

REPORTAGE IN THE 'THIRTIES

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Themse im Froste nächtigen müssen." Social hierarchy is ironically reduplicated even in this 'micro-economic' sphere: "diese Allerelendsten der Elenden sind noch in Gesellschaftsschichten geteilt, noch unter diesen Obdachlosen bestehen Vermögensunterschiede".⁴⁹ (DrR, p.9) A few pence, grown disproportionately significant, make all the difference between what even the Whitechaplars take for granted and worse privation.

The I-witness feels theatrically over-dressed for the occasion - until he joins the queue for the casual ward in Middlesex Street: "Mein Kostüm war mir fast übertrieben zerfetzt erschienen, als ich es angelegt hatte. Ein Blick auf meinen Nachbarn belehrte mich eines Besseren."⁵⁰ (DrR, p.9) Paying 3d for a plank bed, his descent is described in metaphors which echo London - *Abgrund* ('abyss') - and anticipate Orwell - *Unterwelt* ('underworld'):

So steige ich denn die Stufen zur Unterwelt hinab, während die Reichen, die in Vermögen von fünf Pence waren, es sich oben im Schlafsaal gutgehen lassen können ... Was die Stadt in ihren tiefsten Abgründen nicht mehr zu halten vermochte, was selbst Whitechapel, dieses Asyl der Desperados aller Weltteile, nicht mehr aufzunehmen gewagt hatte, was zu Bettel und Verbrechen nicht mehr geeignet ist, scheint hier abgelagert worden zu sein. Da sitzen sie und verderben die warme Luft. Der eine schnallt seinen Holzfuß ab und lehnt ihn an die Bank. Der andere macht Inventur, einige hundert Zigarretten- und Zigarrenstummel neben sich ausbreitend. Einer holt aus seinem Schnappsack die Dinge hervor, die er wahllos aus dem Rinnstein aufgelesen: Stücke alten Brotes, den Rumpf einer Pumpe, zusammengeballte Zeitungen (er glättet sie sorgfältig), den Rest einer Brille, das Rudiment eines Bleistiftes. Einer bindet sein Bruchband zurecht, einer wickelt seine Fußlappen ab, einer verdaut hörbar - alle Sinne werden gleichzeitig gefoltert.⁵¹ (DrR, p.10)

Human and material refuse - stumps and endings, lumped together interchangeably and dumped out of sight - is the reportage's metonymic conceit. And again the lowest expectations are undermined: for some people even begging and crime are remote aspirations. People can be

literal 'cast-offs', part-person, part-object (like the man with the wooden-leg), or live by re-cycling consumer society's cast-offs. Kisch's facts shock the sensibilities as effectively as any of Orwell's and express a similar anti-aesthetic, but with Dadaesque suggestions of the satire of Grosz and Dix as well as Schwitter's junk collages.

The destitute are still regimented and dehumanized by "the cold and usurous hand" of Victorian charity. At 9.00 p.m., when a whistle blows, the macabre resemblance the beds under the vaults bear to coffins makes the hostel into a crypt: "Und schon beginnt der Totentanz" ("already the death-dance begins") (DrR, p.12) of naked, skeletal bodies - the repressed conscience of the affluent world above. Hence in the morning, the six o'clock call is an ironic resurrection, not to the sublimating after-life, but back to the status quo.

As the relieved reporter goes out of the door, the real 'abyss' between his temporary 'participant observation'⁵² and the down-and-outs' fate opens up with bitter irony: "Endlich, denke ich, und atme der Luft entgegen. Die anderen ducken sich vor dem ersten Hieb der Kälte."⁵³ (DrR, p.14) Nonetheless, suppressed but intimate connections are suggested between the morality and economy of the underworld and the world above. During the night, the narrated 'I' overhears a conversation between his neighbour and a young convict, out on bail from Pentonville. The latter's guarantor is one Danny Rowlett, an enterprising, "steuerzahlender Bürger Londons" ("tax-paying citizen of London"), who needs him and his like for unspecified work. (See DrR, p.12) It is a Brechtian point: "Was ist ein Einbruch in eine Bank gegen die Gründung einer Bank?" ("What's robbing a bank compared to founding a bank?") asks Mackie Messer in *Die Dreigroschenoper*, tracing his own ascent to bourgeois 'respectability'.⁵⁴ Similarly, Kisch's 'Streifzug durch das

into bourgeois households, and reporting all information to the Military Revolutionary Committee, which struck with an iron hand, unceasing. In this way was discovered the Monarchist plot led by a former Duma-member Purishkevitch and a group of nobles and officers, who had planned an officer's uprising, and had written a letter inviting Kaledin to Petrograd. . . . In this way was unearthed the conspiracy of the Petrograd Cadets, who were sending money and recruits to Kaledin. . . .

Neratov, frightened at the outburst of popular fury provoked by his flight, returned and surrendered the Secret Treaties to Trotsky, who began their publication in *Pravda*, scandalising the world. . . .

The restrictions on the Press were increased by a decree¹⁰ making advertisements a monopoly of the official Government newspaper. At this all the other papers suspended publication as a protest, or disobeyed the law and were closed. . . . Only three weeks later did they finally submit.

Still the strike of the Ministries went on, still the sabotage of the old officials, the stoppage of normal economic life. Behind Smolny was only the will of the vast, unorganised popular masses; and with them the Council of People's Commissars dealt, directing revolutionary mass action against its enemies. In eloquent proclamations,¹² couched in simple words and spread over Russia, Lenin explained the Revolution, urged the people to take the power into their own hands, by force to break down the resistance of the propertied classes, by force to take over the institutions of Government. Revolutionary order. Revolutionary discipline! Strict accounting and control! No strikes! No loafing!

On the 20th of November the Military Revolutionary Committee issued a warning:

The rich classes oppose the power of the Soviets—the Government of workers, soldiers and peasants. Their sympathisers halt the work of the employees of the Government and the Duma, incite strikes in the banks, try to interrupt communication by the railways, the post and the telegraph. . . .

We warn them that they are playing with fire. The country and the Army are threatened with famine. To fight against it the regular functioning of all services is indispensable. The Workers' and Peasants' Govern-

ОБЪЯВЛЕНИЕ ПОСТАВЛЯЮЩИХ

1) Городъ Петрограда объявляетъ на осидируеть положеніи.

2) Всякія собранія, митинги, сборища и т. п. на улицахъ и площадяхъ воспрещается.

3) Попытки разгромовъ винныхъ погребовъ, складовъ, заводовъ, лавокъ, магазиновъ, частныхъ квартиръ и проч. и т. п. будутъ прекращаемы пулеметнымъ огнемъ безъ всякаго предупрежденія.

4) Довольствъ комитетамъ, заводарамъ, дворянскимъ и купеческимъ вѣдѣностямъ въ безусловную обязанность поддѣрживать самый строжайшій порядокъ въ домахъ, дворахъ и на улицахъ, пречестъ возврата и подвѣзды дошлей должны запарываться въ 9 час. вечера и открываться въ 7 час. утра. После 9 час. вечера вышускать только кильцовъ подъ контролемъ домохозяина комитетовъ.

5) Виночиче въ раздѣчъ, продажѣ или прѣбываніи асвнать спертыхъ напитковъ, а также въ нарушеніи правилъ 2-го и 4-го будутъ немедленно арестованы и подвергнуты самому тяжкому наказанію.

Петроградъ 6-го декабря, 3 часа ночи.

Комитетъ по борьбѣ съ погромомъ при Исполнительномъ Комитетѣ Совета Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

¹⁰Bolshevik order. A proclamation of the Committee to fight against Pogroms, attached to the Petrograd Soviet. For translation see Appendix II.

and Krushinsky, member of the *Vikzhel*, said "From this moment, when the union of all true Socialists is raised, the whole army of railway workers places itself absolutely at the disposition of the revolutionary democracy!" And Lunatcharsky, almost weeping, and Proshian, for the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, and finally Saharashvili, for the United Social Democrats Internationalists, composed of members of Martov's and of Gorky's groups, who declared:

"We left the *Tsay-ee-kah* because of the uncompromising policy of the Bolsheviks, and to force them to make concessions in order to realise the union of all the revolutionary democracy. Now that that union is brought about, we consider it a sacred duty to take our places once more in the *Tsay-ee-kah*. . . . We declare that all those who have withdrawn from the *Tsay-ee-kah* should now return."

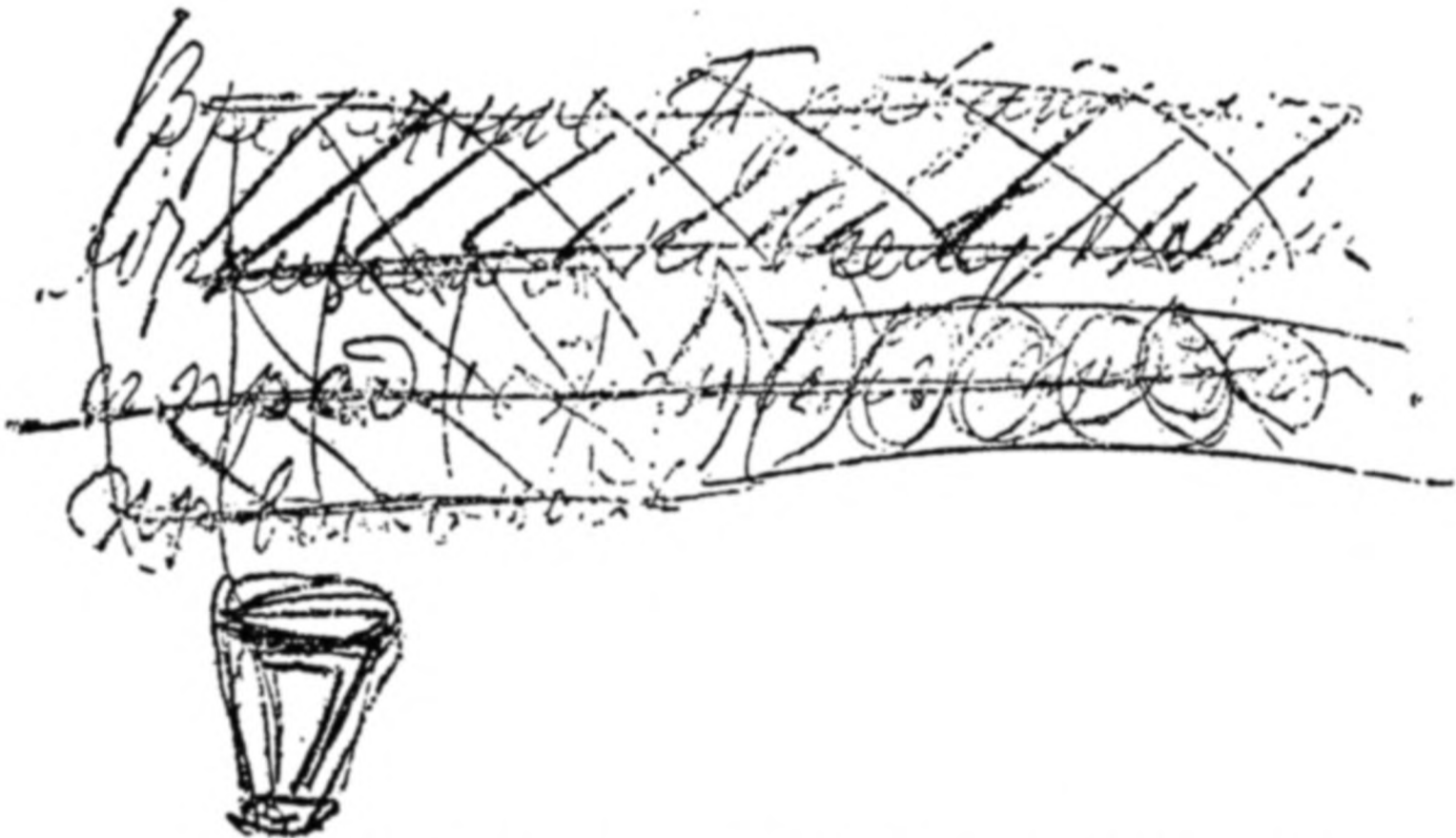
Stachkov, a dignified old peasant of the presidium of the Peasants' Congress, bowed to the four corners of the room. "I greet you with the christening of a new Russian life and freedom!"

Gronsky, in the name of the Polish Social Democracy; Skripnik, for the Factory Shop Committees; Tifonov, for the Russian soldiers at Salonika; and others, interminably, speaking out of full hearts, with the happy eloquence of hopes fulfilled. . . .

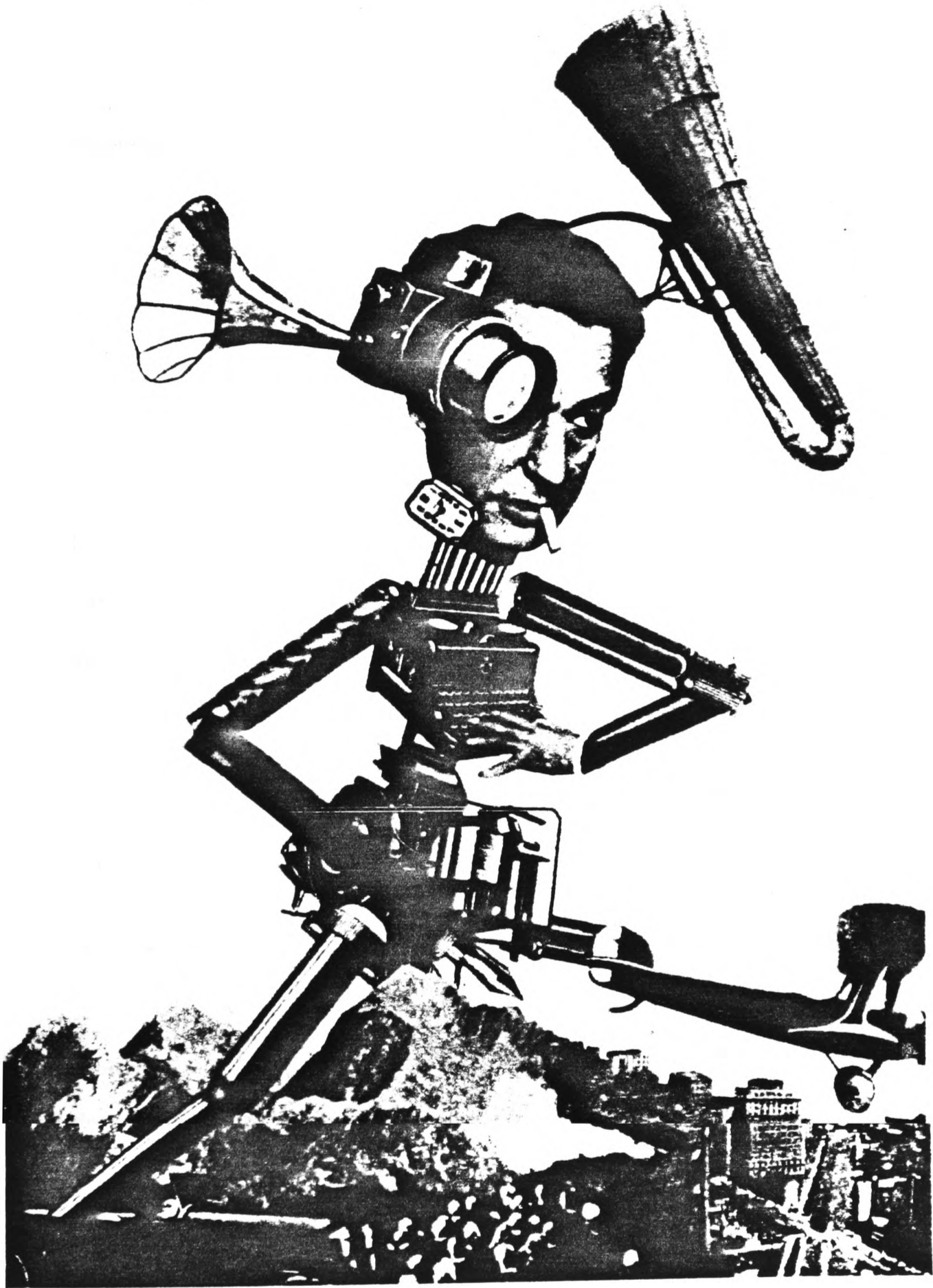
It was late in the night when the following resolution was put and passed unanimously:

"The *Tsay-ee-kah*, united in extraordinary session with the Petrograd Soviet and the Peasants' Congress, confirms the Land and Peace decrees adopted by the Second Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, and also the decree on Workers' Control adopted by the *Tsay-ee-kah*.

"The joint session of the *Tsay-ee-kah* and the Peasants' Congress expresses its firm conviction that the union of workers, soldiers and peasants, this fraternal union of all the workers and all the exploited, will consolidate the power conquered by them, that it will take all revolutionary measures to hasten the passing of the power into the hands of the working class in other countries, and that it will assure in this manner the lasting accomplishment of a just peace and the victory of Socialism."²



Facsimile of the beginning of a proclamation written in pencil by A. I. Konovalov, Minister of Commerce and Industry in the Provisional Government, and then scratched out as the hopelessness of the situation became more and more evident. The geometrical figure beneath was probably idly drawn while the Ministers were waiting for the end.



If reportage was one of the distinctive new approaches, photo-reportage was another. Together, they helped build a documentary tradition that is still very relevant today. The master reporter was the Austrian Communist Egon Erwin Kisch, here depicted by three leading artists: *right, above*, Rudolf Schlichter (c. 1927) shows him outside Berlin's Romanisches Café against a poster column featuring the Prague football team for which Kisch once played and John Reed's pioneer reportage *Ten Days that Shook the World*.

Christian Schad, 1928 (*right, below*), sets Kisch among Eiffel-Tower-like girders, while Umbo's montage (*above*) makes him a well-articulated body out of all the paraphernalia of modern communications. *Opposite* are two anonymous illustrations from the brilliantly edited picture magazines of the time – in this case, the *Kölnische Illustrierte* (*left*) and the *Berlin Weltspiegel* (*right above*). *Below right*, Willi Muenzenberg's appeal for 'worker photographers' able to record what the capitalist press could not or would not see.

