

‘Who will change the world?’: Willi Münzenberg, *Kuhle Wampe* and the call for a united front

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Abstract *Kuhle Wampe, Or Who Owns the World* (1932) was among the last motion pictures (partly) produced by Prometheus, the film company co-founded by the communist publisher Willi Münzenberg. Whilst the film is often cited for its use of Brechtian montage techniques, its relation to Münzenberg’s media organisation remains less well discussed. This paper explores how Münzenberg utilised the potential of film, alongside his other activities, to open creative, anti-sectarian approaches to the organisation of the working class in response to the call for a united front against the advance of the fascist threat. Here, the focus falls on the tactful ways Münzenberg highlighted the need to move beyond the isolating ‘camp mentality’ that Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge analyse in relation to the German Communist Party (KPD). The aim is to situate the production of *Kuhle Wampe* within a counterpublic sphere formed from a semi-autonomous media network that operated within, but presented a challenge to, the narrow and abstract public sphere constructed by the Stalinised KPD. The film is interpreted as one of the final attempts to articulate a united-front policy before the victory of German fascism in 1933 and, therefore, as an urgent contribution to the question of strategy just as the strategic debates of the interwar years appeared to be coming to an end.

Keywords: Willi Münzenberg, *Kuhle Wampe*, united front, antifascism, communism, public sphere

I

Drawing on an earlier article he had written for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in April 1932, Siegfried Kracauer penned, for his new book on Weimar cinema *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), a short account of the left-wing production *Kuhle Wampe, Or Who Owns the World* (1932). After providing a description of the film collaboratively produced by Slatan Dudow, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Ottwalt and Hanns Eisler, Kracauer goes on to explain the conditions of its censorship and to praise certain features, noting especially the 'unusual construction of the plot' that, for him, under Dudow's direction, contained the film's 'underlying radicalism'.¹ But if the montage sequence of the unemployed cyclist's frantic job hunt, the unorthodox motif placement of the suicide of the son – around whose family the plot orbits – and the unsentimental handling of the troubled romance between the daughter Anni and her partner Fritz impressed Kracauer, he was less enthusiastic about other aspects of the film. What appears to have troubled him most, in scenes such as the couple's ill-fated engagement party and that of the crowded S-Bahn carriage after the sports festival, is what he interpreted as a 'gross attack' on the attitudes of an older generation of workers 'obviously designed to stigmatise social democratic behaviour'.² With these workers apparently criticised rather than encouraged to stand in solidarity, Kracauer perceived the filmmakers to have distracted themselves from their efforts to bolster the masses in service of the revolutionary cause. He concluded his account by pointing to the resemblance between the film's 'young [communist] revolutionaries' and 'those youthful rebels ... of the opposite camp', a likeness, he suggested, that captured the 'unbalanced' condition of the unemployed youth in the period just before Hitler came to power.³

Given the narrative Kracauer was to trace from this point onward in his book, such a conclusion is understandable. Nevertheless, as Bruce Murray explains, Kracauer's analysis of the psychological disposition of the petty bourgeoisie in connection to the rise of National Socialism as reflected in the cinema of the Weimar Republic is reliant on its author's careful accounts of the most significant and commercially successful productions. This, Murray observes, leads Kracauer to de-emphasise

films such as *Kuhle Wampe* – which do not fall into this category – as well as the possibility of a leftist alternative they represent.⁴ Moreover, teleological and retrospective histories such as that written by Kracauer have a tendency, as John Lessard notes, to produce ‘a certain kind of tragic fatalism that risks undervaluing the efforts of those who fought that very sense of inevitability’.⁵ Ignoring the hopes and struggles of defeated generations, as well as the potential for them to be actively remembered and interpreted anew in service of present struggles for social change, these histories are produced, transmitted and received as static, closed cases. They tend to leave the reader, in the words of the French Trotskyist theorist Daniel Bensaïd, with ‘the idea that what is was fated to be’, preventing them from ‘seeing where there were other paths, or other opportunities that were missed or simply lost’.⁶ Here, then, in an attempt ‘to re-establish the sense of historical options’, I return to *Kuhle Wampe* as one of the last motion pictures to be produced, in part, by Prometheus, the film production and distribution company managed by the communist publisher and activist Willi Münzenberg in connection with his extraordinarily successful left-wing media and propaganda organisation.⁷

This essay considers the production of *Kuhle Wampe* in the context of Münzenberg’s efforts to utilise the potential of new media to open creative, collective and anti-sectarian approaches to the organisation of the working class in relation to the strategic debates of the Communist International (Third International or Comintern) and the advance of the fascist threat. Looking at Prometheus Film, which produced *Kuhle Wampe*, alongside the popular illustrated weekly, the *AIZ* or *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (*Workers’ Illustrated Newspaper*), established and first published in 1924, I will attempt to gain a sense of Münzenberg’s larger project of mobilisation and mediation, its political implications, and its legacy. The focus here falls on the tactful ways Münzenberg highlighted the need to move beyond the isolating ‘camp mentality’ that Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge analyse in relation to the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (Communist Party of Germany or KPD).⁸ Thus, the aim is not to carry out a rigorous scene-by-scene or technical analysis of *Kuhle Wampe* in relation to Brecht’s theories on montage and ‘epic theatre’, such as that already provided by Roswitha Mueller.⁹ Rather,

it is to situate the production of *Kuhle Wampe* within Münzenberg's wider project, and, therefore, within a counterpublic sphere formed from a media network that operated within, but presented a challenge to, the narrow and abstract public sphere constructed by the Stalinised KPD. The film is interpreted as one of the final attempts to articulate a united-front policy before the victory of German fascism in 1933, and, therefore, as an urgent contribution to the question of strategy just as the strategic debates of the interwar years appeared to be coming to an end.

II

Filmed and released in the period just preceding that which saw the publication of what Jean-Michel Palmier has described as 'one of the greatest symbols of antifascist activity in exile' – Münzenberg's *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag* (1933) – *Kuhle Wampe* intervened in a media landscape characterised by both change and continuity.¹⁰ As Robert Heynen – one of the few scholars to include Münzenberg in his own discussion of *Kuhle Wampe* – emphasises, Prometheus and the films it worked with may be understood as products of a broader and revived worker culture which grew out of a 'powerful cross-fertilisation between the cultural and political' during Weimar's last years.¹¹ Münzenberg's role in the development of this worker culture was, in part, to renew a sense of hope that, as Eric Hobsbawm reminds us, was 'rarely articulated' in the work of the central European avant-garde during the years prior to the period of Hitler and Stalin. In contrast to Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera* (1928) and Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), all three of which, Hobsbawm continues, came 'out of apocalypse and tragedy', *Kuhle Wampe* – despite its various connections to these earlier achievements – took part in a certain re-articulation of hope, inspired by the radical practices of the Republic's early years and the growing urgency of Münzenberg's antifascist politics.¹² Like John Green, whose recent biography of Münzenberg seeks to recover an 'instructive and inspiring' figure whose progressiveness has previously been overshadowed by authors who have narrowly

portrayed him as ‘a willing tool of Bolshevik machinations’, Heynen attempts to restore the contradictory, but too often obscured, revolutionary dimension that shaped the cultural forms of the Republic’s late period.¹³ Both commentators are careful to avoid dwelling on the imminent but as yet not inevitable disasters that were the Nazi takeover and the closing down of the spirit of the 1917 revolution under Stalin.

Following the British Film Institute’s (BFI) recent reissue of *Kuhle Wampe* in the United Kingdom, Kracauer’s view that the ‘line of argument’ taken by the filmmakers ‘is the party line’ has perhaps been rather too easily reiterated.¹⁴ Writing for *Tribune*, Stephen Daker comments that ‘[t]he film mirrors Communist politics of the time’ and rules out the possibility that, like the party leadership, it was at all ‘in the mood ... to imagine a united working-class opposition to Nazism’.¹⁵ What Daker fails to take into account is that the production of *Kuhle Wampe* was bound up with the cultural activities of one of the Comintern’s most important and most controversial characters, whose relationship with the party leadership was often tested and never simple. Münzenberg’s somewhat ambiguous political position, as a member of the KPD and answerable to the Comintern, yet somehow managing to assume ‘a semi-autonomous status’ from both, was crucial to his success in reaching out to a large proportion of the working class.¹⁶ During the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the possibility of a united front of defence forming between Germany’s workers’ parties was increasingly waning, despite the urgent need for an antifascist alliance, he came to play an influential mediating role within and among different left-wing circles. Film and photography were central to his attempts to achieve this unity.

III

For Münzenberg, who thought film one of the most effective media for drawing connections between everyday struggles and political projects, Prometheus was a primary focus for the fostering of a broadly defined and optimistic worker culture. As one of several of Münzenberg’s ventures, the company emerged from the international solidarity organisation that was the *Internationale Arbeiterhilfe* (International Workers’

Relief or IAH).¹⁷ Established in 1921 and placed under Münzenberg's leadership, this Comintern-affiliated organisation took the form of a transnational support network, the purpose of which, as Kasper Braskén explains, was to 'sound the alarm' and strengthen the resistance against colonialism, imperialism, fascism and war.¹⁸ The founding of Prometheus in 1926 coincided with the launch of *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* (*The Worker-Photographer* or *AF*), a magazine that, in an extension of the *AIZ*, called upon photographers to become, as Edwin Hoernle put it, 'the eye of the working class'.¹⁹ The common aim of these projects was to foster the participation of amateur worker-photographers, whose ability to document their everyday lives using affordable small camera technologies gave them the opportunity for self-representation, critical reflection and intervention.²⁰ Recognising photography's great potential to communicate information to readers and engage them as participants in the magazines' production, Münzenberg found a way to challenge the commercial press on its own terms. Soon drawing attention to the possibilities of the motion picture, his call for the establishment of 'film as a propaganda weapon' in 1925 reads like a manifesto preceding the launch of the Prometheus project.²¹ Stressing the increased sensory and emotional impact of film over that offered by the press, Münzenberg challenges the communist parties – as yet too suspicious and 'timid' to make use of the medium – to embrace and conquer its technology, to 'develop the tremendous cultural possibilities of the motion picture in a revolutionary sense' and thus 'wrest it from and turn it against' the capitalist bourgeoisie.²² Putting his theory into practice, Münzenberg facilitated – in creating Prometheus – an alliance between the IAH and the KPD which he believed could put the cinema in the hands of the workers. If the KPD remained somewhat hesitant to accept the avant-garde practice being developed by Soviet filmmakers and the constructivists, the projects of Prometheus, the *AIZ* and the *AF* represented a commitment to put such aesthetic developments into the service of a collective worker culture.²³ They show that Münzenberg understood that the elimination of the hierarchies associated with so-called bourgeois art and media depended on using the same instruments.

Unlike the *AIZ*, however, Prometheus consistently experienced financial difficulties. Early in 1932, just a year after accepting Dudow's sketch

for *Kuhle Wampe*, it went bankrupt, so that another studio was called on to release the film in May of the same year.²⁴ Prometheus's precarious finances reflected, at least in part, the KPD's hesitancy to support film production and accept avant-garde practices, but this also meant, as Green notes, that the company was able to avoid the political scrutiny to which some of Münzenberg's other endeavours became subject as his influence grew.²⁵ Because he was aware of his inescapable usefulness to both the Comintern and the KPD, Münzenberg allowed himself to pursue courses of action that were off the orthodox path. Indeed, the question as to whether Prometheus's bankruptcy was due less to its having become economically non-viable and more to the conflicts and tensions forming between Münzenberg and the Comintern's leadership has already been raised by Tilmann Siebeneichner. For Siebeneichner, these conflicting positions that developed out of the independence initially granted by Lenin to Münzenberg's IAH should lead us to ask the question: 'How important were the IAH and its message of international solidarity with regard to an above-party-alliance that strove to overcome Communist isolation within the European working class?'.²⁶ With this question in mind, the partnership Münzenberg secured between the IAH and the KPD through Prometheus strikes one as playing a crucial, if hazardous role in his continuing efforts to articulate the experience of the working class, and, in turn, to organise an above-party left-wing movement capable of reaching beyond the limitations set out by the leadership in Moscow. The work they produced was a demonstration of '[Münzenberg's] refusal to be pinned down' and his 'versatility' – which, for the characters of Peter Weiss's famous historical novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (1975), 'matched the art of photomontage ... and the experimental political cinema' that the projects of the AIZ and Prometheus promoted.²⁷ Both represented a commitment to put aesthetic developments in the service of a worker culture that was nourished by the 'message of international solidarity' issued by the IAH, as opposed to being starved by Stalin's notion of 'socialism in one country'.²⁸

This doctrine of 'socialism in one country', formulated by Stalin in 1924, directly opposed the traditional Bolshevik idea – one Trotsky would maintain through his theory of permanent revolution – that socialism could only be created through the efforts of the proletariat on

an international scale. For Stalin, the connection between the successful organisation of a socialist economy in Soviet Russia and the struggles taking place in the advanced countries that surrounded it mattered only in so far as those struggles were able to ensure the 'central position' of the USSR in the world communist movement.²⁹ The Comintern's positions on fascism were determined by its "economistic-mechanistic" view', and the increasing influence of Stalin's doctrine over the wider working class had a hugely detrimental effect on worker solidarity against fascism. Münzenberg's ambitions to promote solidarity through the cultural activities of the IAH were part of an attempt to move beyond the isolating 'camp mentality' that Negt and Kluge have analysed as common to the interwar European workers' parties in general, and the KPD in particular.³⁰

In their analysis, Negt and Kluge explain that, as the KPD increasingly turned away from its Spartacus roots and towards Stalinisation, under the leadership of Ernst Thälmann, it developed a 'public sphere of the camp': it sealed off the proletarian public sphere from its bourgeois counterpart. By separating itself in this way from the capitalist society which surrounded it – even though the individuals it organised remained employed in capitalist factories – the KPD rendered itself unable to accurately assess the power, or understand the characteristics, of the bourgeois public sphere.³¹ Conceiving of itself as 'a society within society', the party was able to produce only 'an illusory synthesis of the whole of society'. It failed to acknowledge, as Negt and Kluge write, that '[t]he proletarian public sphere can leave out nothing whatever for it derives its energy from its grasp of [the] total context'; and this includes 'the bourgeois public sphere and its public instruments of power'.³² The KPD also insisted that German workers identify not with their own experiences but with those set out by the Soviet Union, and this served to further reinforce its 'camp mentality': they adopted organisational practices that operated in accordance with Stalin's suppression of political positions different from his own, and this resulted in internal divisions which ultimately led the party to facilitate the destruction of the solidarity that it had initially sought to create.³³

The consequences of the situation Negt and Kluge describe much later were not lost on Münzenberg at the time. A close witness to the

developments that were occurring simultaneously within the German party and in Russia, in defence of the 'camp', he stepped up to the challenge of finding ways to deviate from the bureaucratic forces formulating the party line in an effort to inspire genuine solidarity among workers.

IV

By 1931, the IAH had achieved a membership of around 105,000 individuals across Germany, formed of specific groups supporting and providing information and cultural activity to workers, women and children.³⁴ Intending to reveal to them 'the true character of bourgeois-capitalist society', Münzenberg developed his cultural projects as a type of propaganda which, aligned with, but independent of, the party, functioned differently from their official counterparts such as the KPD newspaper *Rote Fahne* (*Red Flag*).³⁵ He sought, as Heynen notes, to 'deploy the new visual practices of photography and film ... for the construction of new *working-class* subjectivities'.³⁶ In the example of the *AIZ*, new media allowed Münzenberg to offer a broader and more accessible range of information that could challenge the commercial press by taking control of the forms it dominated. With its glossy pages, clear format and strong imagery, combined with text that resisted sectarian jargon in favour of a mixture of news, practical everyday advice, sport, humour and the causes of the transnational humanitarian and proletarian movement, the *AIZ* borrowed the persuasive techniques of commercial advertisers and effectively competed with the capitalist press on Berlin's newsstands.³⁷ From 1929, Münzenberg established an exclusive working relationship with John Heartfield who had developed an equally keen eye for the cross-over between the political and commercial spheres through the practice of photomontage.³⁸ Together, they produced intellectually and emotionally engaging visual propaganda that Münzenberg hoped would inspire 'apathetic and indifferent workers ... who simply have no ear for the propaganda of the Communist Party', to take up an interest in political life.³⁹

Unprepared to leave the weapons of propaganda as represented by the media of photomontage and film to the class enemy, Münzenberg

ensured that his own projects achieved an effective balance between bourgeois and radical forms.⁴⁰ Adopting a similar approach to that taken with the *AIZ*, the collective who approached Münzenberg to produce *Kuhle Wampe* through Prometheus ended up with a cinematic, high-quality-sound production with themes capable of reaching the politically indifferent as well as the politically active. Indeed, Marc Silbermann's observation that *Kuhle Wampe* does not ignore or denounce but instead 'thematizes apolitical behaviour as a reality of the working class' suggests that the filmmakers had found a way to acknowledge Münzenberg's approach to propaganda and the audience he believed it should reach in the context of the Comintern's earlier efforts to create a united front.⁴¹ Writing in 1923, Münzenberg highlighted that the effort to 'overcome the apathy of the despairing masses of workers' required 'propaganda and action of a considerably greater elasticity': once it had mastered the engagement of politically active groups, it should equip them with the means to guide the struggle for common action among the thus far unorganised workers.⁴² By 1932, when the issue of working-class apolitical or indifferent behaviour became a blind spot for the parties on the left and a prime opportunity for the National Socialists, Münzenberg's approach acquired a new urgency. For the filmmakers working on *Kuhle Wampe*, the point of emphasising the issue of political indifference was, as Silbermann writes, 'not so much to clarify its causes but to show the powerlessness resulting from the desire to escape from politics altogether'.⁴³ The need for widespread propaganda efforts working towards the creation of a united workers' front had never been more pressing.

The task of *Kuhle Wampe*'s producers, or 'engineer[s]', as Walter Benjamin would go on to write, was to 'adapt [the productive apparatus] to the purposes of the proletarian revolution'.⁴⁴ Their challenge, as Benjamin observes and as Münzenberg already understood, was to 'use and learn from' the 'newer instruments of publication', to 'enter into debate with them' rather than try to compete with them directly.⁴⁵ As Heynen suggests, Münzenberg's project was, then, one of 're-functioning' (*Umfunktionalisierung*): this Brechtian term describes not the complete destruction, but rather the reworking, of bourgeois instruments and forms of production, to create a space for 'a new

way of producing new modes of seeing, new subjectivities, and new forms of embodiment'.⁴⁶ Documentary realism, considered capable of helping to develop a critical understanding of the world, could then be utilised against the fragmentation of existence wrought by capitalist modernity. The adoption of the fragmentary technique of montage in *Kuhle Wampe*, therefore, does not serve to completely do away with the conventional dramatic narrative characteristic of commercial films; rather, it effectively 're-functions' it so that it becomes an intellectually and emotionally engaging 'epic' narrative open to the spectator's critical judgement on the state of social relations, and the possibility of their transformation.⁴⁷ Sabine Hake – rereading *Kuhle Wampe* with reference to Sergei Tretyakov's aesthetics of 'operativism', which was based on the combining of the cognitive and the emotional, and of objective knowledge and subjective experience – argues that 'strategies of rupture and immersion both have a legitimate place in Brecht's definition of realism as "showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators"'.⁴⁸ Further, this method was applied to a film that directly eschewed the gender divides still strongly entrenched in the communist imagination by letting 'a young woman [Anni's friend and comrade] announce the workers' desire to change the world because they, in her words, "don't like it"'.⁴⁹ In the final scene of the film, the camera switches in a sudden movement from the face of the middle-aged bourgeois, whom we see from below, to that of this young female worker, whom we see from above – as if in solidarity with others who have been looked down on – making her direct and defiant plea to the audience all the more powerful. 'By giving the last word to a confident young woman', Hake points out, the film 'identifies the discursive position from which the habitus of power can already be tested'. *Kuhle Wampe* thus offered to a class whose mobilisation was becoming increasingly urgent both new subjectivities and a 'different model of proletarian identifications' – against a typically militant and masculinist party culture.⁵⁰ In this film, Anni and her friend – both 'short-haired and slender', but, in the words of Eric D. Weitz, 'more sober' and 'less erotic' than their bourgeois counterparts – carve out roles for themselves that allow them to take the 'working-class version of the new woman' beyond what the communist leadership imagined and promoted. Over the course of the

film, from the moment that Anni replaces her brother as the script's central character, her own and her friend's experiences and actions reveal that they 'have an acute sense of the injustices under which they labour, and want to change the world around them' – and that they have the agency to do so.⁵¹ The critique of the capitalist mode of production and the 'camp mentality' of the KPD that runs through *Kuhle Wampe* is their critique, and they actively claim the struggle for unity and social transformation as their own.

The collective that came together behind *Kuhle Wampe* realised that, beyond the articulation and delivery of progressive content, their responsibility as filmmakers was to transform the relationships that sustained capitalism as a necessary step towards the proletarian revolution. Instead of underestimating the role of the class struggle and ignoring the relationship between the bourgeois and the proletarian public spheres – as the KPD leadership continued to do under the influence of its 'camp mentality' – the collective sought to understand these dynamics and to intervene in this relationship. The people who made up the production team, each with their different backgrounds, worked alongside a cast that brought together trained actors, the agitprop group *Das rote Sprachrohr* (The Red Megaphone) and members of the workers' sports club; as Silbermann notes, this collaboration 'reflected the attempt to counteract the hierarchical studio arrangements in the commercial industry'.⁵² Again then, far from imagining themselves as separated from commercial filmmaking, the collective operating under Münzenberg's media organisation acknowledged that the film industry was a public instrument of power of the bourgeois public sphere, and grasped the opportunity to put the process of 're-functioning' into action, at the heart of the film's production. As Christoph Schaub has argued, the biographies of *Kuhle Wampe*'s producers and actors are evidence that participation in the Weimar Republic's 'labour-movement public sphere' was regulated 'not by social position but by political belief'.⁵³ In this sense, the film owes its very existence to a recognition of the common ground holding firm beneath all the social and professional differences 'in the face of the common danger'. In the following year, Trotsky – holding fast to the idea of 'the united front for defence' – ensured that the need for unity in a time of danger was central to the

message of his polemical appeal to Germany's workers.⁵⁴ It was a similar recognition and democratic mode of collaboration and production that would ensure the explosive success of Münzenberg's *Brown Book* just a year later, which was deftly pieced together out of chapters written by different authors all determined to denounce National Socialism – and was a surprisingly coherent text in its structure and evidence.⁵⁵

For Münzenberg, playing the role of mediator between party doctrine and a broader leftist experience, the projects of both the *AIZ* and *Prometheus* functioned to promote a more inclusive worker culture, offering 'an alternative and antidote' to the KPD's 'sterile and unattractive' programme.⁵⁶ Through them, and in particular through *Kuhle Wampe*, as Schaub goes on to suggest, Münzenberg contributed to the 'reimagination of the image of the working-class masses and a corresponding attempt to transform modernity from the standpoint of proletarian collectives'.⁵⁷ The two organisations contributed to the creation of what Negt and Kluge would describe as a 'context of living [*Lebenszusammenhang*]': a counterhegemonic framework of experience for the working-class subject.⁵⁸ At a time when the KPD, having adopted the idea of 'social fascism' in relation to the development of its 'camp mentality', had failed to set up specific forms of united-front organisations, Münzenberg used these projects to identify communism with a more flexible notion of proletarian solidarity.⁵⁹ He thereby ensured that they at least remained capable of articulating the possibilities of a united front.

V

By the mid-1920s, the KPD's theory of 'social fascism' – a term used in referring to the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany or SPD) and its supporters – was already stalling attempts to build the united front that had previously been the aim of the Comintern.⁶⁰ Years of distrust between the parties, alongside the growing influence of the 'camp mentality', ensured that this split within the workers' movement was maintained, setting the stage for 'social fascism' to become regarded a threat equal to that of

the fascism of the radical right. This theory of 'social fascism' is what Kracauer – whilst he does not use the term – perceived to be lurking behind the filmmakers' choices on characterisation, for example that of Anni's father, which could be taken as a criticism of an older generation of workers associated with the SPD. Yet, as Marcel Bois recalls, after the KPD's turn to isolating policies in 1924, it was Münzenberg who, in 1926 – the same year in which he founded Prometheus – co-led the KPD's most successful campaign in renewed support of a united front strategy. The campaign in question was for the 'expropriation of the princes' (the princely land-owners that were a legacy of the empire). Communists and social democrats had committed to joint action in an extremely successful campaign for a vote on a referendum on the confiscation of these lands, whilst each maintaining their independence, and Münzenberg had utilised various forms of media, including film, in support of this.⁶¹ The outcome had proved that the united-front approach could be effective in the struggle to win specific working-class demands in support of the transition to socialism.

However, the strength and encouragement that the KPD, and indeed the entire workers' movement, acquired during this time was undermined following Stalin's announcement of the 'ultra-left turn' in 1928. This opened the so-called 'Third Period', during which social democracy was to be viewed as posing a threat to what Stalin and the KPD leadership saw as the revolutionary moment to come following the collapse of capitalism under the weight of the 1929 Depression.⁶² This doctrine of 'social fascism' finally swept aside all official efforts to unite Germany's working class. But in the Republic's last years the growing threat of National Socialism revived the call for a united front among those with enduring hopes for unity against fascism – for transcending what Trotsky would describe as the 'shrill and empty leftism' of the KPD.⁶³ Although many still underestimated or misunderstood the nature of fascism, others were convinced that party controversies had to be put aside in the name of an antifascist union. Münzenberg, increasingly treading the fine line between loyalty to and criticism of party policy, for some time publicly rejected the idea of an alliance with the SPD, but after the elections of 1930 he maintained that a united front was both desirable and possible on the condition that it should

be genuinely anti-capitalist.⁶⁴ It is indicative of Münzenberg's ability to mediate and facilitate the articulation of political strategy that his public rejection of a united front with the SPD did not prevent him from continuing to act as the 'guiding spirit' of the anti-Nazi front, *Das Freie Wort* (The Free Word), which brought together left-liberals, communists and socialists, including SPD officials.⁶⁵ Münzenberg's efforts to unite the left, however, ultimately proved insufficient against the forces which would Stalinise the Communist Party and thereby render any opposition ineffective through the effects of the official line of 'social fascism'.⁶⁶ The 'Urgent Call for Unity' petition, addressed to the KPD and SPD by intellectuals just before the 1932 Reichstag elections in July, was only acted on in January 1933, by which point the Nazis, who had already seized power, had banned both parties, with their members inevitably becoming some of the first victims of the regime.⁶⁷ But, as shown by the appearance of Heartfield's photomontage *Die Rote Einheit macht euch frei!* (*Red Unity Will Make You Free!*) on the cover of the *AIZ* in July 1932 – the first of his works to appear on the magazine's cover – this call had been one that was supported from the beginning by both the artist and the publisher. The cover shows a flag bearing the symbol of the pro-unity organisation *Antifaschistische Aktion* (Antifascist Action) being held aloft by three arms, representing the Communist Party, the SPD's Iron Front and an unaffiliated sympathiser. Their combined strength is effectively conveyed by Heartfield's contrasting use of light and shade and his dramatic, tower-like composition.⁶⁸

As Sabine Kriebel explains in her discussion of Heartfield's image, the message of unity communicated through this cover 'was at once visually compelling and politically controversial'.⁶⁹ *Antifaschistische Aktion*, or Antifa, was established in 1932 by the KPD, then led by Ernst Thälmann, as a counter organisation to the Iron Front or *Eiserne Front*, the Social Democratic Party's own militant antifascist coalition, which had been launched in 1931. The Iron Front, which had already been successful in bringing together socialists, republicans and liberals, did not welcome the Communist Party, and so, as Joseph Fronczak explains: '[j]ust as the Social Democratic Party had excluded the Communist Party from the Iron Front, so too Thälmann now excluded the Social Democratic Party from Antifa'.⁷⁰ And yet, as if to counter Thälmann and his 'social

fascist' attitude towards unity, Münzenberg and Heartfield decided not to exclude the SPD's Iron Front or its imagery from the front cover of the *AIZ*. It may be argued that, while Münzenberg and Heartfield retained and clearly displayed their allegiance to the KPD, their aim here was perhaps to suggest that the 'red unity' they endorsed was not a false unity designed to assist the building of the party and weaken social democracy, as Thälmann sought; rather, it was a 'red unity', designed to build a genuine antifascist movement forged through united action. As Kriebel points out, the *AIZ* election montage even echoed the symbol of the Iron Front – newly created by the propagandist Sergei Chakhotin – thus engaging 'in a politics of mutual reinforcement, bolstering the communist message of unity in the context of Socialist signs'.⁷¹ Compare this front cover of the *AIZ* with the election poster released by the SPD in November 1932 and it becomes clear just how much of an impact the visual language pulled together by Münzenberg and Heartfield had had on the propaganda of the Social Democratic Party following the July elections. *Gegen Papen, Hitler, Thälmann (Against Papen, Hitler, Thälmann)* reuses the three clenched hands and vertical composition of Heartfield's photomontage, but instead of having them holding a single flagpole representing the potential of antifascist unity, it shows each arm as separate but close together around the three arrows that made up the symbol of the Iron Front, each of them aiming at their individual targets: monarchism, the Nazi Party and the Communist Party.⁷² As Fronczak observes, the SPD had completely 'inverted the original symbolism' of the Iron Front, which had been designed to suggest that the groups making up its antifascist coalition could together take aim and strike at the common enemy that was Hitler's Nazi Party, as represented by the swastika: 'Instead of the three different arrows (the Iron Front's socialist, republican, and labour elements) striking as one', the poster 'sent the message of one heroic party (the Social Democracy) able to slay three foes all at once'.⁷³ The original antifascist message of Chakhotin's design, as well as the message articulated by Münzenberg and Heartfield against Thälmann and the 'camp mentality' of the KPD, was here deliberately repudiated by the SPD leadership. The message that Münzenberg and Heartfield appear to have been trying to communicate through their cover of the *AIZ* – like the 'Urgent Call for Unity' – did not fully sink

in until it was too late. But their message does demonstrate that, though, in 1932, the idea of the united front had been abandoned by the party leadership of the KPD, neither Münzenberg nor Heartfield had given up on it.

As the team behind the *AIZ* were thus engaged in one of their final attempts to resist the policy of 'social fascism', and to secure a workers' united front of defence, the filmmakers responsible for *Kuhle Wampe* were making their own case for unity against fascism. For, although Kracauer was perhaps right to point out that the notion of 'social fascism' had entered the film in its criticism of social-democratic behaviour, many of the filmmakers' other decisions suggest that they were, nevertheless, in support of movements of broader unity. In particular, the film represented one of the left's most successful collaborative actions of the late Republic – on the topic of abortion – at a time when notions of the *Volkskörper* (people's body or national body) had become central to Nazi policy.⁷⁴ Among other organisations, Münzenberg's IAH had long campaigned for the scrapping of Paragraph 218 – the legislation that criminalised abortion – and in 1931 it played a role in the movement that erupted onto the streets, in the press and across popular culture to change the law.⁷⁵ The attempt to change this law was ultimately unsuccessful, but the movement in support of women's rights to safe abortions, without the fear of committing a criminal offence, led by members of the hugely influential sex reform leagues, succeeded in uniting people across political, class and gender lines. This made it one of the few movements – alongside the earlier campaign for the 'expropriation of the princes' mentioned above – to bring social democrats and communists together during the Weimar years.⁷⁶

However, whilst the demands and the joint action forged through this campaign had initially received the enthusiastic support of the KPD, by 1932 the party's 'camp mentality' had ensured that no further interest would now be shown either in such rights or in opportunities for working-class unity. But, as Heynen explains, by drawing attention to the 'politics of gender and reproduction', *Kuhle Wampe* entered into 'the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion' that 'recognised the danger [the Nazis] posed in a way that the KPD, with its social fascism approach, did not'.⁷⁷ During a period in which the KPD seemed to have

become blinkered and isolated through its Stalinisation, the case for abortion in *Kuhle Wampe* – despite the limiting treatment it received due to censorship imposed by the Film Inspection Board – represented a call for unified action.⁷⁸ It had been inspired by a popular movement that had previously, as early as the year before, stimulated the KPD, SPD and other left-wing factions to organise and act together. The struggle for reproductive rights in *Kuhle Wampe*, invoked through Anni's difficulties in obtaining an abortion, remains one of the film's most memorable topics – alongside its engagement with the steep rise in unemployment and the loss of justice that came with the bureaucratic tightening of the welfare state's restrictions.

VI

Kracauer's account of *Kuhle Wampe* remains influential in its suggestion that those involved in the film's production must have been either politically blind to, or else complicit in, Stalin's disastrous theory of 'social fascism'.⁷⁹ Yet, when viewed alongside Münzenberg's organisation, the making of *Kuhle Wampe* appears, on the contrary, as perhaps one of the final attempts to articulate a united-front policy before the victory of German fascism in 1933. Indeed, when *Kuhle Wampe* was shown in Berlin, the audience's efforts to ensure its eventual release from the grip of the Film Inspection Board were rewarded with a film that uniquely captured the prevailing crisis and the challenges faced by the city's unemployed.⁸⁰ The film's initially successful run in Germany was, predictably, cut short, however, firstly because the standard formulas for commercial success were neither adhered to nor a priority among its producers, and secondly because it was banned as Hitler came to power.⁸¹ Nevertheless, with the brief success of *Kuhle Wampe's* reception in Berlin in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that the audiences in the Soviet Union had apparently been unimpressed by, or could not fully relate to, its portrayal of the German experience.⁸² If the cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and Germany was evident in the film's aesthetics and themes, the limits of the 'camp mentality' appeared to have made it difficult for Russian workers to understand the experi-

ences of their German counterparts: the collective who produced *Kuhle Wampe* did not submit to the idea that German workers should identify their experiences directly with those of workers in the Soviet Union; instead it insisted that the film should, both intellectually and emotionally, encourage individuals to identify with their own experience of the world.⁸³ This, Münzenberg and the filmmakers appear to have acknowledged, was necessary for constructing the solidarity that supporters of the KPD and the SPD needed if they were to be able to move beyond such damaging policies as 'social fascism'.

Whilst Münzenberg's activities remained close to the Comintern and the KPD, in the years from 1929 to 1933 the AIZ and Prometheus produced a number of highly innovative projects that were able to function within the workings of existing technological forms to offer the working class a sense of involvement in the task of unity, and, ultimately, to promote an optimistic commitment to reconciliation within the workers' movement against the rise of the fascist threat.⁸⁴ Münzenberg needed to show loyalty to the KPD in order to sustain his activities, but his loyalty did not exclude him from making a critique of the sort that could be successful only in the form of tactical mediation. The IAH had been founded and entrusted to Münzenberg by Lenin in 1921, following the latter's formulation of the policies of the united front as part of a revolutionary strategy; and, as Braskén's pioneering account reveals, it went on to become one of the largest, most influential and most relevant international left-wing organisations in history.⁸⁵ Through his continued leadership of the IAH, along with his work as secretary of Clara Zetkin's Action Committee Against War Danger and Fascism from 1923, Münzenberg held fast to a pre-Stalinist, antifascist politics forged on the basis of the united-front strategy.⁸⁶ As Brigitte Studer writes, Münzenberg's talent was found in his ability to 'tak[e] up political ideas that were in the air but which others shied away from realising, because they required great organisational skill, unflinching perseverance and extraordinary personal powers of persuasion'.⁸⁷ His efforts to 're-function' the bourgeois press and film production in Germany along the lines suggested by Tretyakov and Eisenstein in the USSR allowed him and those he worked with to contribute to the creation of that 'context of living' described by Negt and Kluge.

In 1935, however, the IAH was shut down, after the Comintern's dramatic shift, under the leadership of Georgi Dimitrov, away from the ultra-leftism of the Third Period and towards the policy of the Popular Front, based on the need for a broad antifascist alliance. Yet, with this alliance, a certain reversal within the creative process which Münzenberg had helped to foster took place, as a consequence of the Popular Front's continuation of the 'bourgeois mechanisms of exclusion' characteristic of the party, which Negt and Kluge saw as incompatible with the 'collective work programme of socialism'.⁸⁸ Bringing communists, socialists and the liberal bourgeoisie together into a politically and intellectually fragile antifascist coalition, the Popular Front was established because of the collective need to struggle against fascism.⁸⁹ The First International Congress for the Defence of Culture, held in Paris in June 1935, represented a milestone in this antifascist mobilisation that symbolised the union between the workers' movement and the broadly aligned intelligentsia. As Enzo Traverso comments, in a reaction to Joseph Goebbels's statement that '1789 will be erased from history', the antifascist alliance saw its task as being to 'oppos[e] the principles of equality, democracy, liberty, and citizenship to the reactionary values of authority, hierarchy and race'; and to 'inscrib[e] itself forcefully in the tradition of the Enlightenment, in its universal conception of humanity, its rationalism, and its idea of progress'.⁹⁰ The problem, however, as Franco Fortini observes, was that the establishment of this well-intentioned 'generally all-purpose "left" formula' led not to a clear, politically revolutionary strategy but to an 'insipid social-radical humanism'.⁹¹ By 1935, Fortini continues, this was the only ground on which a meeting was possible between antifascist intellectuals of divergent political currents, if fascism was indeed 'linked to capital, but in a pathological and monstrous way, with all the characteristics of an enemy of the human race'; from 1935, the fear 'of frightening away writers and intellectuals "of good will" with Marxist slogans' came to 'dominate political choices'.⁹² With the antifascist Popular Front's detachment from a working-class base – so central to the earlier idea of the united front – came the sacrifice of progressive political strategies, the halting of the revolutionary transformation of culture, and the diminishment of the possibility of proletarian emancipation.

For Münzenberg, who continued to do all he could to build and coordinate an antifascist resistance throughout the Popular Front years, this policy shift, as Green puts it, came with a sense of ‘bitter satisfaction’.⁹³ The collaboration between communists and socialists that was necessary to confront fascism had finally been established, but not only had it come too late: it had adopted (whether he fully realised it at the time or not) a quite different strategy from that of the workers’ united front, for which he had for so long fought for. Later screenings of *Kuhle Wampe* between 1932 and 1936, in Paris, Amsterdam, London, New York and Zurich, following its ban in Germany and as the Popular Front period was being inaugurated, were shown in a context within which nearly everything it did and stood for quite suddenly no longer appeared to matter. For, as Isaac Deutscher reminds us, the policy shift that took place alongside Stalinism’s appeal to ‘the “antifascist conscience” of the Western bourgeoisie’, following the largely self-inflicted disaster of 1933, involved the complete abandonment of the kind of ‘revolutionary-proletarian and socialist orientated action’ that *Kuhle Wampe* captured and represented.⁹⁴ Further, since they were not part of the cultural heritage of the Enlightenment that Popular Front antifascism defended and sought to renew, film and photography during this period were very often put to the service of an exclusionary bourgeois tradition; less attention was paid to mobilising their mass media potential for the creation of a new democratic culture. The Popular Front experiment consisted of an attempt to maintain and reform, rather than transform, capitalism and the bourgeois state, and, as Simon Dell has argued, this resulted in the restraining of the practice of worker-photography as a ‘weapon’ in the class struggle.⁹⁵ Indeed, socialist and worker orientated film and photography became particularly vulnerable to suppression at this time, for fear of their capacity to remove culture from its realms of exclusivity and to inspire transformative change. The Popular Front’s reassertion of the value of the bourgeois cultural heritage, and its promotion of the intellectuals’ voice of reason for political ends, led to a devaluation of class demands of the kind Benjamin hoped his theses on the ‘Work of Art’ (1935) might help to formulate and advance.⁹⁶ Fascist barbarism, as Benjamin would make even clearer in his 1940 ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, could not be fought by means of a defence of

civilisation – as the official line of antifascism held – because civilisation itself, rooted as it was assumed to be in Enlightenment values, was inextricably linked with fascism's reactionary and instrumental perversion of modern rationality and technology.⁹⁷ Benjamin recognised the dangers posed by an uncritical affirmation and reification of cultural heritage in the name of 'progress' – not only in the hands of the fascists but also in those of many antifascists. The latter failed to effectively confront fascism even while it was simultaneously facilitating the downfall of a revolutionary alternative.

VII

For the collective behind *Kuhle Wampe*, it was not so much the possibility of changing the world that was in question: its focus was more about the issue of exactly 'who' would change it. This central question of the film – with its answer of 'those who do not like it' – can be understood as an urgent contribution to the question of strategy just as the strategic debates of the interwar years appeared to be closing in the tightening grip of Stalinist bureaucracy. Moving into its final scenes, *Kuhle Wampe's* narrative, as Murray points out, 'supplies no individual hero and posits no clear solution to the portrayed crisis'; instead, it advocates the joining together of those who are dissatisfied with the world to set in motion a revolutionary strategy of their own making.⁹⁸ That strategy was not that of the party line under Stalin – which Kracauer and others suggested had been uncritically followed by the filmmakers behind *Kuhle Wampe* – but was the strategy of the united workers' front. The film, far from conforming to the 'camp mentality' of the KPD, which severed the workers from 'the experience of their own social reality' and left them open to further exploitation, suggests, in the end, that it is only through joint action that working-class people will find themselves able to confront the existing crisis and 'to struggle to the very end in defence of basic needs and culture'.⁹⁹ In this sense, the strategy of the united front – and the incremental application of transitional demands associated with it – is linked with the 'horizon of experience' that unifies the 'context of living' and enables

the individual to learn about, understand and interpret the world.¹⁰⁰ If, as Negt and Kluge argue, the development of the proletarian public sphere finds its form in the social forces that join together at times of crisis characterised as '[h]istorical fissures', then *Kuhle Wampe* might be described as a film attempting to document that crisis and that joining together.¹⁰¹

In the context of Münzenberg's wider project to inspire a movement of anti-capitalist resistance and radical transformation through the united front – against those dimensions of the Stalinised KPD that prevented it from building a strong left-wing opposition in the face of capitalist and fascist offences – *Kuhle Wampe* provides a key reference point for understanding the past as it was experienced by those involved in its debates and its struggles. For, as Bensaïd reminds us, whilst strategy starts from the emancipatory struggles that exist in the present – 'defin[ing] the fundamentals with which to rally, organise and educate activists' – it also draws on the revolutionary experiences of the past. Only in this way can it develop '*a project of the overthrow of bourgeois political power*'.¹⁰² When the strategy of the united front was first adopted in Münzenberg's time, as one of the outcomes of the Third World Congress of the Communist International in 1921, its objective was to win the 'majority of the working class' to revolutionary Marxism, 'to summon the proletariat for the direct conquest of power and to achieve it' through propaganda and the development and realisation of goals secured through action carried out in unity.¹⁰³ Today, it is this idea of 'joint action for a common goal in the interests of the working class' that provides the simplest definition of the united front and highlights its continuing relevance. In changed and changing contexts, this core definition allows the strategy of the united front to develop in line with the 'actual experiences of struggle' in all their broadness and diversity.¹⁰⁴ Though conditions have changed between Münzenberg's and our own times, his strategies foreground a resolve to fight for the unity of the working class by creating a space in which the process of unity in action – working together – can take shape. For those returning to questions of political strategy today, *Kuhle Wampe*, and Münzenberg's role in the film's production, serve as reminders to look 'backwards and forwards', to approach politics, as Isabelle Garo suggests, 'as a strategic

art, combining thought and action, past history and the current situation without confusing them or uncoupling them, nor forgetting that the battle of ideas has always been part and parcel of emancipatory struggles'.¹⁰⁵ The film may be understood, at least in part, as a contribution to the strategic debate of the 1930s, but it should also continue to provide material for such a battle of ideas among those who consider its project an unfinished one.

Garó's recent study proposes a reactivation of communism 'as general social reappropriation' (as it was originally conceived by Marx) as the alternative to contemporary neoliberal capitalism, arguing that one significant task is to achieve a unity and collective mobilisation among contemporary movements. 'At a time of political crisis and fragmented struggles', she writes, 'we must aim to outline a mobilising, majoritarian political road, combining multiple forms of contestation and the construction of a comprehensive alternative, which is radically democratic and resolutely anti-capitalist'.¹⁰⁶ Garó's attempt to restore to the communist project such an emancipatory potential and critical energy is one of the most recent to challenge the enduring influence of liberal anti-totalitarianism during a period in which authoritarian movements continue to advance. The restricted understanding of communism produced by a liberal totalitarian narrative – first established during the Cold War but hegemonic within the West ever since – also forms the starting point for Traverso's call for the development of a critical historicisation of antifascism.¹⁰⁷ Amid an international wave of scholarly interest in antifascism over the last decade, Traverso's aim has been to critically 'rethink' the movement, with all its ambiguities and limitations – from its historical foundations to its historiographical developments – in response to the contemporary moment.¹⁰⁸ The result is a challenge to any revising of the history of antifascism that sees it as a product of Stalinist ideology, as well as to the idea of Stalinism as the be-all and end-all of communism. Such rethinking of both communism and antifascism is crucial for addressing the increasingly urgent question today of how to interpret the retreat of democracy in recent years, and the character of the 'growing number of states moving in an authoritarian direction', as one special journal issue puts it.¹⁰⁹ Traverso's concept of 'post-fascism' attempts to capture

the 'hybrid' character of the 'nationalist, racist and xenophobic' new right, which is 'no longer fascist' but cannot be defined without that comparison; for him, grasping our own historical moment necessarily involves confronting the de-historicisation of democracy, which has resulted in, and grown out of, revisionist attempts to deny the 'historical link' between democracy and antifascism.¹¹⁰ If democracy is, as Traverso argues, 'a historical conquest of political revolutions and antifascist struggle', then it is our responsibility – as the heirs of that struggle living in a present in which the upholding of democratic values can no longer be taken for granted – to pursue a critical historicisation of antifascism, to rescue this tradition from the conformism that threatens it (Benjamin).¹¹¹

In our own time, the answer of 'those who do not like it' to the question of 'who' will change the world, delivered in the last scenes of *Kuhle Wampe*, has retained its capacity to help us rediscover and open up a strategic approach to the shift towards authoritarianism that accompanies the current crisis of capitalism. Münzenberg recognised that antifascism could only be sustained so long as it could continue to act as a force for the unification and mobilisation of the working class, who understood their defensive struggle in relation to the social totality and its ultimate transformation.¹¹² As Ugo Palheta has recently suggested in relation to the present movement, antifascism should define itself 'not as a sectoral struggle ... or an abstract ideology, but as a common sense permeating and involving all emancipation movements'. If the present antifascist movement is to be an effective one, Palheta argues, it needs to think and act collectively, to find ways of organising the collective experience of the oppressed through uniting it with anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and ecological struggles, whilst resisting the narrowness of a singular and rigid ideology.¹¹³ With the 'task of promoting the common action of the oppressed' at the centre of this definition of antifascism, Perry Anderson's reminder from 1976 still stands: it is 'not mere archaism to recall the strategic confrontations' of the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹⁴ A return to *Kuhle Wampe* in the context of Münzenberg's counterhegemonic project – bound up as it was within these confrontations – may in itself reactivate some of those unfulfilled hopes for, and possibilities of, a cause that remains

unresolved. For this very reason, it might still serve as a guide for unity and resistance today.

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Notes

- 1 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2004, p246.
- 2 Ibid, pp246-7.
- 3 Ibid, p247.
- 4 Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990, p5.
- 5 John Lessard, 'A Second Look: Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns the World?', in *Cinéaste*, Vol 34 No 4, 2009, p71.
- 6 Daniel Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life: A Memoir*, trans. David Fernbach, London, Verso, 2015, p292; Daniel Bensaïd, '9 November 1989: The fall of the Berlin Wall', in Penelope Duggan (ed), *Recorded Fragments: Twelve Reflections on the 20th Century with Daniel Bensaïd*, trans. IIRE and Resistance Books, Amsterdam and London, IIRE and Resistance Books, 2020, pp104-5.

- 7 Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life*, p267.
- 8 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi et al, Minneapolis & London, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, see pp205-213, 231-3.
- 9 See Roswitha Mueller, *Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Media*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1989.
- 10 Jean-Michel Palmier, *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America*, trans. David Fernbach, London, Verso, 2017, p317.
- 11 Robert Heynen, *Degeneration and Revolution: Radical Cultural Politics and the Body in Weimar Germany*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2015, pp497-8.
- 12 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London, Michael Joseph, 1994, p188; Heynen, *Degeneration and Revolution*, pp497-8. Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* was the first film that Prometheus distributed. For a detailed account, see Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic*, pp118-21.
- 13 John Green, *Willi Münzenberg: Fighter against Fascism and Stalinism*, Oxford, Routledge, 2020, pp3-5, 7. For the two authors and their works Green refers to, see Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals*, New York, Enigma Books, 2004; and Sean McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West, 1917-1940*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2003.
- 14 Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p247. The British Film Institute (BFI) released its restored edition of *Kuhle Wampe* in September 2022.
- 15 Stephen Daker, 'Forwards, Not Forgetting', in *Tribune*, 16, 2022, p93.
- 16 Helmut Gruber, 'Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933', in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol 38 No 3, 1966, p278. For further discussion about Münzenberg's relationship with the KPD leadership, see Green, *Willi Münzenberg*, Chapter 13.
- 17 On Prometheus, producer and distributor of socialist cinema in Germany between 1926 and 1931, see Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic*, pp1-4, 118-21, 216-24.
- 18 Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p202. See also Green, *Willi Münzenberg*, pp2, 194.
- 19 Edwin Hoernle, 'The Working Man's Eye', in Jorge Ribalta (ed), *The Worker Photography Movement, 1926-1939: Essays and Documents*,

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- 24 Marc Silberman (ed), 'The *Kuble Wampe* Film (1932)', in *Brecht on Film and Radio*, London, Bloomsbury, 2000, pp201-58: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408185285.ch-005>
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- 26 Tillman Siebeneichner, 'The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany', in *German History*, Vol 34 No 3, 2016, p505.
- 27 Peter Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance Vol. 1*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, Durham, Duke University Press, 2005, p136.
- 28 Heynen, *Degeneration and Revolution*, p497. See also Green, *Willi Münzenberg*, p182.
- 29 Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution*, Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2010, pp70-1. See also Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*, trans. Judith White, London, Verso, 2018, pp36-52.
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- 31 Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, pp207-8, 210-13, 231-3.
- 32 Ibid, pp207, 213.
- 33 Ibid, pp206-7, 232.
- 34 Gruber, 'Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire', p285.
- 35 Münzenberg quoted in Gruber, 'Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire', p284.
- 36 Heynen, *Degeneration and Revolution*, p510.
- 37 Molly Jean Loberg, *The Struggle for the Streets of Berlin: Politics, Consumption, and Urban Space, 1914-1945*, Cambridge, Cambridge

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- 40 Brigitte Studer, *Travellers of the World Revolution: A Global History of the Communist International*, London, Verso, 2023, p209.
- 41 Marc Silbermann, 'Whose Revolution? The Subject of *Kuhle Wampe* (1932)', in Noah Isenberg (ed), *Weimar Cinema*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, p317. See Willi Münzenberg, 'Question of a United Front (January 1923)', in *Marxists Internet Archive*, 2021: www.marxists.org/archive/muenzenberg/1923/01/quf.htm (accessed 15 April 2022).
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- 53 Christoph Schaub, 'Labor-Movement Modernism: Proletarian Collectives Between *Kuhle Wampe* and Working-Class Performance Culture', in *Modernism/modernity*, 25.2, 2018, p344.
- 54 Leon Trotsky, 'The United Front for Defence: A Letter to a Social Democratic Worker (February 1933)', in Kunal Chattopadhyay and Paul Le Blanc (eds), *Writings in Exile*, London, Pluto Press, 2012, p99. For some of Trotsky's earlier writing on the united front see,

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- 56 Gruber, 'Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire', p296.
- 57 Schaub, 'Labor-Movement Modernism', p345.
- 58 Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, p6.
- 59 See Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, pp182-3.
- 60 See Marcel Bois, "'March Separately, But Strike Together!' The Communist Party's United-Front Policy in the Weimar Republic', in *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory*, 28.3, 2020; Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, p232.
- 61 Marcel Bois, "'March Separately, But Strike Together!'", pp150-2.
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- 68 See Sabine Kriebel, 'Photomontage in the Year 1932: John Heartfield and the National Socialists', in *Oxford Art Journal*, 31.1, 2008, pp115-16.
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- 70 Joseph Fronczak, *Everything Is Possible: Antifascism and the Left in the Age of Fascism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2023, p65.
- 71 Kriebel, 'Photomontage in the Year 1932', p116.
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- 73 Fronczak, *Everything Is Possible*, pp66-8.
- 74 Heynen, *Degeneration and Revolution*, pp4, 508.
- 75 Green, *Willi Münzenberg*, pp172-3; Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, p304.
- 76 Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, p304.
- 77 Heynen, *Degeneration and Revolution*, pp508, 572-4.
- 78 For accounts of the censorship process, see Heynen, *Degeneration and Revolution*, pp572-4; John Willett, *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches*, London, Methuen Drama, 1998, pp131-2 and Silberman (ed), 'The *Kuble Wampe* Film (1932)'.

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- 81 See Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic*, p223.
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- 85 See Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief*, pp233-40; Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', in *New Left Review*, 100, 1976, pp59, 78.
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- 87 Studer, *Travellers of the World Revolution*, p205.
- 88 Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, p260.
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