

cusations. She leaves the room abruptly and therefore sets the stage for the next act, a search for her in the school that takes the various parents to different areas of the school, including the gym and the swimming pool.

We witness the tensions that exist between Marina and Patrick trying to integrate into the East-German society in Dresden after moving from Cologne. Marina wants to go back (*Wir hauen hier ab*). She wants to live among people who are “like her” and she is not willing to sacrifice their child to her husband’s job opportunity, while Patrick points to the reality and necessity of making a living. In the meantime, Jessica discovers that her husband has had an affair. When she calls home, she finds out that he is not taking care of the children as promised. When her cell phone falls into the pool, it seems to reflect more than a comical accident. Finally, it is revealed that Wolf and Katja had an affair while Wolf was still married. His ongoing obsession with her becomes clear when he makes a bizarre request of her. What should be a chance to make the audience more sympathetic to the complex lives of the parents instead becomes a classic case of *Selbstzerfleischung*, or self-mutilation, that ends with a bloody lip and a broken show case.

When Mrs. Müller returns, we enter act three of this didactic comedy. Through a rather simplistic reading error by the parents and some other unexpected turns, the teacher emerges as the moral victor, as someone whose steadfast pedagogical principles outshine the parental perspectives. The majority of the parents are exposed as only interested in good grades that will assure that their child will make the transition to the Gymnasium. Conversely, they have very little awareness or concern about the actual behavior and educational progress of their children.

The resolution of the story demonstrates that teachers cannot and should not be held responsible for everything and rehabilitates the honor of the teaching profession. It also serves as a rebuke to parents who see teachers only as *Steigbügelhalter* or *Erfüllungsgehilfen* for the parent’s own ill-conceived aspirations. After the unquestioned pedagogical authoritarianism of the fifties and sixties and the subsequent excesses in parental involvement and pressure tactics in recent decades, it seems high time to establish an effective balance of power in the relationship of parents and teachers.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Frau Müller muss weg!

By Sönke Wortmann

October 14, 2016

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

Support provided in part by the
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



Frau Müller muss weg!



Director: Sönke Wortmann
Producer: Tom Spieß / Oliver Berben
Screenplay: Oliver Zigenbalg / Lutz Hübner
Sarah Nemitz
Music: Martin Todsharow
Camera: Tom Fährmann
Editor: Martin Wolf
Year: 2015
Length: 88 Minutes
Cast: Gabriela Maria Schmeide (Frau Müller)
Justus von Dohnanyi (Wolf Heider)
Anke Engelke (Jessica Höfel)
Ken Duken (Patrick Jeskow)
Alwara Höfels (Katja Grabowski)
Mina Tander (Marina Jeskow)
Rainer Galke (Hausmeister)
Commentary: Karl Moehlmann

Klassenkampf

In the nineteen fifties and sixties, there was a simple explanation for bad grades in school: the student was lazy. Questioning the judgment of the teacher was unheard of. Physical punishment or any other disciplinary action by the school was repeated by the parents. This included acceptance of the school's decision to divide the student population into those who would go to the *Gymnasium* after 4th grade and therefore have the chance for a higher education at the university level and those who would be sent to the *Realschule* or *Hauptschule* for careers in non-academic fields.

The injustice and shortcomings of this early and often arbitrary selective system gave fuel to the educational reforms of the late sixties and early seventies. These reforms included the introduction of later selections in the *Orientierungsstufe* in 5th and 6th grade, with integrated *Gesamtschulen* in many states and more openness and parental involvement in general.

Fifty years later, we seem to be faced with incredible excesses regarding the rights and involvement of the parents. In 2014, Ralf Hermann, the principal of the Schillerschule in Bad Cannstatt near Stuttgart, created a stir in all of Germany when he sent a so-called *Brandbrief* to the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* outlining how parents had become *helicopter-parents*. Such parents hover over every aspect of the school lives of their children and turn into

attack drones when they disagree with grades or other important assessments by teachers or the school. There is a near-obsessive focus on the one decision that is crucial for their child's future career: the jump to the *Gymnasium* after 4th grade in elementary school.

It is not uncommon today to involve lawyers when parents think their children are not treated justly and deserve to get more points or better grades. In his 2008 book *Paranoid Parenting*, the British sociologist Frank Furedi spoke of a growing insecurity among parents. Furedi emphasizes just how strongly parents are driven by the fear that their child could miss the path to success and lose out in our competitive *Leistungsgesellschaft*.

It is in this atmosphere that Sönke Wortmann decided to adapt Lutz Hübner's theater play with the same name into the school-comedy *Frau Müller muss weg*. It is the story of how worried helicopter parents of elementary students in Dresden arm themselves to attack and remove the *Klassenlehrerin* Frau Müller, whom they blame for the falling grades of their children.

Wer zuletzt lacht...

The situation in the 4th grade of the Juri Gagarin Elementary School seems clear. Grades are falling dramatically, the atmosphere in the class is not conducive to learning, and thus, the desired transition to the *Gymnasium* is threatened. There is unrest among the students, and the *Klassenlehrerin* Frau Müller seems in over her head, unable to control the students and improve the situation. She is also suspected of being psychologically unstable since it has been reported that she is in therapy.

All the parents sign a petition to remove her. Five of them as representatives come to the school on a Saturday to meet with Frau Müller. The committee includes the self-appointed leader and typical helicopter-parent Jessica, who subordinates everything to the success of her child; the Yuppie-couple Patrick and Marina, who have moved to Dresden from Cologne and as *Wessies* add the East-West-conflict to the situation; the unemployed *Ossie* Wolf who has high expectations of his daughter and drags her from one Math-Olympiad to another; and finally the sympathetic Katja who at first seems open minded but soon reveals more about her difficult relationship to her *Klassenprimus* son Fritz.

When Frau Müller is faced with this coup-attempt, she fights back and complains about the spoiled and maladjusted students. She points out that one student, Lucas, is a clear case of attention deficit disorder while another, Laura, falsifies the signature of her mother for various excuses, and that Janine is unable to do simple math problems in class because her father, Wolf Heider, always does them for her. Mrs. Müller tells the parents to look at their own problems first before they make such unfair ac-