

Der Weg einer Proletarierin [The Journey of a Proletarian Woman] (1929)

Abstract

From the mid-1920s onwards, various factions of the German workers' movement began experimenting with the new medium of film to communicate their political messages. Under the grandiose slogan "Conquer the film!," the communist media entrepreneur Willi Münzenberg began calling in 1925 for an expansion and professionalization of revolutionary film production. In response, a number of leftwing filmmakers turned their critical lenses on the social problems of the Weimar Republic, from poverty to the uncertainties of the labor market. Their films also sought, in the spirit of political agitation, to highlight the positive political power of a mobilized and united working class.

These clips from the 1929 film *Der Weg einer Proletarierin* [The Journey of a Proletarian Woman], the debut directorial effort by Maria Margarethe Harder (1898–1936), blend both dramatized and documentary scenes. In addition to directing the film, Harder had also, in that same year, taken over the management of its production company, the Film- und Lichtbilddienst (FiuLi), founded by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1926 to create movies promoting its point of view. In concise, episodic form, the film follows the life of Martha (played by Soviet actress Vera Baranovskaya), a pregnant farm worker who moves to the big city, becomes an industrial worker, and joins the labor movement. Working hard to make a living as a single mother, she raises her daughter Hanne in the spirit of Marxism. The film contrasts the precarious living conditions of the industrial proletariat with those of the more affluent social classes. At the same time, it highlights what the workers' movement has already achieved through its struggle—especially for mothers like Martha—such as daycare centers, health clinics, subsidized housing, and financial support.

Source

Intertitles:

Martha: 25 pfennigs hourly wage. How could I survive on that with a child?

Karl: Today, the expectant mother is no longer without rights! She receives maternity leave, breastfeeding allowance, medication, remedies and free medical treatment. You are no longer alone. The workers' movement is also fighting for you!

Martha: Yes, if I could give birth to my child like that! But here?!

[She decides to leave for Berlin and walks to the train station in Thyrow.]

Years have passed. The farmhand has become a factory worker and a fighter.

[Shots of Potsdamer Platz and the factory gates]

While the mothers are at work, the children are looked after at a childcare facility.

[Martha picks up her daughter from childcare, they walk home.]

Daughter: Mother, does everyone have to live in a basement?

Martha: Things will be different one day. Many men and women are fighting for a better world. Later on, you will understand it better.

[Shows her portraits of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Marx]

They and others have fought for us their entire lives.

Others continue to fight!

[footage of worker's demonstrations]

[Martha takes her daughter on a walk to a new subsidized housing development]

Martha: We all want to live such bright surroundings one day!

We come from misery and darkness!

[Overhead shot of tenement blocks]

The future shines brightly from the dark past!

But you shall be free!

Source: *Der Weg einer Proletarierin*, dir. Marie Harder, Film- und Lichtbilddienst, 1929. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 82609 <https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/82609/697516>

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