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# SALT OF THE EARTH



- Free of charge -

A FILM BY HERBERT J. BIBERMAN

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On 10.1.2023, from 8 p.m. in **Lecture Hall D** of the Philosophenturm (Von-Melle-Park 6)

## „Salt of the Earth“

A film by Herbert J. Biberman  
(English w/ german subs, USA, 1954)

When "social cohesion" is loudly preached in times of crisis, justified scepticism is more than appropriate. With the pretended perspective of equal integration into a larger "we" - whether family, nation or the ever so tolerant "community of values" - specific disadvantages are not overcome but exacerbated. Whereas human dignity as a universal standard of actual equality can only be realised by combating and overcoming exploitation, competition and alienation as structural causes of social inequality. It is only in this social debate, which tends to be

*"Some have nothing to eat and think about it, which can lead to a realisation of their situation: and that is Marxism; others have food and don't think about it: and that is the official religion. That's how different it is in human life!"*  
Kurt Tucholsky, "So different is it in human life!", 1931.

jointly contested by all non-billionaires, that it becomes possible to overcome all-round harmful structures of prejudice, discriminatory role ascriptions and group-based misanthropy. The organised labour movement gained a great deal of experience in this regard in the 20th century. The film "Salt of the Earth", shot in 1954 in the USA during the McCarthy era and self-financed by the criminalised mineworkers' union (IUMMSW), bears witness to this in a highly topical and impressive way.

Based on true events, it depicts the emancipatory struggle of Mexican-born mining families in the zinc mines of New Mexico. Because, unlike their Anglo-American colleagues, they are denied the most basic rights by the powerful mining company, which repeatedly leads to fatal accidents, they go on an indefinite, wildcat strike. In doing so, they not only have to deal with the racism of the company management, which is being forced to divide the workforce, with incited, paid strike-breakers and arbitrary attacks by the state, but also with the growing dissatisfaction of their wives. They suffer from the precarious, degrading living conditions, but also from the men's patronising ignorance of their specific situation. Although deeply concerned about the possible loss of their livelihoods, the women support the strikers with food and set up an aid committee. Their demand to focus the strike not only on safety at work but also on improving hy-

giene and basic services in the workers' settlements was initially met with incomprehension and laughter at the strike meeting. This relationship, exemplified by the relationship between the local

strike leader Ramón and his wife Esperanza, begins to change as the strike continues. In the face of growing repression, it becomes increasingly clear that the struggle can only be won if equality is realised on all sides. After all, it is the women who, in order to maintain the strike against legal criminalisation, have to take over the picket lines and defy the police apparatus

while the men take care of the household. The strikers develop a sense of solidarity and self-confidence as a result of the controversial realisation of equality in the joint struggle for decent living and working conditions, which has an impact far beyond the immediate industrial action and ultimately forces the company management to capitulate despite all its perfidious machinations.

In this sense, the film is a historically groundbreaking plea for the militant-humanistic unity of democratic participation, social progression and cultural emancipation. However, this applies not only to its artistic content, but also to its genesis. Almost without exception, the actors are miners who actually took part in the great strike of 1950. Most of the film crew were members or sympathisers of the Communist Party of the USA and were on the "black list" of those persecuted by the "Committee for Un-American Activities". Numerous attempts at sabotage, including the deportation of the leading actress to Mexico during filming, were overcome with solidarity.

In this way, it can be seen and consequently considered: enlightenment and emancipation is a necessary, convincing and humanly liberating matter. The global "we" comprises 99 per cent. Everyone is needed.

Bread, peace, dignity - now! International solidarity: an end to austerity.

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