

Bertolt Brecht  
Ernst Ottwald

# Kuhle Wampe

(or Who Owns the World?)

FADE IN

TITLE: "ONE FEWER OUT OF WORK"

FADE OUT

A SERIES OF SHOTS...

... as agitated MUSIC PLAYS, showing LOW ANGLES on buildings, factories, apartment houses and streets. A locomotive pulls into an industrial station. More LOW ANGLE shots of housing complexes and blocks of rental flats. All of this establishes Berlin in 1931.

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

Seventeen headlines, one after the other, outline the economic depression in Germany. Millions are out of work and the ranks of the unemployed grow daily.

DISSOLVE TO:

A CLOSE ANGLE ON A LISTING OF AVAILABLE JOBS

The listing is posted on a public bulletin board in Berlin.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT: BERLIN CITY STREET—DAY

PEDESTRIANS and BICYCLE RIDERS move along the street and on a sidewalk parapet overlooking the industrial section of the city.

A horse-drawn cart passes by, and more and more riders arrive, park their bikes and begin to congregate on the street and around the public bulletin posting column. YOUNG BÖNIKE arrives and stands near his parked bike. These are the jobless, and they assemble awaiting the arrival of a new job list.

A BIKER rides up, carrying an armload of papers. He dismounts and begins distributing the new job list to the crowd of unemployed people. They cluster around him, reaching, straining to get hold of a copy of the jobs list, and once having done so, step off to themselves to quickly scan it.

YOUNG BÖNIKE gets his copy of the list and hurriedly but carefully reads through it. THE BIKER gives out the last few papers, then gestures to those who have not received a copy that there are no more.

The crowd disperses, YOUNG BÖNIKE finishes reading the listings, puts away the paper, gets on his bicycle and rides off. Others mount their bicycles and ride off in the same direction after him.

CUT TO:

#### A SERIES OF ANGLES ON THE BICYCLE RIDERS—MOVING

The Bicycle Riders ride in packs, their bike wheels spinning, wobbling, pedals pumping relentlessly as they are off in search of work.

CUT TO:

#### EXT: A FACTORY FRONT—DAY

The Bicycle Riders, including Young Bönike, arrive in front of the factory just as A MAN hangs out a sign in the front window.

#### INSERT OF SIGN

Reads: "NOT HIRING WORKERS."

The Bicycle Riders mount up and ride away.

#### ANOTHER SERIES OF ANGLES—MOVING

The Bicycle Riders continue on as before, searching for work.

CUT TO:

#### EXT: AN ENCLOSED COURTYARD OUTSIDE A FACTORY ENTRANCE—DAY

A group of Bicycle Riders, including Young Bönike, arrives and rides out of sight through the gate behind the courtyard walls. They reappear, having been turned away, a moment later walking their bikes. Young Bönike crumples up the job list he has been carrying and pitches it away in disgust. They mount their bicycles and ride off again. The agitated MUSIC STOPS.

CUT TO:

#### EXT: STREET IN FRONT OF THE BÖNIKES' APARTMENT—DAY

Young Bönike rides up in front of the apartment building, dismounts and walks his bike through the open front door.

MUSIC comes from somewhere in the building. In the hallway, Young Bönike, still walking his bike, passes TWO STREET MUSICIANS, one of whom is playing a HARMONIUM and the other a SAW.

CUT TO:

#### INT: THE BÖNIKES' APARTMENT—DAY

FATHER BÖNIKE lies on the lace-trimmed livingroom sofa, reading a newspaper. A particular item catches his interest, and he sits up, putting the newspaper down on the dining table. From his vest pocket he takes a stubby pencil with which he marks a note on the newspaper.

FATHER BÖNIKE

The boy won't be drawing any more unemployment according to this.

This is directed to MOTHER BÖNIKE, who is setting the table for dinner. Receiving no answer from her, Father Bönike puts his pencil back into his vest pocket and returns to reading his newspaper.

FATHER BÖNIKE

You just don't care about anything, do you.

Young Bönike enters the apartment, hangs his bicycle up on a hook on the wall, takes off his hat and goes into the livingroom. He sits at the table next to Father Bönike, looks at his father briefly, then turns his head and stares vacantly down at the table.

Mother Bönike sets a large casserole dish down on the table and begins dishing out its contents for Father and Young Bönike. ANNI enters the apartment through a door out in the kitchen.

ANNI

Hi.

She removes her cap and puts it down, takes a comb from her handbag and goes to the dinner table.

ANNI

The welfare agency is going to pay Schulz's back rent.

Mother Bönike sets dishes out for herself and Anni.

MOTHER BÖNIKE

They won't give us any help.

She puts the serving bowl aside and sits down at the table. Anni comes and sits down next to her and they eat.

FATHER BÖNIKE

You can never tell. The welfare people do what they want to.

MOTHER BÖNIKE

There is always work for a really good worker.

(then, to Young Bönike)

But when a person doesn't even bother trying to find work, there's no need wondering why things have gotten so bad.

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON BICYCLE RIDERS—MOVING

Peddalling their bicycles, as before, in search of work.

CUT TO:

INT: THE BÖNIKES' APARTMENT—AS BEFORE

FATHER BÖNIKE

And this boy doesn't even bother to greet our landlord.

ANNI

Greeting him doesn't help much when you're six months behind on rent.

FATHER BÖNIKE

(angrily)

He could still greet him! A person can't afford to be unemployed and rude both.

MOTHER BÖNIKE

(sternly to Young Bönike)

So you can't find work anywhere?

FATHER BÖNIKE

Of course not! Not by being rude!

ANNI

Or by being polite, either. There are no jobs!

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON BICYCLE RIDERS—MOVING

As before, out looking for jobs.

CUT TO:

INT: THE BÖNIKES' APARTMENT—AS BEFORE

Father Bönike gestures at Anni with his spoon as he speaks:

FATHER BÖNIKE

The boy may be poor and he may be unlucky. But no one could possibly be that unlucky for seven months running now!

ANNI

Are you trying to say that he's just good-for-nothing?

FATHER BÖNIKE

Yes, that's what I'm trying to say!

ANNI

And you? How are you getting on? I suppose you've got a time card right there in plain sight in your pocket? You're out of work, too!

FATHER BÖNIKE

Just because you spend your whole day out stamping your time card doesn't mean you can come home here and act snooty!

He stands up angrily and leaves the table. Mother Bönike stands and calls after him:

MOTHER BÖNIKE

For goodness' sakes, quiet down! What will the neighbors think!

Father Bönike goes to the kitchen door, slips on his jacket and cap and looks back at his family, scornfully. Young Bönike sits demoralized, a blank look on his face. Mother Bönike scrapes the last spoonfuls of food from the bottom of the serving dish.

MOTHER BÖNIKE

Every day, the same squabble.

Father Bönike leaves through the kitchen door and walks down the staircase from the apartment. Anni sits looking at Young Bönike, still with his blank stare. Mother Bönike cleans the dishes off the table, removes the table cloth, puts the centerpiece in place and goes to the kitchen.

Anni goes to a mirror hanging on the wall and applies her lipstick. Outside, someone WHISTLES sharply, and she turns around, goes to an open window and leans out.

ANNI

I'm coming!

She goes back to the mirror, primps some more and puts her lipstick back into her handbag, which she slips under her arm as she turns to leave.

CUT TO:

INSERT OF A WALL PLAQUE IN THE KITCHEN

It reads: "Lament not the morning that toil and labor brings. It is so nice to care for people that one loves."

CUT TO:

ANGLE FAVORING YOUNG BÖNIKE

He looks after Anni as she goes out and sits silently for several seconds. Then, he gets up slowly and deliberately, walks to the window and swings back wide open the two hinged sashes.

As he holds the sashes open, his attention focuses on the wristwatch on his left wrist. He lowers his arm, carefully unbuckles his watch and places it gently on a dresser top. He turns back to the window, moves a flowerpot to one side and climbs up onto the window sill.

CUT TO:

HIGH ANGLE ON MOTHER BÖNIKE

She walks up the staircase outside the apartment, carrying a heavy handbag.

CUT TO:

A CLOSE ANGLE ON YOUNG BÖNIKE'S HAND...

...gripping the top post of the window frame. The hand lets go and disappears from the frame. There is a brief silence, and then from far below a short cry.

CUT TO:

A CLOSE ANGLE ON THE FLOWERPOT IN THE WINDOW SILL

CUT TO:

A CLOSE ANGLE ON YOUNG BÖNIKE'S WRISTWATCH

It lies on the dresser, showing exactly six o'clock.

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON THE BICYCLE RIDERS

As before, out looking for work.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER ANGLE ON YOUNG BÖNIKE'S BICYCLE...

...hanging just inside the door on the hook on the wall.

CUT TO:

OVERHEAD ANGLE

A crowd gathers around Young Bönike's body, lying on the street below, covered by a tarpaulin.

CUT TO:

EXT: AT STREET LEVEL

Several WOMEN, CHILDREN, WORKERS and a POLICEMAN make up the crowd. Anni and her boyfriend FRITZ approach the crowd. Fritz glances

down at the covered body on the street and then at the Policeman. In the b.g. VOICES OF CHILDREN PLAYING can be heard.

FRITZ  
(to the Policeman)  
What's going on here?

WOMAN NEAR THE POLICEMAN  
Jumped out of the window.

Fritz and Anni look at each other and then down at the covered body.

CUT TO:

#### LOW ANGLE ON TWO WOMEN

They are standing on a stairway landing in the apartment building. A THIRD WOMAN climbs the steps toward them.

FIRST WOMAN  
And before he jumped, he took his wristwatch off and laid it on the table.

SECOND WOMAN  
Naturally. The fall would have broken it.

CUT TO:

#### ANGLE ON THREE CHILDREN DOWN ON THE STREET

FIRST CHILD  
Which window is it then?

THIRD CHILD  
(pointing)  
That one there!

SECOND CHILD  
No, not that one. That one there!

All three of them stand looking up at the window.

CUT TO:

#### ANGLE ON WOMAN ON STAIRCASE LANDING

WOMEN  
One fewer out of work.

There are FOUR OTHER WOMEN standing on the landing with her.

FIRST OTHER WOMAN  
Such a young man.

SECOND OTHER WOMAN  
And his father doesn't know yet.

CUT TO:

#### INT: A TAVERN - DAY

Father Bönike and A MAN stand at the bar drinking schnaps and smoking.

FATHER BÖNIKE  
In America they already have seven million people out of work.

MAN  
Aw, well. They used to drive to work in cars. Now they're demonstrating against unemployment.

FATHER BÖNIKE  
But on foot!

The Man nods his agreement.

CUT TO:

#### EXT: THE STREET IN FRONT OF THE BÖNIKE'S APARTMENT - DAY

In the crowd standing around the body of Young Bönike are the Policeman and ANOTHER OFFICER.

OFFICER  
What was the motive?

POLICEMAN  
Unknown!

CUT TO:

#### ANGLE ON OLD WOMAN . . .

. . . standing on the staircase of an apartment building.

OLD WOMAN  
Such a young man. He had the best years of his life ahead of him.

CUT TO:

EXT: STREET IN FRONT OF THE APARTMENT –  
AS BEFORE

A police ambulance is parked on the street. An attendant closes and latches the double doors on the back of the vehicle, goes up front, gets in behind the wheel and drives away.

CUT TO:

TITLE: "THE BEST YEARS OF A YOUNG MAN'S LIFE"

FADE OUT

SOUND FILM: KUHLE WAMPE or WHO OWNS THE WORLD?

In the summer of 1931, by taking advantage of especially propitious circumstances (the dissolving of a film company, willingness of an unnamed individual to invest a modest sum of money together with his theatrical abilities in a film, etc.), we had the opportunity to produce a short film. With the impression left by the *Three Penny Opera* case fresh in our minds, we drew up a contract which, for the first time in the history of motion pictures we are told, made us legally both the producers and the authors of the film. Though this cost us our claim to the usual guaranteed fee payments, it secured for us almost unlimited control over our work.

Our small company consisted of two screenwriters, a director, a musical scorewriter, a production manager and, last but not least, an attorney. Understandably, organizing the company and planning the details put us to much more trouble than the artistic work itself, that is to say, we came more and more to regard the organizing as being a significant aspect of the artistic work. That was only possible because the nature of the work was as a whole political.

Yet, at the last moment before completion of all work in progress with nearly nineteen-twentieths of the film shot and considerable funds used up, our credit was withdrawn. A firm that had loaned us money and which had a monopoly on certain equipment that we needed explained to us that it no longer had any interest in the release of our film and was canceling funds which had been promised to make further work on it possible. They claimed that though the film might be highly lauded by the press, the press did not reflect the opinions of the paying public, and that the film could not possibly turn a profit, in as much as communism no longer posed any danger for Germany.

Other firms refused to extend credit because they feared censorship of

the film, not so much government censorship, though, as censorship by the theatre owners themselves. Indeed the former is just the mouthpiece of the latter, and the government censors generally don't act just as an impartial third party, but rather as executors of the wishes of the existing administration and economic system.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FILM

The sound film *Kuhle Wampe or Who Owns the World?* consists of four self-sufficient sequences which are separated by musical pieces which accompany montages of tenements, factories and landscapes. The first sequence, based on a true event, shows the suicide of a young man out of work during the best years of his life. His troubles have accumulated layer by layer until, on top of all this, the final unbearable misery is laid: the young man's unemployment benefit is canceled. Before hurling himself out of a window, the aforementioned young man takes off his wrist watch and lays it aside so that it will not be broken. The beginning of this sequence in the film shows the search for work as work itself.

The second sequence shows the eviction of the family as the result of a court judgment (which refers to the unfortunate family's inability to keep up its rent as being "brought about through their own fault.")

The family moves out of the city to a tent colony called *Kuhle Wampe* and takes shelter in the tent of their daughter's boyfriend. (The film was for some time supposed to have been titled *Ante Portas*.) The daughter becomes pregnant, and because of the narrow-minded attitudes about relations prevalent with those in the colony, (a type of "possession" of land and property plus the acquisition of a little income create peculiar social forms) the young couple is pressured into an engagement. It is the daughter's decision, though, to break off the engagement.

In the third sequence, a workers' Sports Rally is shown. The rally is well attended and excellently organized. Its purpose is thoroughly political; the recreation and competition of the masses is merely a symbol for revolutionary activity. In this sequence, over 300 worker-athletes were involved. The young couple from the second sequence are shown among the athletes and the workers: the girl has, with the help of her girlfriends, raised the money for an abortion, and the couple have put aside all thoughts of marriage.

The fourth sequence shows the trip home from the rally in a railroad car in which takes place a discussion over a newspaper article which tells of the destruction of Brazilian coffee for the purpose of price-fixing.

CONCERNING THE POETRY

The "Song of the Homeless" was omitted because of apprehension over censorship, and "Roll Call" because of technical problems.

The "Solidarity Song" was sung by some 3000 worker-athletes. The "Sporting Song" was sung by a soloist during the motorcycle and boat races.

The poem "On Nature in the Spring," done in solo voice, accompanies and connects three walks taken by the young lovers. During production, this part of the film was screened for worker-athletes who objected to the nudity in it.

Brecht, Dudow, Höllering,  
Kaspar, Ottwald, Scharfenberg

#### A SMALL CONTRIBUTION ON THE SUBJECT OF REALISM

Only seldom is it possible to test the actual effectiveness of artistic methods. Most often, one meets with, at the very best, agreement ("Yes, the way you have showed it is the way it is with us"), or that one has had an impact in some measure or another. What follows is a little test of a more fortunate sort.

With Slatan Dudow and Hanns Eisler, I produced a film called *Kuhle Wampe* which depicted the desperate condition of the unemployed in Berlin. It was a unified montage of relatively self-sufficient sequences. The first of these showed the suicide of a young man unable to find work. The censor took exception to this sequence, and the result was a meeting with the censor and the attorney for our firm.

The censor proved himself to be an intelligent man.

"No one denies you the right to portray suicide," he said. "Suicides happen. It is furthermore acceptable to show the suicide of a man out of work. This happens, too. I see no grounds for concealing any of that, gentlemen. I raise objection however to the manner in which you have depicted the suicide of your jobless man. It goes against the interest of the general public, which I am empowered to protect. I am sorry gentlemen that here I must give you an artistic reprimand."

Eisler, Dudow and I sat silently insulted.

"Indeed, you will be surprised that I fault your depiction in that it does not seem *human* enough. All you have shown us is a man whom we can safely say is a stereotype. Your jobless man is not a real individual, not a flesh and blood man, unique from all other men, with particular sorrows and particular joys and, in the final analysis, with a particular destiny. His characterization is totally superficial, and you will excuse me as artists for stating strongly that we are told too little about him. His actions are merely used to make a political statement, which compels me to protest the film being approved. Your film tends to represent suicide as typical, not merely as the measure of one abnormally disposed char-

acter, but rather as the fate of an entire social class! You contend that society drives young men to suicide in that it denies them the opportunity to earn a living. And you certainly don't go to the trouble at all to point out moreover what the unemployed might be advised to do in order to bring about change. No, gentlemen, you have not behaved as artists, not here. No one would have been able to prevent you from showing the shocking destiny of one single individual, but that was not what you were concerned with."

We sat perplexed with the unpleasant feeling of having been seen through. Eisler wiped dejectedly at his glasses, Dudow writhed as if in pain. I stood and, despite my aversion to speeches, I gave one.

I relied strictly upon falsehood. I brought up certain characteristics that we had given our jobless young man, for instance that before hurling himself out the window to his death, he removed and put aside his wristwatch. I stressed that it was this pure human trait alone which had inspired the entire scene, and that we had indeed shown other people out of work who had not committed suicide — 4000 of them filmed at a huge workers' Sports Rally. I defended myself against the outrageous accusation that we had not proceeded as artists and hinted at the possibility of a press campaign against such a claim. I did not hesitate to assert that my artistic honor was at stake.

The censor showed no timidity about going into the particulars of the matter. Our attorneys were astonished to see that a proper and orderly debate on art was shaping up. The censor emphasized that we had given the suicide incident a decidedly demonstrative tone. He used the expression "a mechanical sort of thing." Dudow stood up and irritatedly demanded that we get the opinion of some psychiatrists. They would testify that actions of this type often bear a marked mechanical quality. The censor shook his head.

"That may be," he said stubbornly, "But you must after all concede that your suicide was hardly an impulsive action. The viewer doesn't at all want to stop it, as it were, which certainly would be the case with an artistic, warm-hearted human portrayal. Good god, the actor plays the scene as if he were demonstrating how to peel cucumbers!"

We had a rough time of it getting our film approved. As we left the meeting, we could not conceal our regard for this shrewd censor. He had penetrated far deeper into the essence of our artistic intentions than had our kindest critics. He had delivered a small seminar on realism. From the policeman's point of view.

Bertolt Brecht

## SCREEN CREDITS

Screenplay .....	Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Ottwald
Music .....	Hanns Eisler
Director .....	Slatan Th. Dudow
Production Managers .....	George M. Höllering and Robert Scharfenberg
Cameraman .....	Günther Krampf
Sound .....	Tobis Melofilm/System Tobis-Klangfilm
Sound Engineer .....	Kroschke Michelis
Sound Cutter .....	Peter Meyrowitz
Scene Architecture .....	Robert Scharfenberg and C.P. Haacker
Musical Director .....	Josef Schmid
Orchestration .....	Lewis Ruth
Leading Players .....	Herta Thiele ..... Anni Martha Wolter ..... Gerda Lilli Schönborn ... Mother Bönike Ernst Busch ..... Fritz Adolf Fischer ..... Kurt Max Sablotzki .... Father Bönike Alfred Schäfer ..... Man with Mustache
Ballads Performed by .....	Helene Weigel and Ernst Busch
Distributed by .....	Praesens Film GmbH Berlin SW 48

*translated from the German by E.J. Campfield*