

OFFICIAL DECISION STATEMENT ON BERLIN AROUND THE CORNER (1966)



This text is a translation of the official deciding statement written by Dr. Franz Jahrow, who used to work with the Division Film Production at the GDR Ministry of Culture's Central Administration for Film (HV Film). The original document is archived at the German Federal Archive (BArch Berlin, DR 1/4559). The document was first published in *Film und Fernsehen*, issue 1+2, 1996. 30-31.

Editor's Note: The translator followed the use of quotation marks in the original document. Quotation marks in written German are also used to mark a passage of a sentence that is used in an ironic way. The translator also followed the original line breaks.

Division of Film Production

Berlin, September 29, 1966

Dr. Ja/My

Decision Statement on *Berlin around the Corner*

The Central Administration of Film (HV Film) at the Ministry of Culture agrees with the opinion of the DEFA Studio for Feature Films that the movie *Berlin around the Corner* should not be submitted for state approval.

This movie can clearly be classified as one of the works that needed to be subjected to criticism and written off due to an anti-socialist, adverse stance. It must be noted that of all the works, this movie adopts these critical positions the most clearly.

The movie implies from beginning to end that a generational conflict exists in our republic that cannot be resolved.

Young workers, whose main hero is Olaf, are depicted in this movie as being in opposition to an older generation that is taking advantage of the young people and won't tolerate them championing their own ideas. The older generation arbitrarily praises or admonishes the young workers out of a personal interest, etc.

Olaf's youth brigade is dissolved by the representatives of the older generation because it openly opposes the older workers, who are secretly defrauding the factory, and does not agree with being underpaid for equal work performance. This is the point of departure for Olaf's and his friends' conflicts in the factory. One by one, the young people are confronted by the editor of the factory newspaper, the factory union's head, the foreman, and by workers during a staff meeting. At no point are the young people able to assert themselves with their justified views. Their actions are not valued. As a result (that is how the movie puts it), Olaf's friend ends up politically on the wrong path when he scrawls a fascist slogan on the bathroom wall, but then he doesn't have the courage to tell his friend (Olaf) the truth.

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This mode of behavior (which was blamed on the older generation) leads to an antagonistic deterioration of the "generational conflict"—right up to the scene where Olaf strikes the editor of the factory newspaper, an old comrade. The configuration of this "conflict" and also of the "solution" immediately following it (the discussion between Olaf and the comrade) is a message directed against the reality of our social relationships.

The basic message of the main conflict described above is intensified through an abundance of sub-plots and sub-scenes and is declared to be a general phenomenon in our republic. This is expressed in the behavior of the tenants towards the young guys; in the lack of understanding of a mother towards her child, who got involved in some sexual games with another underaged youth (the mother is a state prosecutor!); in the relationship between the ABV community policeman and the young guys (the ABV acts in an opportunistic way in regard to the generational "conflict" because he uses the youths for his personal purposes); in the relationship between the head chef and Olaf's girlfriend; in the behavior of the ticket seller and the manager of a dance hall toward Olaf and his friend; in the relationship between Olaf's girlfriend and her husband (who is seen as one of the "older generation"); in the intentions of a film director, who pursues Olaf's girlfriend; in the strange relationship between the old skilled worker and his own son; and in many other scenes.

The final scene of the movie finally and definitely expresses that this "generational conflict" is the "general rule."

This assessment of our life and the relationship between older and younger people is utterly untruthful. It cannot be offset in the film by the fact that now and then contact is temporarily made between the representatives of the "two generations" and only in unusual situations. These contacts are spontaneous and in no way formative.

Likewise, one must level sharp criticism at the moral lessons of the movie. The romantic relationships between young people and between younger and older people have been reduced to sexual gratification, shown in a tacitly naturalistic narrative style declared as "documentary style." This is obvious in the scene with the minors in the rooftop garden, of the "hasty" love affair between Olaf's friend and a girl from the dance hall, which is only interrupted by the appearance of the husband. But it also becomes obvious in the relationship between Olaf and his girlfriend, which is portrayed in a way that Olaf's persistent wooing and the girl's resistance become concentrated exclusively in the "climax" of the sexual act.

There is not a single scene in which this decidedly capitalist "morality" is reversed or at least critically evaluated through its opposite, the love relationship of socialist human beings. Erotic lust is advocated as something "natural" and "mundane."

Problems of our work, of socialist development, are portrayed mainly through the life of the old toolmaker and are distorted in the same way as was indicated in the previous points. This old skilled worker wastes his strength on his constant fight against sloppiness, subjective deficiencies in materials procurement, and the lack of work organization.

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As an individual he fights against these “phenomena of our reality” until he is worn out and dies.

The editor of the factory newspaper is also a “victim” of these “conditions.” He fights with passion in the factory for his socialist ideas, but he mainly encounters a lack of understanding and in some cases resistance (e.g. the staff meeting). Outside of the factory he is portrayed as a lonely, isolated individual.

Stupidity and arrogance, especially in representatives of the older generation, capitalist immorality, individualism, a lack of collective relations, superficiality of feelings, anarchism in work, the incompetence of those responsible, egoism (of the tenants and Olaf’s girlfriend’s husband), greed, dishonesty, fraud, duplicity, and similar “human characteristics” dominate in this movie, which claims to be a reflection of our socialist reality. All this is pegged as being “natural” and “legitimate.” Therein lies the mendacious and anti-socialist message of this movie.

The movie projects an attitude toward life that is contrary to the socialist one. The image of the person of our time and our society is degraded. The fundamental attitude of this movie is pessimistic and subjective, although some extrinsic attributes are supposed to give this movie a touch of objectivism and optimism every now and again. The movie abstains from taking sides. Although almost every shot describes conditions worthy of criticism, the movie never moves to a criticism of these conditions, let alone espouses progressive and socialist statements.

Also, the general outer surroundings in the background of this movie do not correspond to our reality. Although some new buildings are shown in the movie, the environment is depicted as unfriendly and dreary.

The makers of the film have demonstrated with this kind of work that they have succumbed to serious artistic-ideological fallacies and phony ideological positions. They did not understand the criticism of the 11th Plenum. The mistaken positions already clearly developed in the script were not toned down by the director but were even intensified. The generous opportunities to change the movie conceptually, which the studio administration had offered (according to the criticism of the 11th Plenum), were never utilized. This shows that the makers of the film remained unrelenting all the way to the end towards the criticism that was made even of their own film, and which they should have understood at the latest during the controversy about the movie *Trace of Stones*.

original signature

Dr. Jahrow

Translated by Sigrít Schütz.