

## Document Citation

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**Moya Babushka  
(My Grandmother)  
(SOVIET-B&W)**

**ARCHIVE REVIEWS**

**Hong Kong** A Goskinprom production (1929), restored by Gruziafilm (1976). Directed by Kote Mikaberidze. Screenplay, Georgi Mdivani, Semion Dolidze, Mikaberidze; camera (b&w), Anton Polikevic, Vladimir Poznan; production design, T. Gamrekeli, Valerian Sidamon-Eristavi. Reviewed at Hong Kong Film Festival, March 26, 1989. Running time: (at 24 frames per second): **60 MIN.**

The Bureaucrat .....A. Takaishvili  
His Wife .....B. Chepnova  
The Doorman .....E. Ovanov

■ **This silent film, made in Soviet Georgia in 1929, was such a frontal attack on communist bureaucracy that the authorities in Moscow promptly banned it. It was released only in 1976, when Gruziafilm, the Georgian production house, added a music score and sound effects. In this version, it unspooled at the 1977 New York Film Festival.**

Director Kote (Konstantine) Mikaberidze (1896-1973) was an actor and cartoonist, but "My Grandmother" was, apparently, by far his most successful attempt at feature film direction. The very stylized film mocks a Kafkaesque state corporation where most of the bureaucrats are either asleep on the job, or are occupied with non-essentials (one man, responsible for saving paper, instead whiles away his time sending love notes to a secretary and, when rejected, shoots himself).

The outfit's boss (amusingly played by A. Takaishvili rather in the style of Harold Lloyd) is grossly incompetent and is eventually

fired, to the alarm of his exuberant, charleston-loving wife (a very funny performance from B. Chepnova). Of her, an intertitle remarks: "She bought from speculators everything she ever wanted."

The out-of-work bureaucrat quickly discovers that a "grandmother" (influence or privilege) is required to find a new job, and he sets about getting a recommendation, which he eventually extracts from an unwilling executive. A representative of the workers, a Lenin-like figure (shot so that he looks enormous) rejects this "grandmother," and the film ends with titles which demand "Death To Red Tape! Death To Slovenliness! Death To Bureaucrats!" No wonder the censors in Moscow got cold feet.

The film's themes probably are as relevant today as they ever were, and its style is a consistently funny mixture of slapstick and surrealism — the latter exemplified by a scene in which the "hero's wife kicks him out of their apartment window, but he lands on the sidewalk below unhurt. There's also a naked male statue that comes to life, and other, less successful attempts at animation.

In all, it's a delightful film, full of invention, smartly paced, cleverly acted. —*Strat.*