

Title: The Last “Bourgeois” or the First Soviet Comic? Igor' Il'inskii in Iakov Protazanov’s Silent Comedies

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Iakov Protazanov was one of the most prominent film directors in the 1920s and the early 1930s whose films had regular success at the box office while not being favored by the Soviet government or by many Soviet critics for his “bourgeois” tendencies. After his return to Russia from Europe in 1923, Protazanov was invited by the film studio Mezhrabpom-Rus' that during this period represented the shift from the pre-revolutionary Russian cinema to Soviet cinema. Among the most successful of Protazanov’s films in the 1920s and the 1930s were his comedies with the theatrical actor, Igor' Il'inskii.

This research focuses on Protazanov’s silent comedies between 1925 and 1930 with Il'inskii as a case study in order to explain whether Protazanov’s first films upon his return from Europe can be positioned thematically, visually, and stylistically in pre-revolutionary cinema, or whether they can serve as an example of new “Soviet” comedies. These films include his comedies *The Tailor from Torzhok* (1925), *The Three Million’s Trial* (1926), and *Saint Jorgen’s Day* (1930). In this study, the figure of Il'inskii is especially important insofar as his cinematic characters in Protazanov’s silent comedies gradually transformed into recognizable and popular Soviet film icons for the next few decades of Russian film comedy, for instance, in such films as Grigorii Aleksandrov’s *Volga-Volga* (1938), and El'dar Riazanov’s *The Carnival Night* (1956). This paper will analyze the role of the characters performed by Il'inskii in Protazanov’s films and will attempt to answer the question whether his characters represent the “Sovietness” on the screen or serve as the remnants of the “bourgeois” past. The research will include not only the visual analysis of Protazanov’s films but also a brief overview of the reaction to Il'inskii’s comic characters among film critics and public opinion published in newspapers and film journals of that time.