

Arnold Zweig, Reflections on the Revolution (Retrospective Account, 1947/48)

Abstract

In 1914, writer Arnold Zweig greeted the outbreak of war with enthusiasm. He did so because he believed not only in Germany's cultural and moral superiority, but also in a "cultural community" to which German Jews belonged as well. But his subsequent military service in a labor battalion (in Verdun, among other places) and in the press department of the Eastern High Command [*Ober-Ost*] had an extremely sobering effect and ultimately led Zweig to distance himself from German chauvinism. Zweig reacted with enthusiasm and hope to the Revolution of 1918/19, but he also feared the conservative reaction and, subsequently, the American influence on Germany.

Source

With what hopes we had returned from the war! Who could have been prepared for the advancing counterrevolution, which started at the beginning of 1919 with the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg and soon claimed the lives of Erzberger in 1921 and Rathenau in 1922, bourgeois democrats, and who could have been prepared for the roguery that called itself inflation? Was it worth it to try to change such a world with intellectual tools? Was there any point in writing at all? On the other hand, wasn't the written word, like the spoken one, urgently needed to counteract the constantly growing "reaction"? But in the whole German republic was there a single party to which one could subscribe or with which one could identify? And could one have foreseen that the postwar period would turn into such a frenzy of American jazz, fox-trot, and tango, as though it were necessary, on the graves of ten million victims, to celebrate the triumph of having stayed alive and of wanting to make a proper racket with rumbas and double basses, to say nothing of ecstatic Expressionist babble.

All of this made me beside myself with rage, it led me to frantic outbursts in speeches, conversations, sometimes also in articles. What outraged me the most was the repression of the war – the repression of defeat, as I thought at the time, because I saw this process as being limited to us, the defeated Central Powers.

Source: Arnold Zweig, *Freundschaft mit Freud. Ein Bericht*, Part I/II, 1947/48, 5th version, May 1962, typed manuscript, p. 51 f.; reprinted in *Arnold Zweig 1887–1968: Werk und Leben in Dokumenten und Bildern: mit unveröffentlichten Manuskripten und Briefen aus dem Nachlass*, edited by Georg Wenzel. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1978, pp. 103–04.

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