The film *Kuhle Wampe* found its way into East German cinemas via the East German State Film Archive. This archive was founded in 1955 to preserve films produced in East Germany (the GDR) and store the thousands of feature and documentary films from the former Reich Film Archive, which had been confiscated by the Soviet Army after WWII. Some of these had been returned to the GDR by the USSR in 1955. *Kuhle Wampe* was not among the materials returned, however.

A 35mm print of *Kuhle Wampe* was given to the State Film Archive by the Cinémathèque Française in 1956 or 1957. Slatan Dudow had emigrated to France when the Nazis took power. There Lotte H. Eisner, a German-Jewish film critic from Berlin, who had also emigrated to Paris, helped Dudow get in contact with Henri Langlois, who had founded the Cinémathèque Française in 1936. Unfortunately, I cannot say exactly when and how a print of *Kuhle Wampe* arrived at the Cinémathèque.

For me, the second life of *Kuhle Wampe* began when the film arrived at the State Film Archive, directly from France. At the time, I was a research assistant there. Dudow himself was involved in getting the print to the GDR, and it is quite likely that Lotte H. Eisner helped mediate the exchange again. She visited Berlin very often in the mid-1950s, mainly in search of works by German set designers for the Cinémathèque’s collection. I remember meeting her for the first time in 1954 or 1955, when she gave a lecture about German expressionist film at an East German artists’ club called “Die Möwe.”

An extremely friendly, cooperative relationship existed between the Cinémathèque Française and the newly-founded State Film Archive. I have to say it was really extraordinary, given that the Cold War between East and West was gaining momentum and there was an international boycott of the GDR. The Cinémathèque Française paved the way for the State Film Archive to join the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) in 1956. Besides *Kuhle Wampe*, the Cinémathèque handed over other German classics. The high point of the relationship between the two archives was the 1958 exhibit “60 Years of Film,” which took place at the Zeughaus on Unter den Linden (where the German Historical Museum is today). At that time, it was still in ruins from the war. Nearly half a million people attended the show organized by Henri Langlois within six months. So the print of *Kuhle Wampe* came to Berlin in an atmosphere of extraordinarily cordial relations between the Cinémathèque Française and the East German Archive.

Dudow was also involved in the film’s re-release in the GDR. He was well-received there, as he was one of the best-known German filmmakers from before 1933 to join the East German DEFA film studios. In such a position of authority, Dudow had no problem finding the funding needed for the production of a duplicate negative and prints, nor with cooperating with PROGRESS Film-Verleih – the only East German film distribution company – on the film’s theatrical distribution.

For Dudow, it was very important to explain the circumstances of the film’s production to its audience in the 1950s. He asked his friend Herbert Jhering – one of the best-known German film and theater critics – to work with him on a film prologue for *Kuhle Wampe*. The film was thus re-released – accompanied by Jherring’s short, spoken introduction – on February 26, 1958.
Following its re-release, the film was often broadcast on East German television. It was also included in the State Film Archive’s distribution catalog for film clubs and appeared repeatedly in the program of the Camera Cinema in Berlin, which was owned by the East German State Film Archive.

Wolfgang Klaue was the director of the East German State Film Archive from 1969 to 1990, and the director of the DEFA Foundation from 1999 to 2003.  

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