

Wall texts

War and Propaganda 14/18

20 June until 2 November 2014

Mobilization

Propaganda with Long-Term Effects: The images of jubilant masses of people familiar from TV program and school books give a sense of the great feeling of euphoria in the German population at the start of the war. These pictures of the “Spirit of 1914”, however, were already the first act of propaganda. As of the end of July 1914, there were stricter censorship rules for the press and protest demonstrations were prohibited. In the days before the outbreak of the war, around 750,000 people throughout the German Empire took part in peace demonstrations. Although sections of the middle class were enthusiastic about the war, theirs was just one reaction among many. The happy scenes of August 1914 were later idealized and remained unquestioned. In this way, the propaganda of World War I was sustained in the collective memory for a long time.

“Enlist!” Recruitment in the British Empire: In August 1914 there was no conscription in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. War Minister Herbert Kitchener urgently needed to recruit volunteers for the army. In just over twelve months, 12.5 million posters were printed based on 164 designs. The motif of confident soldiers doing their “patriotic duty” was very popular. For the most part, the designs were catchy and conservative. Nevertheless, the upper and middle classes were alienated by the use of commercial picture posters for such a serious matter as the war. The public also took a dim view of the blackmailing motifs designed to instil the fear of losing face in men who stayed at home. Both the initial euphoria of the British for the war and the recruitment figures declined considerably. In January 1916 the government was compelled to introduce conscription.

Recruitment Overseas: The British Empire extended its efforts to recruit volunteers throughout its colonies and dominions. In Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt and South Africa, the posters appealed to people’s sense of obligation to the British crown. The campaigns worked with strong emotions, focusing on pride and fear. In particular, the demonization of the Germans as war criminals perpetrating atrocities against neutral states met with a strong response in the recruitment efforts overseas. The horrifying image of the monster with a spiked helmet was meant to mobilize people to protect their homeland. With the aid of this type of iconography, the image of the evil German had become firmly established worldwide by 1918.

Remember Belgium: The German invasion of neutral Belgium and the atrocities committed there were opportunity on a plate for the propaganda of the Entente. The fear of alleged snipers (“Franktireurs”) was the main justification for many of the attacks by German soldiers against civilians, of which there were 6,500 victims in Belgium and Northern France between August and October 1914. As we know today, the “Franktireurs” were a potent legend. The world was shocked, in particular, by the destruction of the Old City and the library of Leuven, acts which starkly contradicted the Germans’ own self-image as a highly developed, cultured nation. “Remember Belgium” became a byword for the atrocities committed by the German soldiers, who from then on were defamed by the Entente powers as “bloodthirsty Huns”.

Fact Propaganda: Due to the atrocities in Belgium, the German Empire was forced to go on the propaganda defensive at an early stage and had difficulty extricating itself from the situation. On 4 October 1914, 93 German intellectuals published an appeal “to the cultural world”, calling for support of the German position. The reactions from abroad were negative, however, and symptomatic of Germany’s failure in the battle for international leadership in opinion. This development culminated in May 1915 with the British government’s publication of the *Bryce Report* on German atrocities. The deliberately factual tone of the report lent it a character of objectivity. The *Bryce Report* was translated into more than thirty languages and

disseminated worldwide by the *British War Propaganda Bureau*. Some 41,000 copies went to the USA alone. A German counter-report released as a “White Paper” failed to elicit a response.

Demonization

Atrocity Propaganda: In 1917, US President Theodore Roosevelt described the significance of the Dutch artist Louis Raemaekers by saying that his drawings “represented the most powerful of the honourable contributions made by neutrals to the cause of civilization”. Raemaekers’s *War Cartoons* illustrated the reports on German atrocities with drastic images, and were disseminated internationally in the form of books and prints, in magazines, on postcards, and as collectible pictures in cigarette boxes. The caricatures became a central element of Allied propaganda; from 1915 onward Raemaekers worked for the *British War Propaganda Bureau*. In the German Empire the artist was considered an enemy of the state.

Decline in Morale: On 7 May 1915, a German submarine sank the British ocean liner *Lusitania* on the crossing from New York to Liverpool, the Germans claiming that there were illegal weapons consignments on board. Around 1,200 people died off the Irish coast. Occurring in the same month as the publication of the *Bryce Report*, the *Lusitania* disaster consolidated the international image of the German monster. In 1916 the situation was escalated by a derisive medal issued by the Germans about the “greed for money” of the British shipyard Cunard, which had sent the ship out despite the war at sea. Karl Goetz’s falsely dated medal (5 May) was copied in England as proof of a long-planned German attack, and distributed 300,000- fold. The conduct of the German admiralty is still the subject of international controversy today, although the ship actually was carrying munitions.

Birth of a “Martyr”: The British nurse Edith Cavell spent months in German occupied Brussels secretly helping Belgian, French and British prisoners to escape. On 12 October 1915 she was executed under German martial law. Even the interventions of international diplomats were unable to mitigate the unusual severity of the sentence against a woman. The image of Cavell as a “martyr” achieved enormous international resonance for the Entente propaganda until well after the end of the war. Her humility and her courage were regarded as exemplary, her fate was sensationalized and exploited in film. The image of the defenceless nurse in the hands of the German military became a popular motif of anti-German hate propaganda in Europe, South Africa and the U.S.

Participation

Nailings as Collective Events: Between 1915 and 1916, millions of people in the German Empire and Austro-Hungary took part in “nailings”. These were mass ceremonial events at which people symbolically drove iron, silver and gold nails into wooden war emblems. A particularly innovative feature of these donation campaigns was their participatory character. Anyone who paid for a nail could join in. This archaic community experience was meant to reinforce patriotism, morale and the willingness to endure on the home front. The events were framed by propagandistic speeches and patriotic music. The wooden figures usually represented historical German protector figures, whose defense functions were to be symbolically activated by the nailing.

Let’s play World War!: In response to popular demand, the international toy industry developed numerous war-related products in the first years of the war. The sale of these toys contributed to a militaristic education which paved the way for propaganda. In books and games, the enemy was stereotyped with negative characteristics. Classics such as “Struwwelpeter” (Shock-Headed Peter, 1845) modified to suit the war, and new creations such as the French children’s book “Bib et Bob” (1918) made use of cutesy protagonists to communicate the war in simple terms of good and evil. Children used dolls and war toys to play out the events, adopting the role and enemy images from the world of the grown-ups. This taught them patriotic values and encouraged an affirmative attitude towards the war.

Marketing Campaigns

Army of four Minute Men: In an age without radio, public speeches were an especially effective way of addressing the masses. In order to generate a positive attitude towards the controversial entry into the war, the American *Committee on Public Information* (CPI) created the Four Minute Men, a nationwide network of volunteer propaganda speakers. By the end of the war, more than 75,000 men and women had held more than 800,000 speeches, and are believed to have reached around 400 million people at cinemas, theatres and public rallies. The Four Minute Men came from a wide range of social groups and were trained for their work by rhetoric experts. The content of the four-minute speeches came from official CPI information sheets, which provided convincing arguments for subscription to war bonds or the purchase of donation stamps, but above all for recognizing the war as a struggle for freedom and democracy.

Economy of Scarcity: From 1914 onwards, increasing prices and decreasing private incomes tested the fortitude of the people on the home front. The British naval blockade and the collapse of production in the German Empire led to a difficult food supply situation. Consumption quotas, ersatz products and ration coupons for food staples were introduced. Public war kitchens and the *Kriegsernährungsamt* (War Food Office) founded in May 1916 did little to bring relief. Food riots and looting came about as a result. With the aid of patriotic appeals, state propaganda attempted to increase the people's willingness to make sacrifices. Collective renunciation was deemed a virtue. On the other hand, in conjunction with the appeals for donations and the "Liebesgabe" (charitable gift) campaigns, generosity was called for. Parcels from the homeland were to help strengthen the morale on the front.

Celebrities on the Home Front: Prominent personalities had great value for propaganda purposes. Because they enjoyed the sympathy of the masses, Hollywood film stars in particular were important multipliers for the government's opinion. Directly after the USA entered the war, numerous famous people put themselves at the service of the patriotic cause, advertising the Liberty Bonds or calling on men to enlist. Charles Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford – three superstars from the early days of cinema – appeared together as propaganda speakers and attracted tens of thousands of people in the cities.

Vivat Ribbons: Vivat ribbons were already popular at the time of Friedrich II in the 18th century; people pinned them to their clothes as a sign of victory and an expression of individual patriotism. The narrow silk ribbons produced by private art printers bore patriotic quotations and motifs of victory and sacrifice under the slogan "Vivat!" (Long may he live!). As of 1914 they were distributed in return for donations to the Red Cross. By that time, however, the vivat ribbons were no longer worn but kept in albums as collectors' items. The Berlin publishing house Amsler & Ruthardt was one of the three leading vivat ribbon producers in the German Empire, and occasionally commissioned designs from such acclaimed artists as Peter Behrens or Lovis Corinth.

Authenticity

Images of War: Real-life action in the war zone took place remote from the daily lives of the folks back home. All the greater was the longing of the latter for authentic pictures from the front. Illustrated weeklies catered to this tremendous demand. The reports they featured were dominated by drawings and photographs. Official war painters and specially commissioned draughtsmen and photographers recorded the activities on the basis of first-hand experience or second-hand descriptions. The illustrations in the glossies were accompanied by detailed, ideologically biased explanatory texts. The images thus transported propagandistic messages and subtly influenced the readers' opinions. In the process, the press did not shy away from reinterpreting pictorial material pretending to be documentary in nature. The war images thus forfeited their credibility and verisimilitude.

Photography and Censorship: In the First World War, around 100 professional press photographers and countless private photojournalists travelled to the fronts to capture authentic pictures of the events. Their images were sold mainly to illustrated magazines which, in contrast to the daily newspapers, were able to reproduce photographs. The pictures were subject to censorship, however, and critically scrutinized by the state authorities. The latter wanted on the one hand to avoid

disclosing any military secrets, and on the other hand to have their own side depicted as positive as possible. The pictures taken by German photographers were therefore often used to revise the image of the cruel German generated by the Allied propaganda. The focus was directed towards cultivated, humane warriors; the civilian casualties were blamed on the enemy.

Memento

Signs of Life from the Front: During the war years, the postcard became an indispensable communication medium. On the German side alone, around six million cards were sent between the front and home by forces postal service. This allowed soldiers to give their loved ones a sign of life. In return they received the support of their families, which strengthened troop morale. From the kitsch postcard to the photographic postcard showing soldiers' graves, a wide range of genres and motifs were represented, also including propaganda themes.

An Illustrated Front Journal: Collections such as that of the amateur painter Friedrich Adolf Elling, from Hamburg turned the museum into a site for the commemoration of personal histories. His numerous watercolours and photographs have been part of the museum collection in the MKG since 1981. In the First World War, Elling was deployed on the Somme as of 1916; he was subsequently stationed in Lille and Flanders. He documented his experiences on the front in portraits of his comrades and the dugouts. While his drawings show mainly idyllic landscapes, the photographs vividly depict the destruction wrought on those landscapes. At the front Elling developed many of his photographs on paper that had an address field on the back, but he rarely posted any of his homemade photographic postcards.

Memorabilia drive "Hamburg recalls": In the course of the drive, over 200 people handed in more than 1000 objects from the years 1914–1918 – including numerous postcards, photos, diaries, medals and military pay books as well as trench art, patriotic jewellery and dishes. Here we arranged a subjective selection of the immense variety of all the objects and personal stories that have reached us.

War Bonds

War Bonds in the German Empire: The state elite were initially sceptical about propaganda for military purposes. It was only with the sixth war bond campaign in March 1917 that the poster *Helft uns siegen!* (Help us triumph!) by Fritz Erler conquered advertising spaces throughout the Empire, substantially increasing donations. With his realistic depictions of the steel helmet, barbed wire and gas masks, Erler introduced new iconographic content. The German posters also made clear reference to national ideals. The protection of the family, the image of the archaic, Germanic warrior, and the depiction of the modern soldier were popular motifs. The war bonds achieved a total revenue of 97 billion Reichsmarks.

War Bonds in Austria: The multi-ethnic character of Austro-Hungary as a society made up of many different peoples was also manifested in the various languages used on the war bond posters. Czech posters employed soldier motifs to underline the connection between home and front. The Germanlanguage posters, on the other hand, displayed historical and allegorical motifs to recall the glorious history of the Habsburg monarchy. Examples are the flag bearer in the sixteenth-century jerkin, the depictions of knight-like figures or the goddess of victory. These motifs served the strategy of distracting people's attention from the horrors of the ongoing war, urging them to trust in the glorious past and be assured of victory in the present.

War Bonds in Russia: The Russian war bond posters featured idealized depictions of the war. The focus was on the martial and heroic conduct of the Russian soldiers. Examples include the motif of cavalry soldiers in an assault, still armed with lances, or the depiction of a group of soldiers manning a machine gun position in the trenches. Even after the February Revolution in 1917, owing to the decision to continue the war the provisional government introduced a so-called "Liberty Bond".

War Bonds in France: The French war bond posters focussed on two motif complexes. The first revolved around the protection of the nation and family. Domestic scenes and depictions of women and children underlined the necessity of

defending the homeland. This was an expression of the fact that part of the war was taking place on French soil. The second complex focused on pictures with military references glorifying the simple soldier. They were drawn mainly by Abel Faivre, who designed posters for all four French war bond campaigns. The German enemy was often shown not as a human being, but allegorically alienated as an eagle with a spiked helmet. An exception to this was the hate figure of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

War Bonds in Italy: The Italian war bonds usually featured heroic scenes. The enemy was either not shown at all or only in an alienated form. A frequent motif was the Italian soldier who is wounded but nonetheless heroically determined to forge on in battle. As Italy was allied with the Central Powers it originally declared its neutrality at the beginning of the war. Yet it entered into the conflict in spring 1915 on the side of the Entente. In order to strengthen the sense of community within the country the poster motifs employ symbols of national unity. Italy itself was sometimes represented as a goddess of victory or by the female warrior figure of “Italia”.

Liberty Bonds in the USA: The two most important American propaganda strategies for the sale of Liberty Bonds were self-confidence and fear. The first variant was represented by the motif of cheerful starlets, known as “Christy Girls” after their creator, waving the American flag with confidence in victory. In clear contrast to this are the posters that give expression to the anti-German enemy stereotype. The concentration on the Hun’s blood-red handprint or bloodsmear German military boots conveyed a vivid picture of the German threat. The emphasis on values such as freedom and democracy as the American reason for going to war were expressed, for example, by a profile picture of the US President at the time of the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, or a depiction of the Statue of Liberty after an attack on New York.

Erler’s Soldiers: The official war painter Fritz Erler travelled to the battlefields in Flanders and Lille in 1914/15. In his works he created stereotyped images of the strong-willed, battleready German soldier. Shown in German war picture exhibitions, the depictions representing loyalty and patriotism were regarded as works that captured the overriding significance of the war in a monumentalizing manner. Although the prints also show the soldiers’ vulnerability, owing to their glorifying character they always seem to support the war. They were thus ideal for propaganda purposes. Erler’s portfolio was published in 1915 in an edition of 500. It aimed for art-interested circles.

Myth Hindenburg

Self-Representation and Propaganda: The victory in the Battle at Tannenberg (August 1914) made the nearly seventy-year-old Paul von Hindenburg a legendary “conqueror of the Russians” and “defender of East Prussia”. Hindenburg was revered by the German population as a hero and saviour; portraits of him were painted by more than five-hundred artists. His likeness was mass-circulated on postcards, art prints and kitschy articles of everyday use, reinforcing his positive image. People associated in particular discipline, courage and strength of will with the “Hindenburg brand”. The general came to serve as a national beacon of hope in a fatal war. As Chief of the General Staff from 1916 onward, he became the most powerful man in the country. In 1917 the Deutsche Reichsbank also took advantage of his popularity and propaganda value to advertise state war bonds.

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Museum opening times: Tues –Sun 10a.m. – 6 p.m., Thurs 10 a.m.– 9 p.m.

Entrance: 10 € / 7 €, Thurs after 5 p.m. 7 €, up to age 17 free
