

Friedrich Eichhorn to Adolf Heinrich von Arnim (June 7, 1844)

Abstract

This July 7, 1844, letter from Prussian Cultural Minister Friedrich Eichhorn (1779–1856) to Prussian Interior Minister Adolf Heinrich von Arnim (1803–1868) makes clear that Eichhorn shared Metternich's concerns about the liberalizing efforts of intellectuals, especially those in the Prussian Rhineland. In order to disseminate conservative government views more effectively, Eichhorn proposed founding a subsidized newspaper.

Source

In your letter of May 22, Your Excellency expressed the wish that I might take over the execution of the Cabinet Order of April 26, whereby Professor Bercht in Frankfurt was appointed Associate Professor of Education at the University of Bonn and granted a subsidy of 3,000 thalers for the publication of a new newspaper. I would be glad to fulfill this wish to the best of my ability, but without the support and cooperation of Your Excellency and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I will only be able to carry out this task incompletely. Therefore, by making this most humble request, I shall first of all undertake to describe the viewpoints that, in my opinion, the editors of the new newspaper have to consider under the present circumstances.

The need for greater scope for the expression of public opinion has been acknowledged by the expansion of freedom of the press. This fact, which can no longer be altered, is the angle from which the plan for the newspaper needs to be considered. It would, however, have been very desirable if, prior to the onset of expanded freedom of the press, consideration might have been given to the means for countering the anticipated attacks on the conservative principle with well-ordered and practiced defensive forces. We dare not conceal from ourselves that it is chiefly due to this lack of counteraction that this [conservative] principle has been steadily losing ground for three years. Today, the question is what position should a government paper take to have the prospect of checking further advances of a disruptive liberalism? The [liberal] ideas that are trying to break through into everyday life do not, in and of themselves, find any starting point in the real circumstances of societal conditions; thus far, Germany has not even been a ground in which they [these ideas] might hope to prosper once they leave the sphere of theory and try to shape life. In this respect, one might therefore—from the vantage point of state administration today, as so often in the past—tolerate them as the product of a merely philosophical view of life. Yet it is these ideas that have become current for a large number of capricious and passionate literati, which they digest—in part, with highly skilled sophistry and in the interest of their own hopes and livelihood—with a tendency toward profaning the concepts and orders on which social life actually rests. It cannot be denied that they have succeeded in this, and to a degree that is not entirely harmless, through merciless and uninhibited attacks on the existing edifice of social institutions and the persons supporting them. But this most dangerous side of their work is also, in my opinion, the one in which they can be most readily discredited by the skillful unmasking of their dishonesty and mendacity. If I am not mistaken in this, the new newspaper would have to avoid the field of theory as much as possible and leave the various systems that prance upon it to themselves; however, as soon as they venture into the arena of action—be it with critical sophistry or erroneous reporting—the paper would need to take steps against them with vast insight and composure. To this end, it seems to me, Professor Bercht is the right man. As far as success is concerned, I do not doubt for a moment that there are enough healthy forces in the nation that, given the current extent of the misuse of the press, are simply waiting for a worthy

mouthpiece with which they can put forth their ideas.

If the efforts of the party are stopped, and this is done in a way that boldly attacks all existing ideas in order to create an entry point for their [new] theories, then all other parties operating in troubled waters for their special, political, or ecclesiastical purposes and plans—and which are perhaps even more dangerous for the state than capricious literati with no visible means of support—will see the necessity for greater caution. I have confidence that Bercht will not only see through these parties and their ways, but that he also has enough tact to give them warning signs, from which they would have to shrink back timidly.

If Your Excellency agrees with this opinion, I will not be remiss in making the appropriate suggestions to Bercht. He will, however, only meet these expectations when he is equipped with the necessary material information. This shall require a certain path along which the same [necessary material] may regularly flow his way with tacit consent. For years, the Privy Councilor Eilers, employed as a senior civil servant in my ministry, has had a confidential relationship with Bercht and, through a twenty-year stay in the Rhine province, he has also had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the conditions in various spheres of life there. I therefore regard him as eminently suited to conduct the main correspondence with Bercht from here, and I would gladly give him this assignment, so long as he would not also be expected to draft articles. Since the matters belonging to Your Excellency's department will form an especially important part of the content of the new paper, I shall most humbly leave it to [your] discretion to set up the arrangement for delivering to Eilers, on a regular basis, the material that you wish to see treated in the manner suggested. Here it will be less important to submit comprehensive articles than to supply persuasive corrections, both of opinions and actual circumstances. Eilers only needs to make sure to avoid everything that might offend the feelings of the Rhinelanders, which is all the more desirable given that such offenses have given the [anti-government] parties the most favorable opportunities for infusing the people with prejudices against the government.

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