

The Reichstag's Peace Resolution (July 19, 1917)

Abstract

Discussions of Germany's aims during the war were wedded to visions of what the country's political institutions would look like after the war. In issues of domestic politics, the Catholic party had traditionally allied more easily with Conservatives than with the Progressives or the Socialists, where anti-clericalism ran deep. As doubts about the war grew, forces within the Catholic party migrated to the left. In the summer of 1917, the Catholic leader, Matthias Erzberger (1875–1921), persuaded a majority of the Catholics in the parliament to join with the Progressives and Majority Socialists in sponsoring a public resolution in favor of a compromise peace. In July 1917, over the protests of the chancellor and the Supreme Command, these parliamentary allies passed the so-called Peace Resolution. This was the most spectacular act of parliamentary defiance during the war and signaled a major rift in the domestic consensus that had given birth to the war.

Source

As it did on August 4, 1914, the word uttered from the throne still holds true for the German people at the threshold of the war's fourth year: "We seek no conquest." Germany resorted to arms in order to protect its freedom and independence, to defend its territorial integrity.

The Reichstag strives for a peace of understanding, for durable reconciliation among the peoples of the world. Territorial acquisitions achieved by force and violations of political, economic, or financial integrity are incompatible with such a peace.

The Reichstag furthermore rejects all plans that envisage economic exclusion or continuing enmity among nations after the war. The freedom of the seas must be guaranteed. Only economic peace will lay the groundwork for amicable coexistence among the peoples of the world.

The Reichstag will actively promote the creation of international legal organizations. As long, however, as enemy governments do not agree to such a peace, as long as they threaten Germany and its allies with territorial conquests and violations, the German people will stand together as one man, persevere unshakably, and fight on until its right and the right of its allies to life and free development is guaranteed.

United, the German people is unconquerable. In its determination, the Reichstag stands united with the men who are protecting the Fatherland in heroic combat. They can be certain of the never-ending gratitude of the entire nation.

Source: Friedensresolution des Reichstages vom 19. Juli 1917, *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstages*, XIII LP, II Sess., Anlagen, vol. 321, p. 1747; reprinted in Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*. 2 volumes. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961, Vol. 2, p. 471.

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