

Joachim Schätz

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2013

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/4049>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version  
Sammelbandbeitrag / collection article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Schätz, Joachim: Claims for Equality, Changes of Use. Workers' Movements, Film and the Curious Case of Salt of the Earth. In: David Mayer, Jürgen Mittag (Hg.): *Interventionen. Soziale und kulturelle Entwicklungen durch Arbeiterbewegungen*. Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt 2013, S. 135–148. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/4049>.

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Joachim Schätz

## **Claims for Equality, Changes of Use: Workers' Movements, Film and the Curious Case of Salt of the Earth**

*Salt of the Earth (1954) has become famous as the only blacklisted US film: Written, produced and directed by blacklisted Hollywood professionals intent on committing a “crime to fit the punishment,” it tells of a contemporary struggle of New Mexican zinc miners for better working conditions. Developed in collaboration with many of the participants of the strike, the film sets its convictions in motion: The claim for equality spreads from work relations to race to gender, and it affects dialogue, montage and camera movements. I examine how the cause célèbre that is Salt of the Earth relates to three general threads in the relation between workers' movements and film: the representation of workers' movements in films, film as instrument of workers' movements, and the place of union film cultures in a broader history of special interest film commissioning and screening, including points of contact with corporate films.*

The feature film *Salt of the Earth* (USA 1954)<sup>1</sup> has been described as a singularity, in many respects: As “the only blacklisted American film” (as its DVD cover says), for example, or as “the only major American independent feature made by communists.”<sup>2</sup> This emphasis on the film's exceptional status is certainly not misplaced: The fictionalized re-telling of a recent zinc miners' strike in Bayard, New Mexico, is a remarkably solitary object in the cultural landscape of the early 1950s United States – both as filmmaking (with the Popular Front's and Hollywood's brands of populism mixed intriguingly) and as a political *cause célèbre*. In this paper, however, I will shift the emphasis to the question of

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1 *Salt of the Earth* is in the public domain, available for free downloading on the “Internet Archive”: <[archive.org/details/ISaleDellaTerra-SaltOfTheEarth](http://archive.org/details/ISaleDellaTerra-SaltOfTheEarth)>, (10 April 2013).

2 Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Salt of the Earth*, in: Chicago Reader online, <[www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/salt-of-the-earth/Film?oid=2350818](http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/salt-of-the-earth/Film?oid=2350818)>, (April 9 2013).

how the exception of *Salt of the Earth* might instruct us more generally on the relations between workers' movements and film. *Salt of the Earth* is an enthusiastically pro-union film, yet its history of production and distribution was marked by constant suppression, not least from US union organizations. The union that had organized the strike depicted in the film, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (Mine-Mill) had just recently been expelled by the US trade union federation CIO because of its radical stances, for instance opposing the Korean War. As a result, the competing CIO steelworkers' union USWA tried to undermine the strike, stressing the alleged influence of Communists to turn mineworkers of the region against it.<sup>3</sup> Yet, thanks to a well-organized local division and support from the international organization as well as other local unions, the fifteen months strike was reasonably successful. The matter of union infighting is not represented in the film, but its patterns would repeat during *Salt of the Earth*'s production and distribution, significantly hampering both.

This was partly because the director, producer and writer of the film had been expelled for Communist allegiances: They had been blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee that tried to purge Hollywood of all Communist influence in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Thus they had become unemployable to large parts of the US film industry, a measure that was enforced by the dominant film trade union, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), among other institutions.<sup>4</sup> In a move that was unique among the over fifty blacklisted Hollywood professionals, director Herbert Biberman and screenwriter Paul Jarrico founded their own film production company, Independent Productions Corporation (IPC). They were intent on committing a "crime to fit the punishment," as Jarrico put it,<sup>5</sup> focusing on social and political issues in a way Hollywood hadn't let them. But they also hoped, more pragmatically, to continue their filmmaking careers on US soil. For what they hoped to be the first in a string of projects, they chose the story of the zinc miners' strike that had started in Bayard in the summer of 1950, with Jarrico as producer and Biberman as director.<sup>6</sup> The strike was still underway when the film's designated screenwriter Michael Wilson (the third blacklisted one in the

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3 James J. Lorence, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth. How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America*, Albuquerque 2003, 38.

4 *Ibid.*, 2-4.

5 *Ibid.*, 58.

6 *Ibid.*, 54-56.

group) paid the miners his first visit in October 1951. What intrigued the filmmakers about this strike was not just its timeliness, but also the way that it connected workers' struggle with matters of racial injustice and women's emancipation:<sup>7</sup> One core issue of the strike were the discriminatory wage levels that separated Mexican American workers from their Anglo colleagues. In June 1951, the employer, Empire Zinc, had pushed through a temporary restraining order prohibiting union members from picketing. To circumvent this measure, the miners' wives took over the picket lines, and thus were integrated into the strike's organization to an unusual degree.

The film was financed solely by IPC, whose main sponsor was Los Angeles theatre owner Simon M. Lazarus. Yet, cooperation of the Mine-Mill union on a local as well as national level was essential to the production of the film, as it was shot completely on location and with the substantial help of the strike's participants. This method of production was intended to demonstrate the filmmakers' commitment to the miners' struggle, but it was also a pragmatic necessity, since it was impossible for the blacklisted artists to book professional studio space. From the very start, the filmmakers also hoped for the Mine-Mill union's network to help distribute and market the movie. Therefore, they stressed the usefulness of the film as a matter of promoting the union's stance. After some negotiations, Mine-Mill signed on as a co-producer and lent its non-financial support.<sup>8</sup> Thus, *Salt of the Earth* was conceived, in its very production, as an engaged artistic examination of workers' struggle *and* as a semi-sponsored promotional film for one contested union. This dual nature of the film would shape the film's history of distribution in instructive ways. But before delving into this matter, I want to pay attention to *Salt of the Earth's* production history and well as some of its formal strategies by addressing the first of my three points concerning the relations between workers' movements and film.

## A Film on Strike: Representation

This first point concerning the relation between film and workers' movements is the matter of representation. First of all, *Salt of the Earth* is a film *about* labour struggle, more precisely, about a strike. Thus, it participates in a certain filmic

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7 Benjamin Balthaser, Cold War Re-Visions. Representation and Resistance in the Unseen Salt of the Earth, in: *American Quarterly* 60/2 (2008), 347-171, here 352-353.

8 Lorence, 65-68.

narrative of the strike – the strike film as a subgenre of workers' drama, one might say – that has taken a rather recognizable shape in films as stylistically and historically diverse as *Brüder* (D 1929), *I compagni* (I/F/YU 1963) and *Norma Rae* (USA 1979): Often, a workplace accident is shown as a precipitating event, exemplifying the stakes of workers' struggle and sets the strike in motion. Then the main drama is about the gruelling duration of the strike and the way it is made endurable by class solidarity. This solidarity is visibly enacted in the dramatic climax, which sometimes entails an intrusion into the workers' housing by the opposing powers, demonstrating that the separation between factory space, public space and private space is temporary rather than absolute. In the case of *Salt of the Earth*, the finale features an eviction that mirrors a comparable scene in Joris Ivens and Henri Storck's "strike classic" *Misère au Borinage* (Belgium 1933): Here as there, the danger of eviction is averted by spontaneous collective intervention that creatively subverts rather than openly opposes joint state and corporate violence.

Viewed in this light, a strike would be just another topos of (likely not exclusively) filmic representation with its own set of narrative conventions, not different in this respect from, say, a bank robbery or a sport tournament. Yet the strike, as a collective endeavour, has often challenged and engaged the collective endeavour that is filmmaking in a more specific way. Sympathetic filmmakers often were perceptive to the issue of how to adequately translate the collective action of the strike into their films – on the level of the mode of production as well as of the forms that this mode [D. Mayer] facilitates. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, for instance, both the German period strike drama *Brüder* and the semi-documentary reports *The Passaic Textile Strike* (USA 1926) and *Misère au Borinage* featured workers as laymen actors in re-enactments. Those decisions were motivated by thrift, but on the other hand they were, for Ivens as well as *Brüder* director Werner Hochbaum, integrated into ongoing and sophisticated explorations of filmic form. The canonical example of trying to work through the troubles of strikers' representation was to become film essayist Chris Marker's involvement with the strikes of 1967 and 1968 in the French industrial town of Besançon: After producing a rather conventional engaged documentary about the strikers and their programmatic claims for another culture of participation in the factory (*A bientôt j'espère*, F 1968), Marker was heavily criticized by the workers for the film's conventional separation between intellectual artists and experts on the one side, and the objectified workers on the other. Subsequently, Marker retooled his methods and helped make the film *Classe de lutte* (F 1969) that was collectively and equitably directed by workers and filmmakers (dubbed "the Medvedkin Group"). The latter film sported a collage form that dispensed

with a knowing *voice-over* and engaged the workers in an ongoing re-invention of their identities.<sup>9</sup>

Such a radical program was clearly not on the mind of the makers of *Salt of the Earth*. They nevertheless understood the strikers of Bayard as instrumental to the film's production in ways that went beyond economic necessity: Screenwriter Michael Wilson presented the first draft of the script to an open meeting at the union hall and changed it according to the numerous criticisms. And many parts, including the main roles of Mexican American labor activist Ramón and the Anglo organizer and his wife were played by the actual participants who continued to give input.<sup>10</sup> This process of integration and constant revision reflects a certain push-and-pull that was already integral to the leftist US Popular Front culture of the 1930s [D. Mayer2] which had been formative for director Herbert Biberman:<sup>11</sup> The desire to show poverty and injustice in stirring images stood in conflict with a certain trepidation against patronizing those underprivileged "others".<sup>12</sup>

This tension is also evident in the way the film keeps the Anglo union organizer, played by actual organizer Clinton Jencks, on the margins, intentionally lessening the role that Jencks had actually played before and during the strike. Instead, the protagonist is the wife of a Mexican American labour activist named Esperanza Quintero, played by Mexican movie star Rosaura Revueltas. Focussing on issues of race and gender, *Salt of the Earth* may serve today as a rebuke to the idea that Marxism had to be taught sensitivity to non-class issues by post-Sixties identity politics. (Indeed, after the film's screening at the 2012 ITH conference, one of the speakers expressed his impression that the film almost plays as if concocted in a Cultural Studies seminar in the mid-1990s.) While never doubting the primacy of the struggle for workers' rights, *Salt of the Earth* lets the claims for equality spread from work relations to race to gender.

9 Maria Muhle, Ästhetischer Realismus. Strategien post-repräsentativer Darstellung anhand von *A bientôt j'espère* und *Classe de lutte*, in: Drehli Robnik/Thomas Hübel/Siegfried Matl (eds.), *Das Streit-Bild. Film, Geschichte und Politik bei Jacques Rancière*, Wien/Berlin 2010, 177-193.

10 Lorence, 69-77.

11 Ibid., 48-50.

12 This trepidation is examined as well as exemplified by two prominent works of art coming at the tail end of the US Popular Front movement in 1941: James Agee's and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and the Hollywood comedy *Sullivan's Travels* by decidedly non-Popular Front writer-director Preston Sturges. See Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark. A Cultural History of the Great Depression*, New York/London 2009, 104-112; Kathleen Moran/Michael Rogin, "What's the Matter with Capra?". *Sullivan's Travels and the Popular Front*, in: *Representations* 71 (2000), 106-134.

This coverage of different struggles for equality is neatly expressed in the camera pans across the picket line that occurs at three crucial junctures in the film's narrative. These unusually elaborate shots work as variations, relating to each other different positions in the miners' struggle: In the first one, strikers are seen marching with the empty worksite in the background. The second one juxtaposes female strikers coming together by foot and car with the strike breakers waiting in front of the picket line. The third one, finally, juxtaposes striking women, their children playing nearby, and their sceptical husbands watching them from a hill. Thus, the theatre of the strike also encompasses and dissects the family unit.

Most explicitly, the film sets the indivisibility of equality into action during an extended dialogue scene during a party at the Quinteros' house. The Anglo organizer played by Jencks tries to preach his advanced position on racism and women's rights, only to be sarcastically alerted to the limits of his own enlightenment – first by Esperanza's brash husband Ramón (played by real-life local organizer Juan Chacón), then by his own wife (played by Jencks' wife Virginia). The film's unease about patronizing its subjects is acted out in a long flow of statements and qualifying counter-statements. Rather than denouncing the organizer's programme in the name of lived experience, the scene only undermines his secure position of wisdom.

Part debate club, part screwball dialogue, this scene also indicates the strange mix of Popular Front didactics and Hollywood entertainment that is partially responsible for the deftness of *Salt of the Earth's* proto-identity politics. The model of the 1930s Popular Front cinema, as exemplified by groups like Nykino or Frontier Films,<sup>13</sup> is not only present in the film's frequently sloganeering dialogue (e.g. "This instalment plan, it's a curse of the working man."), but also in its leaning towards symbolism by proceeding from the specific to a general analysis of capitalist power structures.<sup>14</sup> A portrait of Mexican president Benito Juárez in the Quinteros' house is discussed, during the party, as an emblem of Mexican American political identity and then seen again in the eviction finale, first lying in the dirt with a broken frame, then caressed by Esperanza's son after the victory. (Fig. 1) In one of the most striking editing effects of the film, a dissolve

13 See Richard Meran Barsam, *Nonfiction film. A Critical History*. Revised and Expanded, Bloomington 1992, 146-153.

14 The symbolic interlocking of text and image is a key device in Popular Front films such as *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (USA 1936), *The City* (USA 1939) and *Native Land* (USA 1942). It would be fruitful to relate this strategy to the more sophisticated notion of "revolutionary symbolism" that Michael Denning has deemed central to the Popular Front's cultural production: Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front. The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, London et al. 1998, 60.



rhymes Esperanza's face, as she has to give birth without medical assistance (the company doctor doesn't visit strikers), with the similarly anguished features of her husband who's being beaten up by the police. The effect is one of blunt mutual clarification: Her pain is marked as politically willed rather than biological, while his connotes the birth pangs of a more just society, as made explicit during the baby's christening party when Ramón reframes the strike as a fight for hope. In another instance of symbolic shorthand, guns – as used by the police as well as the strikers – “become images both for a crude machismo and for the power of the ruling class.”<sup>15</sup> While the hopeless strikers marvel at an image of the safari-ready company boss, rifle across his lap, in a news magazine, Ramón insists to “look at the larger picture.” It is precisely this larger picture that the symbolism of guns and pains and portraits grasps for.

15 Deborah Rosenfelt, *Ideology and structure in Salt of the Earth*, in: *Jump Cut* 12/13 (1976), 19-22, reprinted on <[www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinesays/jc12-13folder/salttofearth.html](http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinesays/jc12-13folder/salttofearth.html)>, (6 April 2013).

Yet, contrasting for instance with the mosaic of stories in *Native Land*, a feature-length treatise on anti-union criminality released by Frontier Films in 1942 and as such the nearest antecedent for *Salt of the Earth*'s filmic activism, *Salt of the Earth* constrains itself to one location and a limited set of characters. As Benjamin Balthaser has recently shown, the finished film even cut out some of the larger systemic points made in Michael Wilson's first versions of the script, including critical references to the Korean War as an example of US imperialism and the Catholic Church's stake in appeasing labor conflicts.<sup>16</sup> In Balthaser's view, the changes likely resulted from giving priority to the part of the collaborating miners who had reason to be invested more in the long-time local struggle of Mexican Americans for work equality rather than in an analysis of Cold War power structures.<sup>17</sup>

The Quinteros' household, the film's main location next to the picket line, is not just stocked with significant objects, but also a site of melodramatic and comedic action centering on Esperanza's empowerment as an active striker and Ramón's slow acceptance of it. As director Biberman, screenwriter Wilson and producer Jarrico had been Hollywood professionals – with the latter two in the prime of their screenwriting careers when they were blacklisted –, it's no surprise that *Salt of the Earth* cannily employs the mechanics of the two contemporary film genres most associated with domestic space: melodrama and comedy.<sup>18</sup> Especially intriguing is some scenes' resemblance with the form of the domestic sitcom series that had recently migrated from radio to television. Scenes with chauvinistic Ramón as the butt of the joke – being helpless alone with the children, or hanging out the laundry with another husband while having a bewildered conversation about “sex equality” – are reminiscent of that enduring staple of sitcom plots, the temporary marital role reversal. Of course, while contemporaneous sitcoms' negotiations of gender as well as ethnic identity were framed by the promises and demands of a burgeoning consumer culture (transmitted via mass media),<sup>19</sup> the condition for empowerment here is collective action. The radio salesman seems to be on the side of the oppressive forces, having the radio taken back during the strike as the Quinteros are behind with the payments.

16 Balthaser, 350.

17 Ibid., 351-352.

18 The blacklisted creatives were experienced in both genres, with Wilson having won the Oscar for co-writing the Theodore Dreiser adaptation *A Place in the Sun* (USA 1951), and Jarrico having received a nomination for scripting the exquisitely kooky Ginger Rogers comedy *Tom, Dick and Harry* (USA 1941).

19 Jean Pfaelzer, *Salt of the Earth. Women, Class, and the Utopian Imagination*, in: *Legacy. A Journal of American Women Writers* 16/1 (1999), 120-131, <[www.uiowa.edu/~c08g013/pfaelzer.htm](http://www.uiowa.edu/~c08g013/pfaelzer.htm)>, (9 April 2013).



*Salt of the Earth's* mix of Popular Front pathos with the comedy of the mundane mirrors the way that the female strikers in the film re-use the everyday in their struggle. In one especially symbol-heavy scene of political awakening, Esperanza uses her shoe to hit a gun out of a policeman's hand. When the women are imprisoned (some with their kids), the demand for baby formula becomes a battle cry. No wonder that one of the more recent academic papers on *Salt of the Earth* stresses Judith Butler's concept of empowerment via performative appropriation,<sup>20</sup> given that the biggest punchline of the film hinges on an ironic reversal of meaning: When the Quintero's house is evicted, the women go and get the removed furniture back in through the back door. Asked by the sheriff to step in and stop them, a grinning Ramón answers: "You know how it is. They won't listen to a man anymore." Thus, the old chauvinist complaint gets re-used as a declaration of admiration.

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20 Aristotelis Nikolaidis, Rethinking the Representation of Gender and Activism in Film, in: *Feminist Media Studies* 11/4 (2011), 501-505.

Still, the display of harmonious collective action in this final scene is, involuntarily, marked by a loss: From early on, the production of the film had been hampered by an anticommunist smear campaign in national media, calling the film Soviet-paid, anti-American propaganda and even – a surreal wrinkle in the story – a potential danger to state security because of the New Mexico set's proximity to the nuclear research site at Los Alamos.<sup>21</sup> Among other repressive measures by the film industry and state officials, Rosaura Revueltas, the actress portraying Esperanza, was arrested by the Immigrant Service and deported to Mexico. Obviously, the finale had not yet been shot at that time: With isolated close shots of Revueltas filmed across the border as well as location shots using a lookalike facing away from the camera, the film tries to paper over her absence. In the moment of victory, Esperanza comes through the front door of her home, alone and hemmed in by a black frame. (Fig. 2) Given the aftermath of the actual strike, in which the women were not consulted for the contract negotiations and things mostly went back to the old way, this image is somewhat symbolic, too, if inadvertently so.<sup>22</sup>

### Film as a Tool: Instrumentality

As already mentioned, the film was not just conceived as a sympathetic representation of a union-organized strike but as a potential instrument of promotion for the Mine-Mill union. It was planned not just as a film *about* but also as *tool* for the workers' movement. This notion of instrumentality is crucial in understanding the role of labor movements' own film commissioning and production. *Salt of the Earth* is a rich case in this respect because of its intermediary position between being a commercial feature film and a commissioned union film. Its history of distribution, as painstakingly reconstructed by historian James J. Lorence, demonstrates the malleability of a film's meaning according to different contexts of use.

As already described, the filmmakers' relationship to unions was fraught with tension. Even before the national media campaign against the film's shooting happened, the film trade union IATSE had been an outspoken enemy of the project and forbade its members to have any part in its production. This would repeat during post-production and distribution, with film projectionists some-

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21 J. Hoberman, *An Army of Phantoms. American Movies and the Making of the Cold War*, New York/London 2011, 230.

22 Lorence, 39-45 and 189.

times refusing to work at the last minute when shows had already been sold out. That was especially problematic for a pro-union film like *Salt of the Earth*, whose reputation could be seriously damaged – so the filmmakers reasoned – by employing non-union personnel.<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, when the filmmakers publicly reacted to IATSE's suppression of *Salt of the Earth*, they took great pains to frame it as a civil rights issue rather than an anti-union complaint.<sup>24</sup> That also fits with the cautious depiction of union organizations in the film itself: The finished film abstains from all hints at the inter-union conflicts that were present in Michael Wilson's first scripts<sup>25</sup> and just stresses the support that the Mine-Mill Local in Bayard had received from other local as well as international union divisions over the course of the strike.

Given the intimidation of willing theatre owners by IATSE, it proved much easier to show the film in closed screenings for union audiences primarily organized by Mine-Mill. The filmmakers hoped to draw good word-of-mouth for later commercial screenings this way, but it was just one of the strategies they followed hoping to return their investment: When there were chances for brief commercial runs, it was sometimes decided to advertise the film as rousing entertainment at the expense of its labour issue to broaden the audience appeal.<sup>26</sup> (“Yes, you’ll cry, but you’ll laugh more,” one trailer promises, “when the women land in jail and the men land in a wash tub.”) In Los Angeles, Spanish-language leaflets targeted the Mexican-American community emphasizing its treatment of racial injustice.<sup>27</sup> But while the crisis-ridden Mine-Mill thrived one last time on the film's publicity and its extensive internal screenings, the opportunities for commercial runs proved few and far between because of IATSE's relentlessness. When, later in 1954, union organizer Clinton Jencks, who played the organizer in the film, was prosecuted as communist agitator, *Salt of the Earth* was again shown to local unions and at fundraisers to rally support for him. The internal function of the film had changed – now recording the achievements of one union organizer threatened with imprisonment. By that time, a rift between the filmmakers and their union partners had become visible: The filmmakers got wary of Mine-Mill's practice of extensive non-profit screenings, as they feared it would withdraw potential audiences from future commercial exhibition.<sup>28</sup>

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23 Lorence, 68 and 113-147.

24 Ibid., 114.

25 Balthaser, 250.

26 Lorence, 122.

27 Ibid., 145-146.

28 Ibid., 186.

Three mainstream unionists from Pennsylvania saw something else again in the film: According to Lorence, they were so impressed by its “value as a tool in labor education and union organizing”<sup>29</sup> that they tried to broker its national distribution via the Labour’s League for Political Education (LLPE), the political arm of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Despite much support inside the AFL, the deal with this eminent big labour organization eventually fell through because of ongoing resistance by IATSE, itself an AFL member. Instructively, one of the organization’s main demands during the negotiations was that Mine-Mill completely divorce from the picture, including extracting their credit at the beginning. To develop its “instructional use”<sup>30</sup> for unionism, *Salt of the Earth* would have had to stop being a promotional tool for one particular, contested union.<sup>31</sup> In Eastern and Western Europe, meanwhile, the film was received as an engaged, but autonomous work of art, receiving the prizes for “Best Picture” and “Best Actress” at the Karlovy Vary film festival in 1954, and being awarded “Best International Picture” shown in France in 1955 by the *Académie du Cinéma*.

To sum up, during its contested US run in 1954/55, *Salt of the Earth* seems have gone through many of the main functions that film has performed as an instrument of workers’ movements – and, indeed, functions of commissioned films in general: a tool for public promotion and internal motivation (for Mine-Mill), a record of an institution’s and its participants’ achievements (especially regarding Clinton Jencks), even an educational film (for the unionists from LLPE). While it’s not quite clear if the educational potential of *Salt of the Earth* was perceived in its applicability as something akin of an instruction manual (How to Organize a Strike) or in a more fuzzy inspirational way (They Could Do It, Too!), the film certainly provides for such uses, among other things, by a keen interest in the minutiae of strike organization. Seen from an educational vantage point, Esperanza and the other women’s gradual absorption into the strike – from making coffee on the sidelines and helping in the union office to picketing – makes for a guided tour through the inner workings of a strike, complete with Esperanza’s frequent explanatory voice-over.

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29 Lorence, 156.

30 Ibid., 156.

31 Ibid., 157.

## Commissioned Films: Contexts

Such a reading suggests the need for relating the exception that is *Salt of the Earth* to the rule of commissioned filmmaking. Some of the film's basic stylistics – such as the “voice of the converted” guiding through the film, the reveal of the film's “real-life models” in the end – can be found in many commissioned films of very different persuasions, for example the US anti-union propaganda short *And Women Must Weep* (USA 1962, commissioned by the National Right to Work Committee).<sup>32</sup>

This leads me to a final point about workers' movements and film: Investigations of workers' movements' uses of film must be related to a more general culture of the stylistics, rhetorics and functions of commissioned films. More specifically, acknowledging the overlap between the respective film cultures of unions and corporations (including commissioning and distribution) should lead to a more integrated discussion of visual cultures and filmic practices of the developing industrial and consumer modernity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, this concerns shared stylistics (often even shared stock images of factory floors and machines). For example, in his studies of West German union films, Stefan Moitra has argued for their stylistic proximity with contemporaneous company films, a measure of their centralist and reformist stance in comparison with more radical workers' films of the Weimar Republic.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond stylistics, it will be fruitful to investigate unions' screening culture<sup>34</sup> in relation to a wider 20<sup>th</sup> century culture and economy of non-public, special interest and often non-theatrical screenings encompassing diverse educational, social and economic institutions and interests.<sup>35</sup> (The importance of non-theatrical screenings for Mine-Mill's use of *Salt of the Earth* is evident in spokesman Maurice E. Travis' repeated stress on the use of 16 mm prints to reach remote

32 *And Women Must Weep* can be seen online on <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNnwW2II6QQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNnwW2II6QQ)>, (9 April 2013). For information on the film, see Rick Prelinger, *The Field Guide to Sponsored Films*, San Francisco 2006, 7.

33 Stefan Moitra, “Reality Is There, but It's Manipulated”. West German Trade Unions and Film after 1945, in: Vinzenz Hediger/Patrick Vonderau (eds.), *Films that Work. Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, Amsterdam 2009, 329-345. On the point of the similarity between union and corporate films, see also Vinzenz Hediger, *Thermodynamic Kitsch. Computing in German Industrial Films, 1928/1963*, in: Vinzenz Hediger/Patrick Vonderau (eds.), *Films that Work. Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, Amsterdam 2009, 127-151, here 143-144.

34 On the issue of non-theatrical screenings also see Stefan Moitras's contribution to this volume.

35 For an expansive exploration of this field in the US context, see Charles R. Acland/Haidee Wasson (eds.), *Useful Cinema*, Durham/London 2011.

areas.<sup>36</sup>) For instance, the concept of “labor education” that is invoked by LLPE’s interest in the film could be contrasted with the idea of filmic civics education as pioneered by the Ford Motor Company’s film unit from 1919 on. Going well beyond typical industrial films and targeting schools as sites for display, the Ford series of films on “Civics and Citizenship of the United States” (starting in 1921) taught the value of self-interested individuality in line with the company’s negation of working class and ethnic community traditions as well as unionization.<sup>38</sup> In this light, *Salt of the Earth*’s educational value to unions might lie less in the nuts-and-bolts information on strike organization to be learned from its narration than in the dramatic (and, occasionally, comedic) enactment of collective action that transcends ethnic and gender conflicts without discounting them. It was this quality, for sure, that made possible *Salt of the Earth*’s US revival in the 1960s and 1970s. Again, it was primarily shown in 16mm,<sup>39</sup> but the context had changed: While Mine-Mill was swallowed up by the steelworkers’ union in 1967, the film became a hit on politicized university campuses.<sup>40</sup>

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36 Lorence, 166 and 186.

38 Lee Grieveson, Visualizing Industrial Citizenship, in: Devin Orgeron/Marsha Orgeron/Dan Streible (eds.), Learning with the Lights Off. Educational Film in the United States, Oxford/New York et al. 2012, 107-123.

39 For a witness report on this matter, see the beginning of Rosenfelt.

40 Lorence, 180 and 193-194.