

# Suppression of Anti-War Sentiment (November 1915)

## Abstract

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During the first two years of the war, voices of opposition of every sort remained scattered and powerless. Popular support for the war extended deep into the labor movement and ensured that agitation against the war found little resonance. This document illustrates the powers afforded to the Deputy Commanding Generals to suppress dissent.

## Source

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During the last months, efforts to achieve peace and world brotherhood have repeatedly been noticed. They require the strictest supervision. To be sure, the supporters and promoters of this movement are for the most part people of little political influence. They remain limited in general to “pacifist” circles, which pursued fuzzy cosmopolitan ideals even before the war.

In view of the resolute patriotic attitude of the German people, it can hardly be expected that the movement will find its way into broad circles of the population and achieve critical importance. Tolerating it at the present time, however, will rightly provoke ill feeling and opposition in wide sectors, and it can in the end impede the determination to hold out. It will be difficult to understand why discussion of concrete, patriotic war aims is forbidden, while agitation on behalf of theoretically unclear, cosmopolitan visions of peace is allowed. All such visions and agitation must be kept away from our fighting troops in particular.

More objectionable than the domestic activity of German pacifists is their impact abroad. In the neutral countries as well as among our enemies, false impressions about Germany’s domestic strength will form. Every statement that can be interpreted as a sign of weakness or disunity is used by the enemy side, with obvious pleasure and satisfaction, to energize the will and hope of defeating Germany militarily. Through personal contacts and correspondence, the impact abroad of these German apostles of peace can also cause immediate harm without their being aware of it themselves. Their statements about the domestic political, economic, and military situation can give the enemy important information, and it is to be expected that enemy agents will take advantage of the pacifists’ wish to communicate. It seems particularly dangerous that the movement, which was originally more scholarly in appearance, has recently started to seek contacts with international socialist groups in all countries. Finally, such behavior by people who portray themselves abroad as representatives of German intellectual life is likely to diminish the respect for the German character and German diligence, which we have achieved as a nation in arms.

To be sure, many of the Germans who are active in this movement are inspired by a vague idealism, which is oblivious of the great occurrences of our times. Many of them may also feel the urge to achieve a certain international renown. Most will not realize that their behavior borders in many respects on treason because it is likely to strengthen our enemies at the cost of our own capacity to resist. However, legal action on the basis of §89 of the Penal Code is in most cases not to be recommended, because the proceedings that would result are likely to give undue public attention to this movement both internally and abroad. The detrimental effects in foreign countries would only be increased, while there is no guarantee of an effective judgment against the accused.

On the other hand, one must vigorously counteract all this activity. It is thus necessary to make unambiguously clear to the people who stand out in the peace movement in an undesirable way that

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their activity is dangerous, and to put this communication somehow in writing. Should they prove unwilling to listen to reason, they can be forbidden all further public activity on the basis of the Law of Siege. Should they defy such a ban, they will have made themselves liable to prosecution, even if an offence as defined in §89 of the Penal Code cannot be demonstrated. The necessary controls can be exercised by surveillance of the mails; by withholding their passports and forbidding them to cross the border, their activity abroad can be prevented.

Favorable references and discussions in the press of the efforts of the pacifists and their writings must be prevented. Attacks in the press on them are not desired either and would in the future become objectively unnecessary as well. The publication and distribution of pacifist writings and pamphlets may not be tolerated. Sending of these materials to foreign countries or to the front is to be prevented. Writings of this sort that arrive from abroad, as well as private letters whose purpose is to promote international pacifist goals, are to be confiscated.

A survey of activities of the peace movement that have become known to us is in the attachment.

Source: Geheimer Erlaß des preußischen Kriegsministeriums vom 7. November 1915 über verschärfte Maßnahmen zur Unterdrückung der bürgerlich-pazifistischen Antikriegsbewegung, Bundesarchiv Lichterfeld, Rep. 30, Berlin C, Polizeipräsidium, Tit. 95, Section 7, No. 15854; reprinted in Willibald Gutsche, *Herrschaftsmethoden des deutschen Imperialismus 1897/8 bis 1917*. East Berlin, 1977, pp. 243–45.

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