

The Socialists Support the War (August 4, 1914)

Abstract

In 1914, the Social Democratic Party decided to support the war. Ideologically, it justified the war as a fight against Russian reaction and autocracy. Socialist support for the war in the Reichstag earned the party greater political legitimacy and social acceptance. However, it also led the party's radical left to break from it and found the Independent Social Democratic Party and other leftist groups. Both the radical left and the right used the Social Democrats' support for the war as an argument against them in the Weimar Republic.

Source

On behalf of my parliamentary faction, I [Hugo Haase] would like to issue the following statement:

We are face to face with destiny. The consequences of imperialist policies, which ushered in the age of the arms race and intensified discord between the nations, are crashing over Europe like a tidal wave. The responsibility for this disaster lies with the supporters of these policies, which we reject. Social Democracy has done everything in its power to fight this disastrous development and has worked to the very last minute to uphold peace by organizing powerful demonstrations in all countries, especially in close cooperation with our French brothers. Our efforts have been in vain.

Now we face the inexorable fact of war. We are threatened by the terrors of enemy invasion. It is not for or against war we are deciding today; rather we must decide on the means necessary for the defense of our country. Now we must think of the millions of our fellow countrymen who are drawn into this disaster through no fault of their own. It is they who will suffer the most from the horrors of war. Our most heart-felt wishes go out to all those, irrespective of party, who have been called to arms. We also remember the mothers who must give up their sons, the women and children robbed of their providers. For them, fear for their loved ones is combined with the threat of hunger. They will soon be joined by tens of thousands of wounded and crippled soldiers. To help all of them, to improve their fate, to ease their inestimable suffering – this we consider our imperative.

A victory of Russian despotism, stained with the blood of the best among its own people, would put much – indeed, everything – at stake for our nation and its future development toward liberty. We must ward off this danger; we must protect the culture and independence of our own country. Thus, we are making good on what we have always emphasized: in the hour of danger, we are not deserting the Fatherland. In doing so, we feel that we are in accord with the International, which has always recognized every nation's right to national sovereignty and self-defense, just as we agree with it in condemning any war of aggression or conquest. We demand that, as soon as the aim of security has been achieved and our opponents are inclined to make peace, this war shall be brought to an end by a peace treaty that makes friendship with our neighbors possible. We demand this not only in the interest of international solidarity, for which we have always fought, but also in the interest of the German people. We hope that the cruel experience of suffering in this war will awaken in many millions of people the abhorrence of war and will win them over to the ideals of socialism and world peace.

With these principles in mind, we vote for the proposed war loans.

Source: Social Democratic Party Statement on the Outbreak of the War by Hugo Haase, Leader of the Parliamentary Faction (August 4, 1914), in *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*, XIII. LP., II. Sess., 1914, Bd. 306, pp. 8 ff; reprinted in Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*. 2 volumes. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961, volume 2, pp. 456–57.

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