

The Tragedy of a Strike (1911)

Abstract

Although Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws of 1878 were not extended after 1890, the struggle for better working conditions and wages continued long after Bismarck. In the decades that followed, there were repeated strikes in industrial enterprises, especially in mining, which was vital to Germany's manufacturing (supplying iron ore) and energy supply (supplying coal). This short film, *Tragödie eines Streikes* [Tragedy of a Strike], from 1911 employs the techniques of melodrama to convey its reactionary message against the strike as a tool of social struggle. The father of a working-class family enthusiastically joins a strike at the power plant for higher wages: the father (Robert Garrison) seems a caricature of a social democrat with a wild moustache, a worker's cap and a Russian worker's smock, and he and the other workers are portrayed as highly excitable and overly emotional. The strikers picket the power plant, forcing it to cease operations. Yet the protagonist's child suddenly falls seriously ill and has to be taken to hospital for surgery. As the power goes out due to the strike and his child is in danger of dying, his wife (played by Henny Porten, one of the most successful actresses of German silent film) convinces him to end the strike. The character of the working-class woman who disapproves of the strike from the outset and wants to maintain the existing order serves here as a vehicle for the message that class struggle can only bring disaster. Before the outbreak of the First World War, director Adolf Gärtner filmed several such moralizing melodramas for Oskar Messter's production company. The theme of overly emotional and excitable workers going on strike, only to cause harm to their own children, would be repeated in many films, most notably Fritz Lang's sci-fi masterpiece *Metropolis* sixteen years later.

Source

/Colleagues!

Attend the meeting taking place tonight at 8 o'clock at Krüger's restaurant. Agenda: Discussion about wage increases.

The shop stewards.

(signed) Felden, foreman.

/"Strike."

/Light and electrical power are indispensable.

/"Where is the night shift?"

/"Let me in, I have to get things back up and running!"

Source: *Tragödie eines Streikes*, dir. Adolf Gärtner, 1911. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv

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