ V. I. Lenin, “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1975), 489.

⁶⁷ Karl Marx, quoted in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1975), 490.

⁶⁸ Lenin, “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” 490-91.

⁶⁹ Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 31.

to workers uprisings (Fig. 19). On the other hand, artists associated with Social Democracy, such as the Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier and the Italian painter Giuseppe Pellizza de Volpedo, represented the worker and the working class in more positive, heroic terms (Figs. 20 & 21). This iconographic development grew even more pronounced in the twentieth century. The worker became an especially important figure in Russia after the revolution, where the Bolsheviks endeavored to create a visual culture that represented the working class as the heroic figure of the Soviet Union.

In these representations, the worker is almost always male, he hardly ever has a beard, as the beard is mostly associated with male peasants, and is often depicted as a blacksmith, represented by the presence of a blacksmith's hammer and sometimes in an apron with an anvil.⁷⁰ We can see this exemplified in Alexander Apsit's poster *The Year of Proletarian Dictatorship*, created in 1918 for the anniversary of the October Revolution (Fig. 22). On the left-hand side of the poster, a blacksmith stands with his left hand on his hip and his right hand leaning on his hammer. He wears an apron and his shirtsleeves are rolled past his elbows, displaying his strong arms. Under his feet are the symbols of the tsarist and capitalist regime that was overtaken by the Soviets only a year earlier. A peasant stands on the right-hand side of the poster, holding a red flag in his left hand and a scythe in his right. Behind them is an industrial cityscape. In the years following the revolution, the blacksmith became the most commonly used image when depicting the worker in the Soviet Union, likely chosen due to the blacksmith's ubiquitous nature, since every community, whether rural or urban, would have had a blacksmith. The blacksmith was depicted in two different positions. In the first, the

⁷⁰ Bonnell, 23. Images of the female worker began to emerge in the 1920s but she was usually portrayed as an assistant to the male worker.

blacksmith stood still in contemplation with his hammer held at his side. In the second, the blacksmith swung his hammer to strike on his anvil.⁷¹ Bonnell notes that the popularity of these two depictions highlights the “dualism” of the worker, in which he was capable of both powerful, intellectual pursuits as well as aggressively physical actions.

The iconography of the worker fluctuated through the 1930s in the Soviet Union and the image of the blacksmith virtually disappeared from representations of workers. Political posters of the era began to focus on an idealized future, while using the “visual terms of the present.”⁷² The image of the ideal worker became a visual blueprint for what the proletariat should be, so that the worker could see these images and model himself after them. Visual propaganda was being used to reconfigure the population into political actors, developing in the average Russian worker a class consciousness with which they could identify through the visual signifiers of industrialization and modernity.

Heartfield’s Worker

Heartfield is most widely known for his anti-Nazi photomontages and for good reason. These images are cleverly crafted and biting satirical, relying on layers of meaning within each photomontage. As scholars before me have noted, these images are markedly different than the images Heartfield creates to promote the Soviet Union.

In *Adolf the Ubermensch* we can see the continuation of this thread of laughter that Heartfield has woven through his negative photomontages (Fig. 23). Produced and published in 1932, a pivotal year in Weimar politics that saw the Nazis battling the Communists both metaphorically in the election booth and physically in the streets, the

⁷¹ Bonnell, 27.

⁷² Bonnell, 38.

photomontage has become one of Heartfield's best known works, mostly due to its later controversy in Prague. After his escape into exile in the city, the photomontage was exhibited in poster form, which caused the Nazi regime to call for a censorship of the exhibition, which Prague officials refused.⁷³

In the photomontage, the viewer sees Hitler as a caricature, with his esophagus replaced by stacked coins, belly full, head askew, and mouth agape. Heartfield uses X-ray techniques within the photomontage, going so far as to print "X-ray by John Heartfield" in the upper right corner, to reveal the truth hidden within Hitler about the source of his power and funding, suggesting that the Nazi party, despite its populist appeal, is merely an extension of capitalist bourgeois interests in direct opposition to Communism. In his open mouth, we can see that his teeth have been airbrushed out. He has been literally defanged by Heartfield in front of the viewer. By creating a caricature of Hitler, with no teeth and a belly full of coins, effectively constructing an image of an unheroic figure with no substance whatsoever, Heartfield attempts to give the German viewer, an individual who is in very real danger of Nazis seizing power, a way to alleviate the tensions felt through society by laughing at the man whose potential threatened all of Germany.

In September of 1933, the *AIZ* published a special issue on the Reichstag Fire, which had occurred in February of that same year and was the catalyst for a Nazi takeover. Heartfield's photomontage *Göring, executioner of the Third Reich* appeared as the cover image for the issue (Fig. 24). The issue covered the Reichstag Fire trial, in which four Communists were accused of setting fire to the Reichstag. Herman Göring,

⁷³ Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty*, 216.

who held several positions of power within the Nazi regime, was named chief prosecutor in the trial.⁷⁴

The image depicts Göring, mouth open in a yell (much like Hitler's in *Adolf die Übermensch*), right hand clutching a butcher's axe, the blade and his clothing splattered with blood, and wearing an apron. His head protrudes oddly from his thick neck, upon which is a very noticeable boil or growth. The Pour le Mérite around his neck is inscribed with the words "Pour le Profit."⁷⁵ Behind him, the Reichstag is on fire. To the left of Göring is the image's caption: "GOERING: DER HENKER DES DRITTEN REICHS" or "GÖRING: THE EXECUTIONER OF THE THIRD REICH." Beneath the headline:

"In Leipzig on 21 September, next to the agent provocateur Lubbe, four innocent men - victims of one of the most outrageous judicial crimes - will stand trial. The true Reichstag arsonist, Göring, will not appear before the bar.

Photomontage: John Heartfield // Jacket illustration of the "Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror" // Göring's face is taken from an original photograph and has not been retouched."⁷⁶

The edition was published on September 14, days before the trial was due to start. The caption refers to Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch communist, who was found at the scene of the crime on February 27, 1933 the night the Reichstag was set ablaze in Berlin and confessed to acting alone in lighting the fire.⁷⁷ It also refers to the *Brown Book about the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror* published in Paris by Münzenberg in

⁷⁴ Evans, *John Heartfield*, 154.

⁷⁵ Evans, 154.

⁷⁶ David Evans's translation.

⁷⁷ Anson Rabinbach, "Staging Antifascism: 'The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror'," *New German Critique* no. 103 (Winter 2008): 98.

August of the same year, which claimed that the Nazis conspired to set the fire and seize power.⁷⁸ This image was also used for the dustjacket of the book (Fig. 25).⁷⁹ Four other Communists were indicted in the arson plot, most notably Georgi Dimitrov, who was head of the West European Bureau of the Comintern.⁸⁰ The incident came as a turning point in the Weimar Republic, resulting in many Communist individuals fleeing the country, including Heartfield himself. Like Heartfield's earlier image of Hitler, this image turns Göring into a figure of visual monstrosity. While the image of Hitler reveals the deformation of his interior body, revealing to us that inside he is something other than human, Göring's body is visibly deformed through his disjointed head and his obvious blemishes, alongside the bloodstains he seems to take no notice of himself.

While many of Heartfield's negative images focused on Nazi officials, they were not the only target of his biting criticism. The *Cabbagehead* photomontage was one of Heartfield's first images published in the *AIZ*, appearing there in 1930 (Fig. 26). In the image, a coal porter sits for his portrait. He wears the uniform of the Black-Red-Gold, a paramilitary organization of the Social Democrats, as well as a leather holster that denotes his job as a manual laborer transporting coal.⁸¹ His head wrapped in the "leaves" of the Social Democrats' press vehicles, *Tempo* and *Vowärts*. The image includes a rhyme directed at the reader, the first line of which asks, "I am a cabbagehead. Do you know my leaves?" These lines parody a patriotic song from the mid-nineteenth century which celebrated the singer's loyalty to the kingdom of Prussia,

⁷⁸ Rabinbach, "Staging Antifascism," 97.

⁷⁹ The dustjacket was printed without the title and caption that was added into the *AIZ* cover.

⁸⁰ Rabinbach, "Staging Antifascism," 99.

⁸¹ Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty*, 66.

the first line of which goes “I am a Prussian, do you know my colors?”⁸² Heartfield’s rhyme continues: “I want to be a black-red-gold cabbagehead!” confirming his allegiance to the Social Democrats. The KPD, of which Heartfield was an official member, was founded in 1918 by members of the SPD who had broken away from the Social Democrats three years earlier when they voted for Germany’s involvement in WWI. Cabbagehead represents a class traitor, a manual laborer who abandons the working class in his support of the Social Democrats. This photomontage was the foundation upon which Heartfield developed his visual language within the pages of the *AIZ*. In the image, Heartfield suffocates his photographic subject in newspaper pages, effectively dehumanizing him by covering his head. This violation of boundaries of the body is characteristic of his negative propaganda images, as we can also see in the images of Hitler and Göring mentioned previously.

Heartfield uses the montage to create a viewership that was brought into the image by his use of visual jokes and photographic manipulations. He endeavored to construct an *AIZ* reader who oscillated between identification with and othering from the image. Heartfield manipulates the imagery to reveal a truth to his viewers: that one must be a critical audience in the face of mass media. In doing this, he is both acknowledging photography’s manipulative potential, shattering the truth value of the photograph, while also revealing a truth about photography’s uses. He is using photography as a way of raising class consciousness, revealing a truth to the *AIZ* reader about his own world and his role within it. The implication here is that the *AIZ* reader is not a Cabbagehead, but rather an “active subject” engaging with the photomontages and photo-essays

⁸² Kriebel, 66.

contained within the pages of the left-wing magazine.⁸³ The viewer becomes a part of the joke because they are not like Cabbagehead.

These three images are examples of what the Communists and Bolsheviks would have viewed as “class enemies,” individuals that have lost some sense of humanity in their opposition to the working class and the left. Their flaws are highlighted for the viewer, put on display in Heartfield’s photographic images, allowing the viewer time to contemplate the consequences of acting as an enemy to the working class.

Heartfield was determined to differentiate the figure of the class-conscious Communist worker from that of the SPD and the Nazi. Heartfield’s images of German workers repeatedly used imagery of arms and hands synecdochally, where these parts of the body signified the whole and where these parts of the body would come together to achieve a common goal. One sees this in his work in the 1920s, such as the election poster *5 Fingers has the Hand* of 1928 (Fig. 2). It is widespread in his work for the *AIZ* as well. In an image published there in 1930, for instance, Heartfield depicts the hands of a blacksmith, striking his hammer onto the hot metal placed on his anvil with his other hand (Fig. 27). Across the top is written “Ein neues Jahr! Ein Jahr wie jedes andre war? Nein!! Das darf nicht sein! Damit aus Not und Qual die neue Welt entsteht: Schlag zu, Prolet! [A new year! A year like all the others? No!! That must not be! So that from misery and pain the new world arises: Strike, proletarian!].” The blacksmith is personified by his labor and Heartfield touches on the representations of the worker common in the Soviet Union.

⁸³ Kriebel, 67.

Another example is a photomontage published in 1931 for a special issue called “Leben und Kampf der Schwarzen Rasse [Life and Struggle of the Black Race],” which was a collaboration between Münzenberg and James W. Ford, an African American activist and Communist radicalized by his experience serving in the US Army during WWI.⁸⁴ It depicts two fists raised into the air, one black, one white (Fig. 28). These fists are held straight into the air with muscled forearms, sleeves rolled to the elbow. The tops of the individuals heads can be seen at the bottom of the page, but they are turned away from the viewer and their faces are blocked by their arms. The top left-hand corner includes the poetic verse “Ob schwarz, ob weiß -- im Kampf vereint! Wir kennen nur eine Rasse, wir kennen alle nur einen Feind -- die Ausbeuterklasse [Whether black, or white -- in struggle united! We know only one race, we all know only one enemy -- the exploiting class].” The issue was focused on “the racial subjugation and capitalist exploitation of Black people by white racists, colonialists and terrorists” but also focused on highlighting “inspiring instances of Black activism and resistance” in an effort to “build solidarity” among the international working class.⁸⁵

In July 1932, the *AIZ* published Heartfield’s photomontage *Die Rote Einheit macht euch frei!* in an effort to unite the parties of the left against the Nazi Party in the upcoming Reichstag election (Fig. 29). The image depicts three arms stretched across the picture plane to grip tightly the pole of a flag. Their sleeves are rolled up, revealing their muscled forearms. The top arm wears an armband with the Communist symbol, while the middle arm wears the armband of the Socialist Iron Front, which included the

⁸⁴ Maria Gough, “Brothers in Arms: The Making and Migration of Black and White Unity,” in *John Heartfield: Photography Plus Dynamite* (Berlin: Hirmer Verlag, 2020), 48.

⁸⁵ Gough, “Brothers in Arms,” 48.

social democrats and trade unionists in an alliance against the Nazi Party. The last arm wears no armband, addressing the “unaffiliated leftist sympathizer.”⁸⁶ The Communist is at the top, representing a hierarchy of leftist ideology. The flag shows the symbol of Antifaschistische Aktion, a KPD campaign under the leadership of Ernst Thälmann which aimed to unite the political parties on the left against the Nazis running for the Reichstag. The bottom right corner declares “Die Rote Einheit macht euch frei! Wählt liste 3 [Red Unity will set you free! Vote list 3].” This image represents a walking back of previous Comintern and KPD policy that declared the Social Democrats “social-fascists,” something that many figures on the left considered a necessary step to defeat the right-wing Nazi Party. The photomontage appeared on the cover of the issue, which included also included an “article on the Anti-Fascist Unity Congress in Berlin.”⁸⁷

Heartfield returns to this image again as Evans has noted in his photomontage *Folgt dem Beispiel Spaniens!* published in February of 1936 (Fig. 30). The image includes the same three male forearms, with their fists tightly gripping the pole of a flag and shirtsleeves rolled to the elbow. Again, the top arm wears the armband of the Communists, while the middle arm wears the armband of the Iron Front and the bottom arm wears no armband. This time, however, the flagpole is shown with a pointed tip, which the three arms drive into the head of a snake. The snake is shown with his visible eye widened in surprise and his mouth opened, as if to scream. Across his body are three swastikas, indicating the Nazi Party and the Third Reich. The inscription at the top of the image encourages the *AIZ* readers to “Folgt dem Beispiel Spaniens! [Follow the Spanish example!]” and adopt the strategy of the Popular Front, just as Heartfield’s

⁸⁶ Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty*, 141.

⁸⁷ Evans, *John Heartfield*, 82.

earlier Reichstag election photomontage had encouraged the parties of the left to come together to defeat the Nazi Party in the voting booths.

These images of German workers are markedly different from the images Heartfield creates of the Soviet worker. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, I have identified nine of Heartfield's photomontages published in the *AIZ* as explicitly pro-Soviet, all published after his trip to the Soviet Union in 1931, the last one appearing in 1938. Of those nine, one depicts Lenin, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter; three focus on Red Army soldiers, two of which position the soldiers in direct opposition to the Nazis; two are explicit celebrations of the Soviet worker; one compares Nazi "construction," shown as charity boxes, to Soviet construction, which is shown as workers building a silo in Tashkent; one uses an image of Vera Muchina's famous monument display at the Soviet Pavilion at the International Fair in Paris in 1937; and one includes a Red Army soldier with peasant women in the background. In this section, I will mainly focus on these last five and their depictions of the working class and industry. Though Heartfield used the iconography of the worker in more of his images than just these, I have chosen to focus on these five images specifically because of their explicitly pro-Soviet messaging and because I believe Heartfield used them to directly respond to the Marxist theory of the worker and the working class's relationship to labor under capitalism as outlined in the first section of this chapter in their representation and celebration of the emancipatory power of the Soviet working class in freeing themselves from the exploitation of the bourgeoisie. Heartfield also used these images to create a recognizable, successful Communist future for his audience in Germany, which was struggling in the underground resistance to Hitler by 1934.

In a statement published in the *Illustrierte Rote Post* in early 1932, Heartfield made his understanding of his artistic purpose clear: “If it is my task to provide a jacket for a book or a brochure for our Front, then I try to organize it so that it has the greatest attraction for the broadest mass, so that it guarantees the widest circulation of revolutionary ideas and best represents the content, and beyond that, is an independent page that serves our purposes.”⁸⁸ Kriebel describes the tone of Heartfield’s statement as “euphoric; its content is marinated in Communist ardor.”⁸⁹ This statement from Heartfield shows that his understanding of his own art relied heavily on its ability to convey revolutionary ideas to a mass audience and that his artistic focus was on distilling complex Communist theory into a single, layered image, making it easily digestible for a wide audience through visual means.

Heartfield had previously been criticized for creating satirical images that seemed too difficult for the average party member to understand. His work for the agitprop section of the KPD faced the harshest criticism in the mid-1920s for this.⁹⁰ However, it seems that Heartfield perhaps took this criticism to heart in the development of his pro-Soviet photomontages, creating images that could be read quite easily by a widespread, mass audience in Germany. Contemporary art historians often dismiss these particular images as too simple, especially when compared with his anti-Nazi images, but in reality, in these images Heartfield distills Marxist theory as it has been applied in the Soviet Union into an easily understandable visual language for the readers of the *AIZ*.

⁸⁸ “John Heartfield,” *Illustrierte Rote Post* 2, no. 2 (January 1932), quoted in Sabine Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty: The Radical Photomontages of John Heartfield* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2014), 105.

⁸⁹ Sabine Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty*, 105.

⁹⁰ Andrés Mario Zervigón, “Productive Relations: John Heartfield and Willi Münzenberg,” in *John Heartfield: Photography Plus Dynamite* (Berlin: Hirmer Verlag, 2020), 42.

Considering the timing of the creation of these images, all published either during or after his trip to the Soviet Union, and after the declaration of Socialist Realism as the official culture of the Stalinist Soviet Union, it is also quite likely that Heartfield was responding to the Soviet debate of whether Communist art should be “revolutionary on the level of form or content.”⁹¹

Heartfield’s first celebratory photomontage of the Soviet Union was published in the *AIZ* in October of 1932 to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Soviet Union (Fig. 31). *15 Jahre Sowjet-Union* depicts a young bald man in a buttoned up shirt with the collar slightly open, sleeves rolled up past his elbows. His right arm reaches straight up in a salute, with his thumb, forefinger, and middle finger extended. His face looks upward to where his hand extends. Behind his left shoulder, moving in a slight diagonal toward the top of the image, is a flag pole, the flag attached blowing in the wind and bearing the coat of arms of the Soviet Union. Behind the man is an industrial scene, with scaffolding, smoke stacks, and smoke billowing in the air. The two tall columns of the smokestacks run parallel to the man’s reaching arm, mirroring both his gesture and his two extended fingers. The text at the top of the image reads: “15 JAHRE SOWJET-UNION.” At the bottom stands: “We swear: “In the hour of danger we do not abandon our Socialist Fatherland”” [“Wir schworen: ‘In der Stunde der Gefahr lassen wir unser sozialistisches Vaterland nicht im Stich’”]. In this image, Heartfield has abandoned his use of symbolic synecdoche in favor of representing the figure as a whole. The worker’s agency is affirmed through his depiction as a healthy, whole figure.

⁹¹ Zervigón, “Productive Relations,” 44

In 1934, Heartfield created his first pro-Soviet image since the magazine's relocation from Berlin to Prague in the spring of 1933 after Hitler had been made Reich chancellor and Nazi Party members had assumed the leadership of the government on every level. The image directly compares the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany (Fig. 32). The photomontage is divided vertically down the center. On the left side, Heartfield has reused an image that already appeared in the *AIZ* three years earlier in 1931.⁹² This image shows the construction of a silo in Tashkent. In the foreground is a shirtless male figure in baggy pants. He hoists himself up onto what appears to be scaffolding using his arms. Behind him, the silos, perhaps representing the columns of a temple, rise into the sky. Underneath this cropped image are the words "Die Sowjetunion ist eine der grossten industriemachte der Welt geworden [the Soviet Union has become one of the greatest industrial powers in the world]."

The right half of the montage, on the other hand, depicts a collection of cylindrical metal canisters. The lids are latched onto their bases with thick, heavy locks. They are stacked on top of each other receding into the distance. Each canister has a white circle affixed to the front, outlined in a thick black line, with a thick, angular swastika at the center. Above the circle are printed the words "Gebt fur [Give for]" with the name of a different charity underneath the circle. The lid of each canister has an open slot, presumably where donations can be added into the container. Below this half of the montage are the words "Die Sammelaktionen haben riesen-hafte AusmaÙe angenommen [Fundraising campaigns have reached enormous proportions]." Heartfield creates a visualization of the promotion of the worker in the Soviet Union, with

⁹² David Evans, *John Heartfield*, 198.

industrialization progressing through the will of the working class, contrasted with the imperialist, capitalist charity of Nazi Germany.

Ein neuer Mensch (1934) appeared on the cover of the *AIZ* in honor of the seventeenth anniversary of the Soviet Union (Fig. 7). The image is dominated by a man's wrinkled face. He wears a hat and his collar is upturned. His glassy, watery eyes look diagonally upward toward his right. In the top left corner (the man's right) are the letters "AIZ" in a three-dimensional style. Below that are the words "Sondernummer: 17 Jahre Sowjetunion [special edition: 17 years of the Soviet Union]" and below these words is a faded image of high rises.⁹³ In the foreground, we see industrial buildings, with a tractor in the center and with piping and scaffolding on the left. On the right of the image, directly below the man's face, is a glass and concrete building with long, wide windows and rounded corners. Behind the man's face, we see crowds of people. Below the image, against a dark band, are the words "Ein neuer Mensch - Herr einer neuen Welt [A new man - Master of a new world]." The new world is modern, technologically advanced, and industrialized, as evidenced by the tractor in the foreground and the industrial-looking building. The worker has created this new world for himself and he has become the agent of power.

The emphasis in *Ein neuer Mensch* is on the male worker whose face looms large and the construction and industrialization of the Soviet Union. As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, at the time of the revolution the Bolsheviks inherited a country which was far behind the rest of Europe in terms of modernization and industry. Regardless of how Western Europe and the United States frame the Soviet

⁹³ Translated with help from Ross Parks.

Union's policies regarding these developments, both at the time and now, the Soviet Union strove to industrialize the nation in a relatively short period of time with the help of the new Russian urban working class, all while the rest of the world treated them as a threat. The "new man" of Heartfield's photomontage becomes a "master of a new world" through both his active labor as well as his political agency. A seizure of the means of production cannot occur without the seizure of political power and a democracy of the working class, as Lenin planned to outline in "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat." *Ein neuer Mensch* is the ideal version of the working class, with complete power and autonomy in Soviet society.

In 1937, Heartfield's *XX Jahre Sowjetunion* was published in the magazine, the name of which had been changed from the *AIZ* to *Volks Illustrierte (People's Illustrated; VI)* in 1936 (Fig. 33). The image appeared as the cover of a special edition published at the beginning of November to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution in the Soviet Union. For this photomontage, Heartfield appropriated an image of Vera Mukhina's monument, which had appeared atop the Soviet pavilion in Paris at the International Fair of that same year. However, the monument is reversed in the photomontage, as the actual monument has the woman placed on the right with the man to her left. The two figures from Mukhina's monument stand on large, three-dimensional looking X's, referencing the twenty years. In the distance, out-of-focus, faded looking smokestacks rise into the sky, the smoke issuing from them making the horizon blurry. The figures stand on top of the X's in an open stance, the man's right leg forward and bent at the knee. His left leg extends straight behind him. His chest and arms are bared, displaying a well-muscled chest and arms. His face is slightly upturned.

His right hand clutches a hammer and reaches straight upward, his left arm flung out behind him. The female figure is obscured by shadow, but we can see that she mirrors his stance with her left leg forward and bent at the knee and her left arm reaching straight upwards clutching a sickle. Their twin gestures mirror the smokestacks behind them. In the top center are the words "XX JAHRE SOWJETUNION Sondernummer - 24 Seiten vierseitige Karte der UdSSR [XX years of the Soviet Union, edition - 24 pages, 4-sided map of the USSR]."

Again, Heartfield equates the worker and the peasantry, though perhaps he wanted to minimize the peasantry's role as well as the role of women in the development of Soviet industry in his reversal of the monument, with the industrial landscape. The worker dominates the image, his body muscled and powerful, his stance moving him into the future. The future of the Soviet Union relies on the power of the worker and the worker's success is seen through the power of the Soviet Union.

In March of 1938, the *VI* published a special edition of the magazine for the twentieth anniversary of the Red Army. A Red Army soldier stands on the right side of Heartfield's image (Fig. 34). He wears a long, wool trench coat, belted at the waist with another strap across his chest. The right side of his coat billows in the wind. His head and gaze are turned upward and toward his right. In his left hand he holds a gun with a bayonet. It is almost as tall as he is and his posture mirrors the straightness of the weapon. In the background of the image are mountains and industrial landscape. Smokestacks rise into the air with smoke issuing from them. On the left of the image, a group of female peasants walk away from a stack of hay. They wear skirts and scarves to cover their heads. The woman in the center smiles and raises a baby into the air. The

other women look on, carrying pitchforks and rakes on their shoulders. At the bottom left corner of the image are the words “Auf der Wacht für den Schutz der Heimat und den Frieden der Welt! [On guard for the protection of the homeland and the peace of the world!].”

The Red Army soldier stands as the protector of the Soviet Union, his straightened form acting as a vertical bridge connecting the industrial imagery with the agricultural. The soldier stands tall as this vertical connector, acting as a protector of the Soviet economy and way of life.

Now that I have described these five photomontages, we can identify the common iconography that Heartfield used to build his visual language of the working class in the Soviet Union. These images show whole bodies of Soviet individuals, not pieces and parts. The worker, the soldier, and even the peasant is depicted as fully and wholly human. These individuals are visually represented not only in opposition to their enemies, but they are also visually different to images that represent the German worker or leftist voter before 1932. Like the earlier images of the blacksmith outlined in the second section of this chapter, Heartfield’s images of the Soviet worker highlights his ability to not only achieve his physical goals to bring about industry in the country, but also his ability to bring the Soviet Union into the future through his intellectual and political abilities.

Heartfield has moved away from his use of the fragment in the representation of the Communist worker to the idealized Soviet worker. The Soviet worker is marked by his wholeness and thus his agency in the world. These figures have accomplished the first stage of the move toward international Communism, a dictatorship of the

proletariat, and it is up to the rest of the world to follow. Here is Heartfield's goal: to encourage the working class of Germany to follow in the footsteps of the working class of the Soviet Union, to stage their own October Revolution and to then encourage the workers of the world to unite behind them.

Chapter Three: Representations of Soviet Leadership

While the majority of Heartfield's pro-Soviet photomontages for the *AIZ* included depictions of workers or industrial landscapes, there is one that stands on its own. *Lenin's vision became reality* is Heartfield's only depiction of Lenin in the *AIZ*, despite the Bolshevik leader's popularity in Soviet propaganda posters (Fig. 8). Heartfield also used the image of the Lenin statue in his first cover for the Soviet publication *USSR in Construction*, created for a Russian audience during his trip abroad in the Soviet Union. Heartfield appears to have been much more interested in representing the worker and the Red Army soldier in his images celebrating the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, in analyzing these two unusual photomontages and their visual relationship with the rest of Heartfield's work, both his anti-fascist images as well as his pro-Soviet montages, we can better understand his complicated relationship to communism and the Soviet Union.

Lenin's Political Life

Vladimir Ilych Lenin was born on April 22, 1870 as Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov to Ilya Ulyanov and Maria Blank. He was the third of their six children. Ilya and Maria insisted on and were committed to educating their three daughters and three sons in the same way, despite differences in gender, which helped foster Lenin's own belief in education for all.⁹⁴

In May of 1887, Lenin's older brother, Alexander, was executed for his role in an assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander III, a plot conceived of in response to the tsarist restrictions on and suspicions of students. Though Lenin never mentioned his brother publicly, Alexander's participation in the assassination attempt and his

⁹⁴ The biographical section on Lenin leans heavily on Lih's biography *Lenin* in the Critical Lives series.

subsequent execution seemed to have a profound impact on Lenin and his understanding of revolutionary action. Following his brother's execution, Lenin was expelled from his first year of school at Kazan University for his participation in a student protest against the same suppression of students that his brother had acted against. The following fall in 1888, Lenin was permitted to move back to Kazan and began to join illegal Social Democratic reading groups. Around this time, he also began reading Marx's *Capital*, which would begin his lifelong passion for the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

It was during his time reading the work of Marx and Engels that Lenin began to conceive of a mass political movement led by the new working class of Russia, created by the advancement of capitalism and industry throughout the urban centers of the vast country. For Lenin, capitalism was a progressive movement away from the coercive circumstances that the peasants lived under during Russia's pre-capitalist stage. Capitalism had to be installed into the economy of Russia as the bridge between the tsarist order and socialism; capitalism, in Lenin's view, was preferable and created the classes necessary to enact revolution against the tsar, transforming the peasants into a revolutionary force.

In 1891, Lenin was able to take his external exams at Petersburg University, which he passed to become a lawyer. Two years later he moved to St. Petersburg, working as a lawyer and establishing himself in Marxist circles in the city. It was here that Lenin began working through his political identity and in 1894, he wrote his first publication *Who Are These 'Friends of the People' and How Do They Fight Against the Social Democrats?* which was published illegally at the time. At the end of 1895, Lenin

was arrested, along with other Social Democratic leaders for spreading “propaganda among the workers of Petersburg.”⁹⁵ He was imprisoned for a year in St. Petersburg before being sentenced to Siberian exile for three years. While in exile, Lenin wrote *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, which was published in 1899, using agricultural statistics to argue against the theory that Russia could bypass capitalism and move directly from rural communes to communism.

The beginning of 1900 marked the end of Lenin’s exile, but he was prohibited from living in the capital, university towns, or anywhere with a large working population. He chose a town close to St. Petersburg but was soon arrested again and acquired a passport for foreign travel and went abroad, mostly in Munich, and then later to London. While in Germany, Lenin teamed up with other Russian emigres to launch an “all-Russian political newspaper” titled *Iskra (The Spark)* inspired by the newspapers created by the SPD and set up an underground system to smuggle the publication into Russia.⁹⁶

By 1902, Lenin had finished *What Is to Be Done?* where he outlined his idea of professional revolutionaries supported by a well-connected underground movement and the working class. After *What Is to Be Done?* was published, printers in Germany decided that it was far too risky for them to continue printing *Iskra* and Lenin moved with his wife to London, where they lived for a year before moving to Geneva in April 1903 after the other publishers of *Iskra* decided they should all be in the same city. In August of that year, the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Party opened in Brussels but was forced to move to London after pressure from the Belgian police and it

⁹⁵ Lenin, quoted in *Lenin*, 61.

⁹⁶ Lih, *Lenin*, 75.

was there that the split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks occurred, with Lenin ousted as the dominant party leader and from his position on the editorial board of *Iskra*. Most of Lenin's writing in 1904 was concerned with addressing party differences.

By 1904, Russia was at war with Japan, an unpopular conflict throughout the country which made the tsarist government look weak with each military defeat. Some historians regard the war as "the first of the global conflicts that defined the twentieth century."⁹⁷ The Revolution of 1905 broke out after "Bloody Sunday," a massacre where the tsarist government opened fire on a peaceful crowd that had hoped to present a petition to the tsar in which they asked for basic freedoms. The revolutionary spirit took over Russia through the spring and summer and reached its climax in October of that year. A strike started by railwaymen soon became a general strike throughout Russia and the tsar, panicking, conceded basic political rights to the people. After the uprising, the revolutionary tide began to ebb throughout the country, though peasant uprisings continued throughout 1906 and the government set up the Duma, an elective legislature, but would not work with liberals or peasant parties.

While the 1905 revolution broke out in Russia, Lenin was preoccupied with the state of the party. That spring in London, he held a congress, but since it was boycotted by the Mensheviks, it essentially became the founding congress of Bolshevism. By 1908, his life and writing was consumed once again with factional disputes within the party. The Bolsheviks were concerned that the Mensheviks demands for the working class were preoccupied with accepting and maintaining the small scraps given them by the government and not focused enough on demanding more. By 1912, Lenin had

⁹⁷ Lih, 87.

largely decided his party was the real party. That same year, Russian society was outraged by the Lena massacre on April 17, where workers striking in the goldmines of Lena were shot down by the tsarist government. The massacre sparked a series of workers' protests which resulted in increased support for the Bolsheviks in aboveground workers' groups. By 1914, the entire world was on the eve of war and, at least in Lenin's view, a revolution.

Even as Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914, the Social Democrats throughout western Europe were protesting the military action. However, on the fifth of August, Lenin and other party members were shocked to read headlines of the SPD Reichstag voting for war credits, betraying the working class and their party platform. Despite this, Lenin still believed that the war would only encourage revolution globally. He was soon horrified to learn that socialist leaders throughout Europe were choosing to support their country's war efforts, rather than rousing the masses and inciting civil war at the perfect moment for revolution.

On March 15, 1917, Lenin learned that the tsar, Nicholas II, had abdicated his throne on behalf of himself and his son and a Provisional Government of representatives from the tsar-endorsed Duma took power in Russia, representing the upper-class of nobility and capitalists, in coalition with the national network of soviets, which represented the working class, sailors, and soldiers and were primarily represented by socialists.⁹⁸ Lenin decided to travel from Switzerland, a neutral territory where he had lived since the outbreak of the war, back to Petrograd.⁹⁹ While travelling

⁹⁸ My account of the Russian Revolution relies heavily on Sheila Fitzpatrick's *The Russian Revolution*.

⁹⁹ The name of St. Petersburg had been changed at the beginning of the war to make it sound more Russian.

he wrote his April Theses which encouraged the Russian proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie and the Provisional Government that represented them. Lenin and the Bolsheviks repeatedly used the slogan “All power to the soviets” to make clear their stance on the Provisional Government of 1917.

The February Revolution had been prompted by food shortages and the beginning of an economic breakdown which resulted in an “unbearably high cost of living.”¹⁰⁰ However, the masses became increasingly disenchanted with the governing of Russia in the eight months after the abdication, which opened the way for the Bolshevik takeover in October. Lenin himself felt that no support should be given by the Bolsheviks to the Provisional Government and unrest grew over the summer of 1917, with widespread demonstrations and increasing militancy throughout the urban working class. Peasants in the more rural parts of the country began to seize land from wealthy landowners on behalf of their villages and redistribute it equally throughout the village when the Provisional Government proved ill-equipped to meet their redistribution demands.

In July of 1917, “mass demonstrations, street violence, and popular disorder” broke out over three days from July 3 to July 5.¹⁰¹ The July Days were prompted by Kronstadt sailors marching into Petrograd and rousing soldiers and workers. Although Lenin spoke to the demonstrators and did not encourage them to act violently against the Provisional Government, the Provisional Government retaliated against the Bolsheviks, arresting prominent party members, including Leon Trotsky, who had joined the Party in early 1917, and issuing warrants for others, including Lenin and Grigory

¹⁰⁰ Lih, *Lenin*, 135.

¹⁰¹ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 57.

Zinoviev, Lenin's close companion. Lenin was accused of being a German agent, which temporarily diminished his popularity in a country still at war with the Germans, and he went into hiding in Finland.

After a coup attempt against the Provisional Government at the end of August by the newly appointed Commander in Chief of the armed forces, which was unsuccessful and served to reaffirm the strength of the working class and shift their positive opinion back toward the Bolsheviks, Lenin wrote from Finland that the Bolsheviks should arm themselves in preparation for revolution. Their moment had come and needed to be seized. Despite calling for this preparation, Lenin did not travel back into Russia until the first week of October, where he remained in hiding. Bolshevik insurrection began on October 24 and they were met with almost no violent resistance. Lenin was finally able to come out of hiding and assumed leadership as Chairman of the all-Bolshevik Council of People's Commissars.

However, the Bolshevik regime faced difficulty after difficulty in 1918. First, they were forced to sign an embarrassing peace treaty with Germany in March, which Lenin had to convince the leadership to sign. In July, the Bolsheviks had to crush an uprising of the Left SRs who had once been their allies. At the end of August, Lenin was shot and wounded by an SR and civil war was underway. In addition to these events, the state was finding it difficult to acquire grain from the peasantry. Germany was occupying several of Russia's most important grain producing regions, including Ukraine, Volga, Siberia, and North Caucasus. Other grain producing regions still under Bolshevik control became vital and Lenin initiated bonuses for prompt delivery as well as advocating an "any means necessary" approach to force the regions into surrendering their grain

supplies to the state. Under these conditions, peasant rebellions broke out and spread, but were swiftly under control by the Red Army at the beginning of August.

At this time, the Bolsheviks were heavily relying on socialist revolutions in other European countries. In early 1919, however, the Spartacist rebellion was quickly crushed in Germany and Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered. This did not deter the Bolsheviks and they held their meeting to found the Third International. Lenin truly believed that the Russian Revolution and their work creating a socialist country would inspire international socialists to do the same.

In 1921, the Bolsheviks introduced the New Economic Policy, which proved to have a “swift and dramatic” beneficial impact on Russia’s economy.¹⁰² Peasants were once again allowed to engage in private grain trade and the Red Army was demobilized. This same year, Lenin admitted to having several health problems including frequent headaches and insomnia. The Politburo suggested that he take some time off at his dacha in Gorki. After six weeks, Lenin returned to work in time for the 11th Party Congress in March of 1922. In May 1922, Lenin suffered his first stroke. He was extremely pessimistic about his health and contemplated suicide rather than suffer through his deteriorating health, going so far as to allegedly request Stalin’s help in obtaining cyanide pills.¹⁰³ In December of that same year, Lenin suffered a second stroke. Just before this, he had begun giving away his personal library to his sister and his wife. He had yet another stroke in March of 1923 and in early 1924 had one final stroke and died on January 21.

¹⁰² Fitzpatrick, 95.

¹⁰³ *Lenin*, 165.

The Cult of Lenin

When the Bolsheviks first gained power after the October Revolution of 1917, one of their major tasks, besides industrialization and shifting agricultural production, was to create a visual language which could engage with the “universal subject” that they claimed to represent.¹⁰⁴ This proved to be a difficult task, not only because of the widespread illiteracy throughout a largely agrarian Russia, but also because their base had no established identity that tied them together as an audience. Lenin published his *Plan for Monumental Propaganda* in 1918 which called for the “urgent construction” of over fifty monuments in public spaces throughout the new Soviet Union.¹⁰⁵ In order to establish a basic visual language for the people of the new socialist Russia, public works were commissioned, many of which were monuments created to honor historical figures that, in some way or another, could be related to the Bolshevik Revolution, no matter how tangentially. Such monuments, known as “monumental propaganda,” were conceived of as a means of disseminating the Party’s political ideology to a mass audience, predominantly in urban, public spaces and the Party soon developed a list of a wide-range of diverse individuals from Karl Marx to Lord Byron.¹⁰⁶ Notably, however, these public monuments excluded living Bolshevik leaders and Lenin himself “repeatedly voiced strong objections to the adulation of Bolshevik leaders, himself included.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Devin Fore and Matthew S. Witkovsky, “Introduction,” in *Revoliutsiia! Demonstratsiia! Soviet Art Put to the Test*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art Under Stalin* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1991), 26.

¹⁰⁶ Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 138.

¹⁰⁷ Bonnell, 140.

Despite Lenin's position, artists and poets began speaking about him in what could be considered reverent tones beginning in 1918. After an assassination attempt against him in August 1918, where Lenin was shot by Fania Kaplan, a Left Socialist Revolutionary, Grigory Zinoviev, who was Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet at the time, made a speech addressing the attempt on Lenin's life, declaring that "Comrade Lenin will live to the terror of the enemies of Communism and to the joy of the proletarian Communists."¹⁰⁸ In the same speech, Zinoviev called Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* the "gospel of the adherents of the *Iskra*" and went on to state that Lenin's role in the 1905 revolution was "colossal." He compared Lenin's recovery to the success of the 1917 revolution. Similarly, in a speech made while he was the head of the Red Army and just after the assassination attempt, which was later published in the press and as a pamphlet, Trotsky stated that Lenin was "the greatest man of our revolutionary epoch" and called him a "beloved leader."¹⁰⁹ In 1919, the first bust of Lenin was created and copies were placed in twenty-nine cities around Russia, becoming the first monument to a living Bolshevik leader.¹¹⁰ After this, depictions of Lenin became popularly disseminated in propaganda images within the Soviet Union but even then, it was relatively limited, and Lenin seemed to have reluctantly accepted it by the early years of the 1920s.¹¹¹

These elements of reverence are epitomized in paintings by Isaak Brodski and Aleksandr Gerasimov. Brodski's *Lenin and the Demonstration* from 1919 won two prizes

¹⁰⁸ Grigorii Zinoviev, "Lenin: Speech to the Speech to the Petrograd Soviet by Gregory Zinoviev Celebrating Lenin's Recovery from Wounds Received in the Attempt Made on his Life on August 30, 1918," Marxists Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

¹⁰⁹ Trotsky, "Lenin Wounded," 1918, Marxists Internet Archive, marxists.org.

¹¹⁰ Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 143.

¹¹¹ Bonnell, 143.

in a painting competition organized by the Petrograd Council in March of that year (Fig. 35).¹¹² The painting depicts Lenin, seated in front of a red curtain, which is pulled back to reveal a crowd of people who have taken to the streets to the viewer. Lenin sits high above the masses below him and looks toward the viewer. Several papers are shown under his right hand with a pen just near his fingertips, as we as the viewer have just interrupted his writing. Similarly, Gerasimov's painting *Lenin on the Tribune*, painted a decade later in 1929, also depicts Lenin as a larger-than-life figure high above the crowd (Fig. 36). Gerasimov depicts Lenin in action, surging forward with his right hand clutching at the lapel of his suit jacket while his left hand holds his cap. His mouth is slightly open in speech. Like in Brodski's painting, we can see the masses who have taken to the streets and wave red banners below Lenin, listening to his speech.

In 1920, Lenin celebrated his fiftieth birthday along with all of Russia. He was lavished with praise, though he still seemed relatively uncomfortable with the attention. It was around this time that Lenin's image began to be codified. Political posters and cartoons began to show Lenin wearing a suit and tie, often wearing a cap on his head (Fig. 37). Also emerging was the iconography of Lenin with a raised arm and pointed finger, as if addressing a crowd, which may be reminiscent of Russian Orthodox imagery of both Christ and various saints.¹¹³ Creators of these posters also began to use the color red, which had religious significance in the church, extensively in their imagery as well as depicting Lenin as a larger-than-life figure, with other figures much smaller than him. This is exemplified in political posters such as Gustav Klutskis's *From NEP Russia Will Come Socialist Russia* from 1930 (Fig. 38). A larger-than-life Lenin

¹¹² Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 56.

¹¹³ Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 148.

strides from left to right with his right hand in his pocket and his left hand pointing forward. He wears a suit and a cap and stands against a red color field. Below him are repeated miniscule figures.

Though its foundations were laid while Lenin was still alive, the cult of Lenin truly emerged throughout the Soviet Union after his death in 1924. It capitalized on the peasantry's deep superstition and religious beliefs. In his eulogy to Lenin, Maxim Gorky said that "Lenin awakened Russia; it will not go to sleep again" and that "the dark line of death only showed up more sharply his importance in the eyes of the world, his importance as the leader of the working people."¹¹⁴ With his death, the "old Bolshevik myth of a leaderless party" was destroyed.¹¹⁵ In 1926, only two years after his death, a monument to Lenin designed by Sergei A. Evseev was erected at Finland Station, the station which had seen his return into the country before the 1917 revolution (Fig. 39). Lenin stands atop an armored car, making an impassioned speech to the crowd who had gathered to welcome him home, with his right hand pointing forward and his left hand clutching the lapel of his jacket in a gesture typical of Lenin portraits.

To develop the cult of Lenin, the peasant's emotional bonds to religion had to be shifted onto the figure of Lenin specifically and the Party in general. Peasant culture revolved around their religious beliefs and rituals, with their days divided between working days and religious holidays, and every peasant household had an "icon corner" which was located diagonally from their stoves and acted as the focal point of worship in the home.¹¹⁶ To shift this loyalty from religion to the Party, a figure needed to be deified.

¹¹⁴ Maxim Gorky, "Nicolai Lenin: The Man," published as a pamphlet by the *Daily Herald* in 1924, marxists.org.

¹¹⁵ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 111.

¹¹⁶ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 4.

After his death, Lenin became the personification of communism.¹¹⁷ These icon corners were appropriated by the Party and Lenin corners were introduced. Guidelines for Lenin corners were introduced almost immediately after the leader's death in February 1924, with images and photographs with scenes from his life often displayed like images of the lives of saints.¹¹⁸ We can see an example of this in Aleksandr Rodchenko's design for a Workers' Club, constructed in Paris as a part of the Soviet Pavilion of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels in 1925 (Fig. 40). Rodchenko includes a poster of Lenin presiding over a revolving chessboard at the back of the room.¹¹⁹ The Party took complete control over Lenin's image after his death and he was spoken of in religious-like terms, with slogans like "Lenin is dead! Leninism lives! Leninism will triumph" spread around the country.¹²⁰ Though Lenin the man may have left the mortal plane, his ideas would never die. The decision to embalm his body for public display only furthered the narrative of Lenin's immortality, playing into themes of the Russian Orthodox Church's doctrine in regards to the bodies of saints, which were believed to remain fully intact and not decay after their death.¹²¹ By 1931, Stalin had essentially declared Lenin infallible and denounced any criticism against the dead leader and his ideas.¹²² By this time, creators of political posters began linking Lenin and Stalin as leaders of the Soviet Union.

¹¹⁷ Tumarkin, 25.

¹¹⁸ Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 148.

¹¹⁹ Christina Kaier, "Rodchenko in Paris," *October* vol. 75 (Winter 1996): 6.

¹²⁰ Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 149.

¹²¹ Bonnell, 149.

¹²² Bonnell, 150.

Heartfield, Lenin, and the First Five Year Plan

In a search of the online Heartfield archives facilitated by the Akademie der Künste, a keyword search for “Lenin” produces eight pages of results. Among the objects and images included in that list are individual source photographs, several book cover designs, a number of photomontages dating from as early as 1924.¹²³ A keyword search for “Stalin” produces only two pages of results, the earliest dating from 1925. However, the first to include a portrait of Stalin does not appear until 1935 and this photomontage does not appear to have been published anywhere at this time.¹²⁴ The first published image of Stalin that Heartfield produced was the cover for a brochure of Stalin and Molotov speeches in 1946. Keyword searches for “Bukharin,” “Trotsky,” and “Zinoviev,” the three other most important Bolshevik leaders in the 1910s and 1920s, produce no results. The absence of these figures, and in particular the marginality of Stalin, is notable when we consider the presence of Lenin in Heartfield’s work and his effort to create a visual language for communism and its successes in the Soviet Union for a German audience.

Before his time at the *AIZ*, Heartfield designed the covers of several books about Lenin or of Lenin’s writing for his brother’s publishing house. The Malik Verlag’s focus was on literature written by and for leftists and several of the books and pamphlets they published included works on Lenin. The first, published in 1924, the same year as Lenin’s death, was Grigory Zinoviev’s *Lenin*, the speech-turned-pamphlet mentioned in the previous section, which was essentially a biography of the revolutionary leader from

¹²³ Akademie der Künste, “Heartfield Online: Catalogue of Works by John Heartfield,” accessed October 2, 2020, <https://heartfield.adk.de/en>.

¹²⁴ This photomontage was produced while Heartfield was in exile in Paris and never appeared in the *AIZ*.

the time of his assassination attempt (Fig. 41). This was the second edition of this book in the German language and also included several of Lenin's writings.¹²⁵ The cover depicts a repeated red hammer and sickle pattern on a black background with a red border and red spine. At the center of the cover is a photographic portrait of Lenin seated at a desk with a pile of books and papers stacked in front of him. He looks off to his left, a slight smile on his face. The title, *Lenin*, appears below the portrait, with the top of the letters overlapping the photograph. In 1927, Malik Verlag published Clara Zetkin's *Reminiscences of Lenin*, which detailed the German Socialist's memories of meeting and speaking with Lenin while he was alive (Fig. 42). It appears that Heartfield created the cover for the first edition as well as the second edition. The first edition's cover is mostly taken up by a portrait of Lenin, whose head is turned toward his left. His mouth is open, presumably mid-speech.¹²⁶ The portrait is bordered at the top and bottom by red bands. At the top is "Clara Zetkin," the author's name, and at the bottom is "Erinnerungen an Lenin," the title of the book. Its spine is red. Heartfield also designed the cover for the *Illustrated History of the Russian Revolution*, which was published the same year with an image of Lenin on the back cover (Fig. 43). In addition, he used portraits of both Lenin and Marx for his cover design of *On Behalf of the Soviets* by Max Liebermann. Though it remains unclear how much of Lenin's writing Heartfield may have read himself, if he read any at all, he designed a cover for at least one of Lenin's pamphlets, namely the Malik-Verlag's edition of his speech on the revolution of 1905, published in 1925 (Fig. 44). Regardless of how much or how little of

¹²⁵ Lux Rettej and Friedrich Haufe, *John Heartfield: Buchgestaltung und Fotomontage*, (Berlin: Rotes Antiquariat und Galerie C. Bartsch), 35.

¹²⁶ Rettej and Haufe, *John Heartfield*, 90.

Lenin's theory Heartfield read, it is clear that he would have come into contact with Lenin's ideas, both through his membership in the KPD and through his discussions with Russian colleagues and officials during his travels in the Soviet Union.

Heartfield arrived in the Soviet Union in the summer of 1931 as a guest of the Comintern's newly established International Bureau of Revolutionary Artists.¹²⁷ Upon arrival, Heartfield described himself as both a "party member" as well as a "revolutionary artist."¹²⁸ While there, he had the opportunity to travel throughout the country and witness first-hand the progress that socialism was facilitating in industry and agriculture, as well as deliver lectures at the Moscow Polygraphics Institute on his art practice which were accompanied by a small exhibition of his work for the *AIZ*. Heartfield was invited to contribute to two separate editions of the *USSR in Construction*, an illustrated magazine published from 1930 to 1941 and meant to highlight the success of the Soviet Union. The visually striking, innovatively designed magazine was published in German, English, French, and Russian and began as an illustrated supplement to Maxim Gorky's literary journal *Our Achievements*. The goal of *Our Achievements* was to "stimulate socialist consciousness in Soviet workers and peasants," as the *AIZ* aimed to do in Germany, while highlighting the Soviet Union's diverse achievements in a way that was accessible to a mass audience.¹²⁹ However, the supplement soon became its own publication meant to capture the attention of a foreign audience. The main goal of *USSR in Construction* was to create a visual language "to represent Soviet industrialization to Western European and American audiences in a manner that both

¹²⁷ Gough, "Back in the USSR," 145.

¹²⁸ John Heartfield, quoted in Gough, 146.

¹²⁹ Erika Wolf, "When Photographs Talk, To Whom Do They Speak?: The Origins and Audience of SSSR na stroike," *Left History* 6, no. 2 (1999): 54.

minimized the backwardness of Soviet technology and highlighted the ideological differences of the Soviet system from capitalism.”¹³⁰ It sought to accomplish this using primarily visual means with a minimal amount of text. By relying heavily on visual material and not so heavily on text, the magazine could convey a variety of messages to different audiences, from businessmen to foreign intelligentsia to workers, without changing its content. It could capitalize on the assumed objectivity of photography.

Heartfield’s first contribution to *USSR in Construction* was his September 1931 (Fig. 5). The figure of the 1925 Lenin monument, sculpted by V.V. Kozlov and cast in bronze for cities across the Soviet, stands over the construction of new Moscow, framed by the wings of an airplane.¹³¹ Lenin’s image is ghostly and transparent, perhaps an allusion to Marx’s evocative image in the *Communist Manifesto* of the “specter of communism” haunting Europe, and clearly serving as a personification of communism and the revolutionary progress that it had brought. His legs are positioned in an open stance as he looks into the distance with his left arm raised in a pointing gesture, directing the way to the future. Through Lenin, the viewer can see the Soviet construction that he envisioned and promoted. The arrangement of Lenin towering over the industrial landscape framed by the wings of an airplane -- a key element in the Soviet iconography of progress -- alludes to Lenin’s vision of what the Soviet Union could be. Lenin is framed with images of industrialization and technology, essentially equating this progress with the development of socialism in the country and with Lenin as the leader of the socialist revolution. Heartfield’s use of the airplane wing juxtaposed

¹³⁰ Wolf, “When Photographs Talk,” 60.

¹³¹ Gough, “Back in the USSR,” 164.

with Lenin's ghostly figure is reminiscent of other Soviet representations that relied heavily on technological imagery.

The photomontage and the photo-essay that followed it drew the readers' attention to the reconstruction of Moscow, a city where the population had grown exponentially since the revolution thanks to the rapid industrialization pushed by the Bolsheviks. Heartfield shows the viewer a distant view of a recently completed housing complex of new Moscow for workers of the city in aerial view.¹³² Heartfield's choice to use the image of the monument is deliberate and notable, since this image appeared at a time when monumental sculpture was seeing a resurgence in the country.

Heartfield's second contribution to *USSR in Construction* was published in December 1931 (Fig. 6). In this case, Heartfield designed the entire issue, from cover to cover. Around the end of August, Heartfield travelled to Azerbaijan and Georgia, the major oil-producing regions of the country, to collect photographs of the oil refineries and surrounding areas.¹³³ Heartfield's spread for the magazine was designed to celebrate these regions and the oil industry within the Soviet Union by showcasing the "Bolshevik enthusiasm of Soviet oil workers, coupled with advanced American technology, enabled the Soviet oil industry to fulfill the expectations of its Five-Year Plan in record time."¹³⁴

Upon returning to Germany, Heartfield continued his work at the AIZ. He now had first-hand experience of socialism in Soviet Union and utilized this knowledge to create images that promoted the workers and achievements of the USSR, such as the

¹³² Gough, 163.

¹³³ Gough, 150.

¹³⁴ Gough, 170.

production of tractors in Stalingrad and the anniversaries of the October Revolution. *Lenin's vision became reality* was Heartfield's only photomontage in the *AIZ* to use a portrait of any Soviet leader (Fig. 8).¹³⁵ Published in 1934, the photomontage was created to celebrate the production of the one hundred thousandth tractor in Stalingrad. In the foreground of the image we see a tractor positioned diagonally across the picture plane. A man smoking a cigarette and wearing a suit sits at the steering wheel with a flag pole emerging diagonally from his place. Other men climb on and around the tractor. To the right, we see a crowded mass of men looking toward the tractor.

Above it all, taking up nearly half of the image, is a portrait of Lenin's disembodied head. He looks out of the photomontage in three-quarter profile. His mouth is closed and his eyes are focused straight ahead. The masses below him fade into his image. On the right side of the image are the words "Lenins vision ward wirklichkeit (Lenin's vision became reality)," accompanied by three paragraphs explaining that in April of that year, the one hundred thousandth tractor rolled off of the assembly line in Stalingrad. Heartfield also includes a quote from Lenin from his speech at the 8th Party Congress of the Bolsheviks in March 1919, where he said "If tomorrow we deliver 100,000 first-class tractors and are able to supply them with petrol and tractor drivers (you know very well that this is fantasy at present), then the middle-class peasant would say: I am for Communism. In order to achieve this, one must first defeat the international bourgeoisie and must compel it to give us tractors, or on the other hand our productivity must increase to such a level that we can provide them ourselves."¹³⁶ Heartfield's text notes that Lenin's goal was even surpassed, as two hundred thousand

¹³⁵ Evans, *John Heartfield*, 216.

¹³⁶ Evans, 216.

tractors were in operation on Soviet farms. Lenin's mouth is closed and he looks into the distance, alluding to his ability to see the successful future of the working class, his brow slightly furrowed. The photomontage depicts the fruits of human achievement, the success of production in the Soviet Union, and the triumph of the worker. Lenin is not a caricature, but rather a distinguished portrait representing the vision he had for the working class and production in the Soviet Union, achieved years after his death. In placing him above it all, as a larger-than-life portrait, Heartfield fits into the codified image of Lenin developed after his death. Lenin appears almost godly, reinforcing Stalin's doctrine that made the leader infallible after his death.

Heartfield's image gives legitimacy to Stalin's controversial First Five Year Plan, which began in 1928 and was still ongoing during Heartfield's trip to the Soviet Union through 1931 and into 1932. The plan consisted of a focus on industry related to machinery and metalworking, with a specific focus on the production of tractors which could be used in the agricultural sector could be converted into tanks should the need for weapons of warfare arise.¹³⁷ The production of tractors became increasingly necessary as the Bolsheviks enacted their plans of agricultural collectivization on the largely unwilling rural peasants. The peasants, in retaliation for being coerced into delivering the grain that the Bolsheviks accused them of hoarding and running "kulaks," peasants who were considered as part of a bourgeois peasant class, out of their villages, began slaughtering their draught animals rather than surrender them to the state. Stalin believed that Russia's economy and national security was reliant on a rapid

¹³⁷ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 130.

industrialization of heavy machinery and a focus on developing socialism within Russia, as opposed to developing an international socialism.

By juxtaposing Lenin's image and his words with images of a successful working class and images of industrial and technological progress, Heartfield produced a photomontage that supports the industrialization and modernization of the Soviet Union as brought about by the First Five Year Plan. However, he did so without so much as depicting or even mentioning Stalin's name in the text. Unlike many Soviet artists creating political posters, Heartfield goes almost out of his way not to depict or mention Stalin's role in the First Five Year Plan and as the leader of the Soviet Union at this time.

Stalin's Absence and Heartfield's Communism

While images of Lenin are far less frequent in Heartfield's work than caricatures of Nazi leaders, it cannot be discounted as unimportant to his development as a Communist artist. Heartfield did not produce images of other prominent Bolshevik and Soviet leaders in his work for the *AIZ*, but chose to depict Lenin as a heroic figure without linking him to Stalin, like many Soviet artists were doing at the time.

After Lenin's death, the Party faced uncertainty as to who would lead them. Two years before his death, Lenin wrote that he believed Trotsky and Stalin to be the two most outstanding figures in the Bolshevik leadership, though Stalin was not considered on the same level as Trotsky and Lenin in terms of being a "distinguished Marxist theoretician."¹³⁸ Others assumed that Zinoviev and Trotsky would assume leadership. When Lenin first became ill, his public political life essentially came to an end and new

¹³⁸ Fitzpatrick, 108.

leadership was needed. Many Bolsheviks feared that the revolutionary government would follow in the footsteps of France, with a Napoleon-like figure declaring himself emperor and these fears were mostly aimed at Trotsky, who was popular within the Red Army and among the youth of Russia. Zinoviev and Stalin became the opposition to Trotsky, essentially working to push him out of the Party, even as Trotsky denied any interest in taking sole power for himself.¹³⁹ By the Thirteenth Party Congress in April 1924, Trotsky had lost almost all support after other Party members were pressured by Stalin and Zinoviev.

With Trotsky removed from all Party power, Stalin broke with Zinoviev in 1925, who then joined Trotsky in his opposition. However, by 1927 Stalin had successfully expelled all opposition from the Party by citing the Bolshevik rule against factionalism and was free to move ahead with his plans to industrialize.¹⁴⁰ Any opposition to the First Five Year Plan was denounced as treachery and silenced.

As had been the case with Lenin, a cult was built around Stalin, this time while he was still alive. By the time Heartfield entered the Soviet Union, the normalization of depicting Lenin and Stalin as equals was well under way. Soviet artists sought to link Stalin to Lenin, visualizing the continuation of Lenin's ideas and theory through Stalin as leader. One example of this is Gerasimov's *IV Stalin Reports at the 16th Congress of the VKP*, a painting of 1935 which shows Stalin addressing the Party while standing before and below an over-lifesize bust of Lenin to the far left (Fig. 45). More directly pertinent to a discussion of Heartfield's photomontages, however, is the work of Gustav

¹³⁹ Fitzpatrick, 109.

¹⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick, 110.

Klutsis, who was one of Russia's leading avant-garde graphic designers of the 1920s and 1930s.

Lenin figured prominently in Klutsis's work as early as 1920 when he made the well-known, semi-abstract photomontage *Electrification of the Entire Country*, which showed Lenin as a colossal figure leading the modernization of Russia (Fig. 46). The title refers to a famous statement of Lenin's defining Communism as Soviet government plus the electrification of the entire country.¹⁴¹ By 1930, Klutsis had established himself as a prolific poster designer, many of which included the figure of Lenin. That year, he produced *Building socialism under the banner of Lenin*, his first poster that included Stalin.¹⁴² In the image, Lenin looks out towards the viewer, a stern look on his face. Behind him, face in shadows and half hidden, is Stalin. The poster visually connects the two leaders and implies a sense of Stalin leading in Lenin's "shadow." This line of thinking gives legitimacy to Stalin as a leader through the implication that he is continuing the work of Lenin, who Stalin himself had declared infallible. This connection then serves to show that by extension, Stalin is also infallible.

In contrast to these types of images produced by Soviet artists, Heartfield focuses almost entirely on the achievements of industrialization in the Soviet Union, as opposed to the glorification of Bolshevik or Soviet leaders. Heartfield's only depictions of a Bolshevik leader appear on the September 1931 issue of *USSR in Construction* and in 1934 with his photomontage which appeared ten years after Lenin's death. Both of these images depict Lenin as a god-like, ghostly apparition presiding over the

¹⁴¹ V.I. Lenin, "Our Foreign and Domestic Position and Party Tasks," 1920, Marxist Internet Archive, marxists.org

¹⁴² Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina*, 62.

achievements, construction, and industrialization of the Soviet Union. Lenin's image serves to invigorate and lead the way for the workers who are creating the socialism of the Soviet Union. However, Heartfield's focus, in all of his other pro-Soviet photomontages, remains on the workers and the Red Army as opposed to the leaders of the Party and government officials. In this way, Heartfield was able to give legitimacy to the Soviet working class and industrialization throughout the Soviet Union, while maintaining a level of detachment from Stalin's regime.

Conclusion

John Heartfield began using photomontage while collaborating with George Grosz and other members of Berlin Dada in the 1910s, where the medium was used to create visual jokes and references for their in-group of artistic and intellectual friends. When the group was dissolved in 1920, Heartfield continued to work in the medium, creating book covers for his brother's publishing house. By 1929, Heartfield was publishing in the *AIZ* where he perfected his craft. It was in the pages of the mass-produced and widely accessible illustrated journal that Heartfield began to display the visual humor he is most known for today. In the *AIZ*'s pages, Heartfield poked fun at Nazi and SPD politicians alike, satirized the class traitor and the bourgeoisie, and pointed out the working class's enemies boldly. However, alongside these biting satirical images, Heartfield also managed to create the image of a heroic worker, who took action to revolutionize his life even while being exploited and oppressed by the ruling capitalist class and make a new world for himself. While the German worker, for Heartfield, signified what the working class still needed to do, the Soviet worker represented what he could one day achieve.

Through his images of the Soviet worker in particular, Heartfield created a visual representation for his audience of what a Communist utopia could look like, where the worker was the master of his own world and no longer beholden to the capitalist class. This world consisted of an industrialized landscape, with heroic figures towering over them and looking out at what they had achieved. These images provided the German working class, who still lived under the burden of capitalism, with an end-point of

revolution. These images showed the German working class what the world could become if they took action and ownership of their labor and the means of production.

While Heartfield's images can seem, at first glance, time-specific to an era where Communists were battling Nazis in the streets and election booths of Weimar Germany, Heartfield's mass-produced imagery survives through our contemporary conception of social media and internet meme culture. Heartfield's images were created to agitate the working class and create active participants of the *AIZ* reader. Though I do not have the space and time here to explore this line of thinking fully or in much depth, I would like to suggest that our contemporary meme culture is the legacy of Heartfield and his peers who worked within the medium of photomontage and published their work in the mass-produced journals accessible throughout their countries. While not all memes are explicitly political in nature, those that are created by anonymous authors on the Left follow Heartfield's formula, condensing complex political thought into a single image by using familiar layouts, cultural references, layered imagery and recognizable online jokes. Taking a glance at any social media page that posts Leftist memes, it is hard to miss the influence that photomontage has had on our contemporary visual culture. Like Heartfield's images, these internet memes agitate the viewer to perform a political action that will help them to take ownership of their labor power and political life.

Heartfield's images provided a visual formula for photomontage during the interwar period in Germany and the Soviet Union and a clear thread can be drawn from these photomontages, produced at such a volatile time in Western history, to the online visual culture that we participate in today. When we consume these images by scrolling

through our social media accounts, we are viewing the legacy that these artists have left behind.

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