

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Soviet silent cinema : The extraordinary adventures of Mr. West in the land of the Bolsheviks</b>
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Pacific Film Archive</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Kuleshov, Lev (1899-1970), Russia (Federation)
Film Subjects	Neobychainiye prikliucheniia Mistera Vesta v strane bolshevikov (The extraordinary adventures of Mr. West in the land of the bolsheviks), Kuleshov, Lev, 1924

PROGRAM NOTE  
SOVIET SILENT CINEMA  
PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

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THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF MR. WEST IN THE LAND OF THE BOLSHEVIKS  
(Alt. Title: HOW WILL THIS END? and MR. WEST)

Production: Goskino, Moscow. Released in USSR 1924.  
In six parts; 2600 metres.

Directed by Lev Kuleshov. Scenario by Nicolai Aseev. Camera by Aleksandr Levitsky.  
Designed by Vsevolod Pudovkin.

With P. Podobed (West), B. Barnet (Jeddy, the cowboy), A. Khokhlova (the "Countess"),  
V. Pudovkin (Zhban, the Con-man), S. Komarov (the One-eyed man), L. Obolensky (the Dandy),  
V. Lopatina (Ellie, the American girl), G. Kharlampiev (S'enka Svisch), P. Galadzhev,  
S. Sletov, and V. Latyshevskii (Con-men), A. Gorchilin (the Millionaire), V. Fogel.

SYNOPSIS

The film is a satiric comedy which ridicules the absurd preconceptions of Soviet Russia held by certain Americans. The film involves the visit of a certain Mr. West, president of the YMCA, to the USSR. Relatives and close associates of Mr. West try to talk him out of travelling to Russia in every way possible, arguing that he is placing himself in enormous jeopardy: namely, that the US press is multifariously depicting the "horrors" of life in the USSR. To protect himself, West takes with him a bodyguard, the cowboy, Jeddy. Alas, the precautionary measures taken by the American do not safeguard him from the extraordinary adventures which befall him. Someone surreptitiously steals his briefcase full of documents. Subsequently, Jeddy mysteriously disappears. An enigmatic man in a top hat returns the briefcase to West, tells him of an insidious plot of the Bolsheviks, directed against Mr. West, and describing himself a victim of the Soviet regime, hospitably invites West to his home. Mr. West falls into the clutches of a gang of swindlers and thieves, headed by the con-man, Zhban. Zhban and his gang deftly exploit Mr. West's absurd preconceptions of Soviet people. Adopting the characteristics of the "Bolsheviks" West preconceived, the members of the gang intimidate the naive American and in a variety of ways, manage to extract money from him. Meanwhile, Jeddy chances on a young lady of his acquaintance in Moscow, the American girl, Ellie. With the help of the militia, Jeddy and Ellie luckily come upon the Mr. West. The gang of swindlers is arrested. Mr. West, accompanied by a representative of the Soviet government, is given a tour of the genuine Soviet Russia.

BACKGROUND

This film is the first successful feature by the man who, until recently, was one of the most neglected of the great Soviet film directors in the fifty-five year history of the Soviet cinema, Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970). Beginning in the summer of 1920, Kuleshov had organized his now famed Workshop, where in 1923 the young Sergei Eisenstein studied film direction for the first time. By then Kuleshov had already distinguished himself as a combat agit-prop film-maker, working with both Dziga Vertov and Eduard Tisse, Eisenstein's remarkable camera operator for most of his films.

Kuleshov was the first aesthetic theorist of the cinema, publishing 41 theoretical articles and one book before 1930, as well as regularly making films. His work led him to formulate an external, circus-like, physical style of acting, influenced by the "bio-mechanic" theory of Meyerhold. (A modern equivalent might be found in Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre of the Poor.) THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF MR. WEST IN THE LAND OF THE BOLSHEVIKS evinces the first practical use of this anti-Stanislavskian, anti-psychological acting style, in which Kuleshov's studies in gesturology and physiognomy as systems of communication were put to use. The hilarious, satiric MR. WEST was an extraordinary success domestically at an economically and ideologically dismal time for Soviet Russia, some four years after the institution of NEP, the New Economic Policy, inviting mixed private enterprise, and shortly following Lenin's death.

MR. WEST was intended as a "showcase of effects" for the newly formed stock company which comprised the Kuleshov Collective, Boris Barnet and Vsevolod Pudovkin among them. It was a means for the collective to put into practice the audacious "bio-mechanical" exercises and "futuristic grotesqueries" which they had practiced in their celebrated studio etudes -- the so-called "films without film", performed at a time when film stock was in short supply in Russia, as if before a camera, for captivated audiences which included Osip and Lily Brik with Mayakovsky, who himself became intrigued enough to work with Kuleshov briefly. MR WEST was also clearly intended as a compassionate and generous

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satire of American paranoia with regard to Soviet Russia (even then!) And finally, MR. WEST was intended as a spoof and a celebration of American comedy and chase films, its chief purpose being twofold: to create a self-critical ambience within the film which invited audiences to laugh at both the Soviets and the Americans; and to show the Americans, whom Kuleshov esteemed throughout his career, that the fledgling Soviet directors could make comedies just as daring in their chases and just as funny in their unexpected twists as they could.