



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918
Censorship Guidelines (II) (1914)

This document, an addition to the original censorship guidelines for the press, goes much further than limiting information about troop movements. The German government instructed the German press on opinion-making and on maintaining support for the war effort.

The War Ministry, most humbly, forwards to the Royal Deputy Commanding Generals, enclosed, a Supplement to the Memorandum for the Press, which itself had been published according to the mobilization plan §20 B. 7. This supplement was written and published by Order of His Majesty the Kaiser and King.

The War Ministry requests that the press be informed of this Supplement in the same manner it was informed of the previously mentioned "Memorandum." The War Ministry requests further that it be made a duty to follow the guiding principles expressed in the Supplement, and, in cases of offences, that appropriate action be taken.

In order to support the Royal Deputy Commanding Generals in this task, the War Ministry will note those articles which are objectionable when we become aware of them and inform the Commanding Generals of such. We request from you, most humbly, to give us the opportunity to comment on cases where there is some doubt.

On behalf of,

[signed] von Wandel

[Enclosure: Supplement to the Memorandum for the Press]

It must be emphasized that the attitude of the press and its observance of the rules laid down in the "Memorandum for the Press" so far deserves and finds full appreciation. In spite of that, it must be noted that certain papers use now and then a language which is not adapted to the importance of the time. This circumstance forces the War Command, in order to supplement the "Memorandum for the Press," to formulate the following regulations, the observance of which during the duration of the state of war is urgently recommended. The War Command is convinced that the hitherto patriotic attitude of the press is evidence that the press also endeavors in the future to prevent unintentional injuries to our great cause.

Guiding Principles:

1. A questioning of the national sentiment and determination of any German, any party or any newspaper is highly detrimental, because it impairs the impression of German unity and energy.

2. German victory means liberation for many foreign peoples from Russian despotism and English world-hegemony, and does not signify oppression. It would be injurious to our cause if German papers should express a contrary view.

3. The language used against the enemy countries may be harsh. However, an insulting and belittling tone is no sign of power. The purity and greatness of the movement which has gripped our nation demands a dignified language.

4. The foreign policy of the Chancellor, conducted upon instructions from His Majesty the Kaiser, must in this critical moment not be interfered with or hindered by covert or overt criticism. To doubt its firmness injures the prestige of the Fatherland. Confidence in it must be strengthened, and, like the confidence in the military leaders, it too must not be shaken.

5. Demands for a barbaric conduct of war and the annihilation of foreign peoples are repulsive. The army knows where severity and leniency have to prevail. Our shield must remain clean. Similar clamors on the part of the inciting press of the enemy are no excuse for a similar attitude on our part.

Source: Schreiben des preußischen Kriegsministeriums an die Militärbefehlshaber: Übermittlung und Erläuterung der Ergänzungen des Merkblattes für die Presse [Letter from the Prussian War Ministry to the Military Commanders: Transmission and Explanation of the Supplements to the Memorandum for the Press], November 9, 1914, Bundesarchiv/ Militärarchiv, Freiburg i. Br., MA/RMA, No. 2049, XVII. May 1, 1933, vol. 1, Duplicate.

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