

reaucratic and inconspicuous contains in effect a painful and ugly reality that many renters even in rent controlled German cities have to deal with and the long, bitter and sometimes violent struggle of renters for their rights.

The rents are rising in most German cities. The top rate in Munich, for example, is said to be 25 Euro per sqm. That means if you have a moderate size apartment with two bedrooms and about 120sqm, the rent would be 3000 Euro per month, a rate that few renters can afford. Landlords want to profit from this trend, but often are limited by law how much they can raise their rent and how they can cancel their contracts. One possible solution is to "encourage" renters to terminate their contracts and move. Some actual tactics of this form of *Entmietung* of properties in Munich included:

1. A landlord turned off the water, heat and/or electricity, claiming that extensive renovation work lead to these interruptions. Renters had to get water in buckets from people in the neighborhood and frequent other people's bathrooms.
2. Landlords renovate their properties with new heaters, new roofs, modern windows, and expensive solar energy systems and then reclaim their costs by raising the rents as much as the city ordinance allows (up to 11% in Munich).
3. Many property owners cover the facades of their buildings with scaffolds and dark tarps. There is little progress in the renovation and the renters have to live in darkened apartments for a long time because their windows are covered.

To further escalate the situation and increase the discomfort of renters, smashing windows and slashing tires are also not unheard of. And when criminal clans are involved, the level of violence increases dramatically.

*"Diese Typen, die werfen keine Steine in die Fenster, die stechen auch keine Reifen, die sind anders drauf, eine ganz andere Liga."*

What makes this movie so memorable is that based on a difficult - but, in the end, positive - father-son relationship, it puts the focus on the ugly side of gentrification in German cities and paints a realistic picture of *großstädtischer Wohnraumproblematik* and related criminal activities. The ultimate burden though of this situation clearly rests on the shoulders of big city governments to provide enough affordable apartments and protect the rights of renters. Whether they have the strength to prevail against those who want to profit from the current situation remains to be seen.

## THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

### *Friday Film Fest Series*



## Atlas

Directed by David Nawrath

February 19, 2021

● 6:30 PM ●

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of Pennsylvania

611 Spring Garden St.

Philadelphia, PA 19123

Support provided in part by the  
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



## Atlas (2018)

**Director:** David Nawrath  
**Screenplay:** David Nawrath  
Paul Salisbury  
**Producers:** Britta Knöller  
Hans-Christian Schmid  
**Camera:** Tobias von dem Borne  
**Music:** Enis Rothhoff  
**Editing:** Stefan Oliveira-Pita  
**Length:** 99 Minutes  
**Cast:** **Rainer Bock** as Walter Scholl  
**Albrecht Schuch** as Jan Haller  
**Roman Kanonik** as Moussa Hadi  
**Thorten Merten** as Alfred Hoppe  
**Uwe Preuss** as Roland Grone  
**Nina Gummich** as Julia  
**Commentary:** Karl Moehlmann



### Atlas

“Jeder lädt sich seine Last selber auf. Jeder muss sie auch selbst tragen.”



Walter Scholl, impressively played by Rainer Bock, is a 60-year-old furniture carrier working for a moving company in Frankfurt. Despite his advanced age, he is the strongest of the carriers in the company, which he illustrates by carrying a whole closet on his back by himself as seen in this screenshot. Appropriately he dons a tattoo of Atlas on his arm, the titan of ancient mythology who was condemned to stand at the western edge of the Earth and hold up the celestial heavens on his shoulders. What could be a sign of strength and burden, Walter performs his duties with remarkable strength and resilience without talking too much or commenting on colleagues and conflicts. Once he arrives home, we realize how much he suffers from this back-breaking work. After taking his corset/belt off and taking pain relieving pills, he lays on the flat cold tiles of his kitchen to rest and recuperate. He works together with Alfred Hoppe, who is a court bailiff and handles the judicial aspects of removals, complaints and lawsuits, because his boss, Roland Grone, specializes in court ordered evictions. And it is during one of those attempts to remove a renter from his apartment that Walter's life changes dramatically. He recognizes that the family his company wants to evict is the family of his son

Jan, whom Walter left when the son was still a child. Walter was running away from the police at that time and had not seen his son in decades. His son, living with his wife and son Karl in the apartment, is determined to fight the eviction. He films the first encounter with the packers and presents a court notice that puts a stay on the eviction and upholds his rights as a renter. It would have been possible to control and mitigate the situation had it not been for a new member of the company. His name is Moussa Hadi and he is a member of the so called Afsari criminal clan of Arabs who do not just trust the legal process of *Zwangsräumung* but use means of violence to escalate the evictions of renters, known as *Entmietung*. At this point, the son doesn't know who Walter is. Even as Walter helps him one night to confront two attackers who smash the windows of his taxi, Jan doesn't recognize his father. As Walter tries to protect his son and his family from the rising violence, he increasingly gets in conflict with his professional obligations and with the "massive" Moussa and his criminal clan. The combination of being rather *wortkarg*/quiet and possessing "titanic" strength ultimately works in his favor and helps him to "overcome" Moussa's out of control behavior. He then uses the trust he has established with his grandson in a fake kidnapping scheme to deescalate the eviction drama. As Walter absorbs the *Blutrache* of the criminal clan, the Atlas tattoo on Walter's arm serves as symbol of recognition with his son. Showing the tattoo to his son so he can recognize him and then surviving the attack by the brutal clan serves as a reminder that the mythological Atlas did not only possess titanic strength, but also had to endure punishment and pain by being eternally condemned to carry the *Himmelsgewölbe* on his shoulders. For Walter it is the burden of leaving and abandoning his son when he was still a child and being completely absent when he grew up. It is a burden of guilt and lack of responsibility as a father that motivate him to risk his life for his son and his family. The fact that he loses his freedom but gains his family may shift the burden but relieves any feeling of eternal *Verantwortungslosigkeit* as a father, thus making him the central figure of a positive ethical and personal development.



### Entmietung

“Die (Kurden oder Araber) machen die ganz harten Geschäfte. Die geben Roland (Besitzer der Speditionsfirma) ihr dreckiges Geld, der kauft davon billig ein Haus, **entmietet es** und verkauft's fürs Dreifache. Die Araber bekommen 'nen schönen Haufen sauberes Geld wieder.”

The combination of the inseparable prefix “ent-” and the verb “mieten” has created a fairly new word in the German language. What sounds rather bu-