

“Anna Müller-Lincke Runs for Office” (1919)

Abstract

This short 1919 comedy focused on the conflicts that emerged when three family members decide to compete for a seat in the National Assembly from different parties, but the film’s central aim was to educate the electorate, not simply entertain viewers. It opens with a scene in which the protagonist Amanda Himmelfahrt declares her candidacy on the ticket of the fictional and clearly left-leaning party called the “Association of Radical Women and Maidens.” At the same time, and unbeknownst to Himmelfahrt, her conservative brother Piesecke also seeks a party endorsement to run, albeit on the opposite side of the political spectrum, with the equally made-up “Imperialist Party.” Both of them pressure young Erna, Piesecke’s daughter and Himmelfahrt’s niece, to vote for them out of familial loyalty. Just to further complicate matters, Erna’s fiancé Hans Stark has *also* resolved to stand for election, he for the “Republican Party.” Unlike Himmelfahrt and Piesecke, however, Stark respects Erna’s independence and simply counsels her to vote for the party whose program best reflects her own values and positions. Stark’s principled advice serves as the film’s moral center, and he wins the election, after overcoming the amateurish attempts by Himmelfahrt and Piesecke to not only sway Erna, but also to (unsuccessfully) stuff the ballot box. Although the film used imaginary names for the three candidates’ parties and thereby gestured to non-partisanship, its sympathies clearly lay with the centrist parties of the “Weimar Coalition” that ultimately won the vast majority of the Assembly’s seats. The Republican Party and Stark, whose last name means “strong” in German, clearly represented the bright future of the new republic, while Piesecke and Himmelfahrt stood, respectively, for the right and left political extremes. The film’s concluding message that “The right to vote is the duty to vote!” hinted at the concern held by many supporters of the new republic that German women might not avail themselves of their newly acquired right to vote. In the event, that concern proved misplaced, as 82% of eligible women took part in the election to the National Assembly—turning out in higher percentages than the men—and they elected the first 37 women ever to serve in a German legislative body.

A government-funded entity produced this film, the *Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst* (RfH), which aimed here at informing German citizens, explaining the voting process, and mobilizing voter turnout for the January 19, 1919, elections to Germany’s National Assembly. One scene showed Piesecke measuring and cutting out his own ballot, which was a practice in the first elections during the Weimar Republic, when the parties themselves had to supply their voters with ballots to cast. One of the very next scenes, in fact, shows party representatives handing out ballots to voters just outside the election locale. The German state finally took responsibility for providing general ballots to voters in 1924. In the film, too, only men can be seen tallying the ballots. Perhaps surprisingly, the title, *Anna Müller-Lincke kandidiert* [Anna Müller-Lincke Runs for Office], took its name from that of the starring actress who played the film’s protagonist, rather than from the protagonist herself, Amanda Himmelfahrt. The RfH likely wished to capitalize on the public recognition that Müller-Lincke, a renowned performer whom fans dubbed the “queen of humor,” enjoyed at the time, as a means of drawing larger audiences to the movie and exposing them to its message.

Source

Intertitles:

Characters:

Pensioner Piesecke - Herbert Paulmüller

Erna, his daughter – Lissy Schütz
Amanda Himmelfahrt, rich aunt – Anna Müller-Lincke
Hans Stark, newspaper editor and Erna's fiancée – Rudolf Döll

Amanda Himmelfahrt, chairwoman of the association of radical women and maidens

[Shot of a middle-aged woman knitting and reading the newspaper]:

“[...] 6 deputies are to be elected to the National Assembly. The parties shall submit their nominations (list of candidates) to the undersigned without delay. The nominations must be signed by at least 100 voters. The elections commissioner.”

[She decides to run. Piesecke is shown at the breakfast table reading the same article.]

“I'll have my *Stammtisch* nominate me as a candidate for the Imperialist Party.”

[He leaves the house. Erna opens a letter she just received]:

“Dear niece! You must come to the association of radical women and maidens today. I will be speaking there. You will be in for a surprise! Your aunt Amanda.”

Amanda Himmelfahrt has the floor!

Himmelfahrt: "Down with men! We don't need them!"

[Her audience agrees.]

Pensioner Piesecke has the floor.

[Piesecke gives a speech to his friends at the pub (*Stammtisch*).]

“Our friend Piesecke must be nominated as a candidate for the Imperialist Party!”

[Himmelfahrt has finished her speech and is put forward as a candidate. Erna hands her the newspaper with the report that editor Hans Stark has been put forward as a republican candidate. Himmelfahrt is annoyed.]

Erna: "But auntie, I have to vote for my future husband!"

Himmelfahrt: "Future husband, nonsense! You must vote for me!!"

[Piesecke is practicing a speech in the living room. Erna was standing behind him unnoticed and starts laughing.]

Piesecke: "Don't laugh, you undutiful child! You're looking at the candidate for the Imperialist Party!"

[Erna tells him about Himmelfahrt's candidacy.]

Piesecke: "Aunt Amanda?! Your vote belongs to me, your father!"

[Erna is standing in front of the entrance to the newspaper *Revolution*. As she enters, Hans Stark is saying goodbye to two gentlemen. He kisses Erna's hand.]

Erna: "But Hans, the stenotypist!"

[Hans asks the stenotypist to leave, they kiss. Erna tells him about her predicament.]

Erna: “Aunt Amanda wants my vote, Father wants me to vote for him – I don't know what to do!”

Hans: “Before you go to the polls, you have to look at the parties' programs, and whichever party you trust, you vote for!”

Election day.

[Piesecke handles a folding rule and scissors.]

“I will measure my ballot myself: white paper, 9 x 12 cm!”

[At the polling station. Himmelfahrt is arguing with a poll worker.]

Poll worker: “Only the officially stamped ballot envelopes may be used to submit your ballot!”

[She throws out her own envelopes and enters the polling booth.]

“Six votes are better than one – just to be on the safe side!”

[Both Himmelfahrt and Piesecke try to cast several votes. Erna enters the polling station.]

Poll worker: "Your ID?"

[Erna shows her ID and votes. At 8 pm the polls close.]

"The polls are closed! Voters who have not yet voted cannot vote anymore!"

[Piesecke comes home.]

"I'm so nervous! I wish the election results were in already!"

Counting the votes.

"Invalid, because the names on the slips of paper are taken from two different nominations!"

"Invalid because of a written comment!"

"Only one vote is counted for the six identical votes!"

[In front of the polling station, people are looking at a board with the election results. Hans Stark received the most votes; neither Himmelfahrt nor Piesecke are on the list. Himmelfahrt and Piesecke meet again on the street corner.]

"Did you make it?"

[Both sigh]

"Lost."

[She takes his arm.]

"Shared disappointment."

[They see Hans Stark and Erna on a pedestal being celebrated and join the crowd. Erna addresses the crowd:]

Erna: "Free self-determination for all!"

"The right to vote -- is the duty to vote!"

Source: *Anna Müller-Lincke kandidiert*, dir. Werner Sinn, Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst, 1919.

Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 3223.

<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/3223/629614>

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Recommended Citation: "Anna Müller-Lincke Runs for Office" (1919), published in: German History in Documents and Images,

<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/weimar-germany-1918-1933/ghdi:video-5210>> [March 16, 2026].