



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918
The German Fatherland Party (September 1917)

In the early summer of 1917, amid mounting skepticism about the success of the submarine offensive, Catholics in the *Reichstag* turned to the left, to join the Progressives and the Majority Social Democrats in sponsoring a public resolution in favor of a compromise peace. In an effort to reinvigorate the war effort, Ludendorff gave his blessing to the foundation of the “German Fatherland Party” in September of 1917. The party was an enormous new patriotic organization designed to mobilize popular sentiments in favor of a victorious peace—in other words, to intimidate the new majority in the *Reichstag*.

Broad sectors of the German people disagree with the position of the current Reichstag majority on the most vital questions that face the Fatherland. They regard the attempt to provoke domestic conflict and constitutional issues at just this moment, when the fate of the Reich is at stake, as a threat to the Fatherland and a benefit, albeit inadvertent, to the enemy. They believe that the Reichstag that was elected before the war no longer genuinely represents the will of the German people.

Who does not yearn with all his heart for peace! The peace resolutions of the weak-nerved, however, only postpone peace. Our enemies, who are bent on the destruction of Germany, see in them only the symptoms of the collapse of German strength. And this at a time when, according to the testimony of our Hindenburg, our military situation is more favorable than ever before. If we convince the enemy that he can have an honorable negotiated peace at any time, he has every reason to continue the war and nothing to lose.

In the light of past events, our government is in a predicament. Without strong support from the people, the government cannot by itself master the situation. To pursue a powerful policy, it needs a powerful instrument. Such an instrument must be a great party, which is supported by the broadest patriotic sectors of the people.

Partisan strife must not be allowed to divide the German Empire. Instead, the unbending will that is focused exclusively on the victory of the Fatherland must unite it! In grateful reverence for our beloved, unforgettable first Emperor and his iron Chancellor, the unifier of the German peoples, mindful of the titanic struggle against a ruinous spirit of partisanship, which Otto von Bismarck condemned with stirring words before God and history, the undersigned men from East Prussia, true to the traditions of their forefathers, have constituted the German Fatherland Party in this greatest and gravest hour of German history, in order to protect and shield the German Fatherland from the hereditary evil of disunity and partisanship.

The German Fatherland Party has as its goal the consolidation of all patriotic forces without respect to partisan loyalties. It comprises patriotic individuals and associations. It wishes to

provide support and backing to a strong government, which knows how to interpret the signs of the times, not in weakly concessions at home and abroad, but in German resolve and an unshakeable belief in victory.

The German Fatherland Party does not wish to enter into rivalry with patriotically minded political parties. It wishes to work hand-in-hand with them in strengthening the will to victory and overcoming all difficulties that stand in the way. The German Fatherland Party is a party of unity. Accordingly, it does not propose to nominate its own candidates for parliament. It will dissolve on the day when peace is concluded.

We want no domestic strife! Amid domestic quarrels, we Germans too easily forget the war. The enemy forgets the war not for a moment! The Germans who are united in the German Fatherland Party pledge themselves to do everything in their power to suspend domestic antagonism until peace is concluded. An individual may stand as he will on domestic political issues, but decisions about them must await the end of the war. At that time our brave ones will have returned from the battlefield and can participate in the domestic building of the Empire. Now all that matters is victory!

We do not live, as our enemies falsely contend, under autocratic absolutism, but with the blessings of a constitutional state whose social benefits put all the democracies of the world to shame, and which has given the German people the strength to defy the immense superiority of its enemies. German freedom towers above so-called democracy and all its vaunted blessings, which English hypocrisy and a Wilson want to coax onto the German people, in order to destroy a Germany whose armed might cannot be conquered. We do not wish to do England's business. We know that the existence and power of our nation in the world is at stake. The German people, unlike England, are not merely interested in business! England, the instigator and determined fomenter of this world conflagration, is in a desperate situation. We are the victors on land and sea. Hit in its most vital spot by submarine war, England places its hope in Germany dissatisfaction and disunity in this last hour. The time is not far off when its arrogance will be broken, if only we hold out and resist the deceptive temptations of peace!

We know, and the enemy knows, too, how much Germany owes to its military education by the Kings of Prussia from the House of Hohenzollern. The enemy sees the chief obstacle to defeating Germany in its institution of imperial monarchy. By all their means of cunning and lies, they want to persuade Germany's sons to abandon their imperial chief. They know not the meaning of German loyalty or how the German federal princes and tribes, who have been forged together by blood and iron, stand to their last breath by the Emperor and the Empire. They have no idea of how military discipline represents not a sacrifice, but the most unrestrained source of pride to us Germans.

We will have no peace of starvation! In order to attain a speedy peace we must follow Hindenburg's command and keep our nerve. If we willingly bear shortage and deprivation, the German people will gain a Hindenburg peace, which will bring home the prize of victory for our immense sacrifices and exertions. Any other kind of peace represents a devastating blow to our future development. The wilting of our position in the world and intolerable burdens would destroy our economic situation and eradicate all the prospects for our working class. Instead of exporting valuable goods, Germany would again see her sons emigrate in droves.

The Founders of the German Fatherland Party have asked His Highness, the Archduke Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg, and the Grand Admiral von Tirpitz to assume leadership of the party.

To all who subscribe to these views, we direct the appeal to join the German Fatherland Party. Anyone who wishes to help is welcome. The goals of the party must be realized at once. Not a moment is to be lost.

Germany's salvation, honor, and future are at stake.

Königsberg in Prussia, in the Yorck Hall of the Land Bank for East Prussia, on Sedan Day, 1917.

Source: "Aufruf zur Gründung der Deutschen Vaterlands-Partei" vom 2. September 1917 ["Proclamation for the Founding of the German Fatherland Party of September 2, 1917"]. *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* [North German General Newspaper], September 12, 1917.

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