

A Propaganda Film for War Bonds: *Our Homeland's Trenches* (1916)

Abstract

War bonds were an important source of financing the war effort for Germany during the First World War. Each new war bond was accompanied not only by subscription appeals from the Reichsbank, but also by various forms of propaganda appealing to the patriotism of the population on the home front. This short silent film from 1916, *Our Homeland's Trenches*, tells a fictional story to encourage people to buy war bonds and support German troops on the front lines. Farmer Janssen tries to convince his brother-in-law, Kramer, to buy war bonds. To make his case, Janssen, a refugee from Germany's Eastern provinces, recounts his wartime experiences: He lost his farm, his wife, and his child in a Russian raid. Janssen admonishes the other villagers that without the support of all Germans, the troops at the front cannot protect the civilian population from the enemy. In the end, his story moves the entire village, so that they all buy war bonds. Even the children scrape together their small change. Produced by the Berlin-based Imperator-Film company, this propaganda film was likely commissioned or at least subsidized by the government. It is typical of the patriotic and propagandistic films German audiences were shown in movie theaters during the First World War. When the war began, films made in the countries of the Entente after August 1914 were banned. (In 1914, 90 percent of all films distributed internationally were made in France.) A general ban on almost all foreign films was issued in 1916. As the war dragged on and Germans on the home front grew increasingly war-weary, however, German commercial film production increasingly shifted away from stories of wartime heroism and patriotic messages and towards more entertaining fare.

Source

Intertitles:

Janssen wants to convince his brother-in-law, Kramer, to buy war bonds./

[Newspaper ad: Buy war bonds!]/

Janssen: "You must buy war bonds! Do not let those at the front down! - If you don't support the front, they cannot protect you! - The enemy will burn down your house and your farms! - Just listen to what happened to me!"/

"It was during harvest season! ...Our barns were blessed with a rich yield..."/

"The Russians are coming!"/

"Strong Russian forces are threatening our neighboring village!"/

"The Cossack raged brutally and indiscriminately! ...He did not spare women and children! ...But I will say no more."/

"Me, I was saved by our brave soldiers, but those dearest to me, my wife and child, lay dead on a bier."/

[Kramer remembers his son, who enlisted to fight in the war.]/

"You remind me with good reason, my son! - Janssen is right! - He who neglects his duty at home is a scoundrel!"/

This old grandmother, too, knows her duty!/
And the little ones brake the piggy bank for their country!/
Kramer: "Come on! Strengthen the trenches of our homeland! - Buy war bonds! Everyone can do it! - Everyone must do it!"/

"Yes, we learned from Janssen's fate! - We must strengthen the front! - Now we will all buy war bonds!"

Source: *Der Heimat Schützengraben*, Imperator Film, 1916. Deutsche Kinemathek - Museum für Film und Fernsehen. <https://www.europeana.eu/en/item/08617/1037479000000255039>

Deutsche Kinemathek

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