German Agitation in Swiss Civil Society during the Great War: Nationalism, Internationalism, and the Struggle for Neutrality

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Abstract

This dissertation, "German Agitation in Swiss Civil Society during the Great War: Nationalism, Internationalism, and the Struggle for Neutrality," argues that Germany was able to achieve wartime goals and needs through its influence within Swiss civil society during the First World War. While Switzerland maintained political neutrality, Germany mobilized people and resources while also shaping international public opinion through voluntary civic associations. Its capacity to do this relied on pre-war sociocultural networks and relationships and their ability to invoke shared, transnational identities and imagined communities. The dissertation surveys a wide range of Swiss civic associations and their organizational cultures. These case studies move along an ideological spectrum, covering Pan-German ethnic nationalist groups, Alpine recreational hiking clubs, internationalist humanitarians like the International Red Cross, exiled pacifists, and working class youth clubs who became involved in revolutionary socialism during the war. Through this analytical framework, the research demonstrates how the activities of pro-German Swiss complicated definitions and boundaries between Swiss and German national identities. Additionally, it challenges the concept that Switzerland was isolated or aloof from the war because of its political, official neutrality. Instead, the Swiss individuals were active participants who privately mobilized through the interstate networks developed by civic associations prior to the war. By doing so, they blurred the division between neutrals and belligerents while also shaping the outcome of the war and the post-war world.

Table of Contents

Introduction: German Agitation in Swiss Civil Society 1

Chapter 1: We Swiss Who Feel Most German..... 41

Chapter 2: The New Helvetic Society: Civic Nationalism and the Fight over National Unity 99

Chapter 3: In Defense of "Our" Alps: The Swiss Alpine Club and the Austro-Italian Front 157

Chapter 4: International Humanitarianism for the German, National Cause: The ICRC and the German War Effort..... 208

Chapter 5: International Pacifism and German Agitation for a Durable Peace 267

Chapter 6: The Swiss Socialist Youth Organization, Lenin, and Antimilitarist Agitation against Germany during the First World War..... 325

Conclusion: The General Strike of November 1918 and Swiss National Identity 389

Bibliography 436

Vita..... 472

List of Abbreviations

ADV – Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein

AfZ – Archiv für Zeitgeschichte, ETH Zürich

AIPG – International Prisoners' Relief and Information Agency

BBB – Bern Bürgerbibliothek

BNV – Bund Neues Vaterland

CFCP – Federal Press Control Commission

DÖAV – Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein

DSG – Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft

DSS – Deutsche Schulverein in der Schweiz

DSV – Deutschschweizerischer Sprachverein

EdA – L'Echo des Alpes

GHS – Georgia Historical Society

GSSB – Genossenschaft Schweizerische Sonntagsblätter

HdK – Hilfsbund für deutsche Kriegerfürsorge

ICRC/CICR – International Committee of the Red Cross

IPB – International Peace Bureau

IPU – Interparliamentary Union

NAOR – Nederlandsche Anti-Oorlog Raad

NHG – New Helvetic Society

NZN – Neue Zürcher Nachrichten

NZZ – Neue Zürcher Zeitung

SAC – Swiss Alpine Club/Schweizer Alpenclub

SCPC – Swarthmore College Peace Collection

SFA – Swiss Federal Archives, Bern

SJO – Swiss Youth Organization

SNL – Swiss National Library, Berne

SoArc – Swiss Social Archive, Zurich

SPD – Social Democratic Party of Germany

SVDFV – Swiss Association for the Study of a Permanent Peace Treaty

SVV – Schweizerische Vaterländische Verbande

UNOG – United Nations Office at Geneva

VDA – Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland

Introduction: German Agitation in Swiss Civil Society

0.1: German "Total War" and Swiss Neutrality

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914 unleashed an unprecedented war in Europe. For Germany, the First World War began with its declaration of war on Russia on August 1 and the implementation of the German war plan. This strategy anticipated a two-front war against Russia and France, aiming to hold Russian forces on the Eastern Front while German troops swiftly advanced through France to force a quick surrender. However, the plan's success depended on unimpeded movement through Belgium, which refused Germany's demand to allow troop passage on August 3. In response, Germany declared war on Belgium on August 4 out of military necessity, violating its long-standing neutrality established by the 1839 Treaty of London. Belgium was not the only neutral county between Germany and France. To the south, Switzerland occupied a strategic position between the opposing alliances and became fully encircled when Italy joined the Entente in May 1915. After repelling a French incursion near Mulhouse in August 1914, Germany maintained its southern flank along Switzerland's northwestern border for the duration near the town of Porrentruy of the war. However, Switzerland's importance to Germany extended beyond geography; its neutrality provided critical advantages that supported German wartime operations.

Switzerland's neutrality during the First World War was respected, unlike Belgium's, for reasons beyond its military capability. While the commonly held belief that Switzerland's militia-style military and mountainous terrain deterred invasion is believed by historians to have been a significant factor in World War II, it does not fully apply to the context of 1914.[1] At the time,

[1] Full summary of Switzerland's military during the war in Hans Rudolf Fuhrer, *Die Schweizer Armee im Ersten Weltkrieg: Bedrohung, Landesverteidigung und Landesbefestigung* (Zürich: Verland Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2003); for Switzerland and the Nazis during World War II, see Klaus Urner, *Let's Swallow Switzerland!: Hitler's Plans against the Swiss Confederation,* translated by Lotti N. Eichhorn (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002).

Switzerland lacked key defensive infrastructure, such as the redoubt system of fortifications, which was not established until the interwar period. In comparison, Belgium actually had stronger defenses, including well-fortified positions around Liège. Switzerland's population of 3.8 million allowed for a maximum mobilization of only about 250,000 soldiers, and its stock of modern weaponry was inadequate, particularly in machine guns and artillery.[2] These limitations meant Switzerland's military posed less of a barrier than Belgium's. However, Germany found Switzerland's neutrality far more valuable than an invasion.

Switzerland declared official neutrality in August 1914, relying on its internationally recognized status established by the Congress of 1815.[3] The Swiss Confederacy, or *Eidgenossenschaft,* was a decentralized federal republic made up of 25 cantons, each with its own constitution and government. These cantonal governments sent representatives to the Council of States (*Ständra*t), one of two legislative chambers. The second chamber, the National Council (*Nationalrat*), consisted of members directly elected by the Swiss people. Together, these chambers formed the Federal Assembly (*Bundesversammlung*), also referred to as the National Assembly at the time. This body appointed an executive branch called the Federal Council (*Bundesrates*), responsible for daily governance. The presidency, largely ceremonial, rotated among Federal Council members. During the First World War, the Federal Council received emergency war powers from the legislative branch. Leadership after August 1914 was primarily directed by Arthur Hoffmann, head of the Swiss Political Department, its foreign relations office. Hoffmann, a Swiss-German intellectual and politician, had studied law in Zurich, Leipzig, and Munich and served as a colonel in the Swiss army before joining the

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[2] Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert, "Introduction: Small States in a Big World," in *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940,* eds. Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 13.

[3] On the origins of Swiss neutrality, see Max Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg: Wie neutral war die Schweiz?* (Zürich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2003), 12-23; Maartje Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics, 1815-1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2-48.

Federal Council as a member of the Liberal Free Democratic Party.[4] Though he projected a neutral stance externally, Hoffmann was known to harbor pro-German sympathies. This opened avenues for German activities in Switzerland as long as they did not overtly compromise Swiss neutrality.[5]

When considering Switzerland's role in the First World War, many envision a venue of international espionage and intrigue.[6] The harrowing tales of early twentieth century spy thrillers, such as those of the real-life inspired activities of William Somerset Maugham, come to the forefront.[7] Yet, this perception paints Switzerland as a passive backdrop, a mere crossroads where foreign agents schemed while the Swiss had little to no agency of their own.[8] However, this image understates Switzerland's significant contributions and strategic importance during the war. As a neutral nation centrally located in Europe, Switzerland held considerable value for all belligerents. Beyond serving as an intelligence hub, the Swiss provided essential economic resources, military supplies, and financial assets.[9] They also extended humanitarian aid by housing sick and wounded soldiers and prisoners of war (POWs) on their own territory. Accessing Swiss resources depended heavily on the influence exerted on Swiss public opinion. This made Swiss public sentiment a key target for propaganda campaigns and agitation. As Swiss historian Alexandre Elsig notes: "Belligerent propaganda then aims for a triple goal in its influence on Swiss opinion: obtaining confirmation of the justness of their cause and, thereby,

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[4] Pleasant Alexander Stovall, *Switzerland and the World War* (Savannah, GA: Mason, 1939), 102-103.

[5] Alexandre Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge: La Suisse Face à la Propagande Allemande de la Grande Guerre.* (Lausanne: Éditions Antipodes, 2017), 190.

[6] For an example in the historiography of the First World War, see Ronald Seth, *The Spy Who Never was Caught* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1967).

[7] W. Somerset Maugham, *Ashenden: or, The British Agent* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1928); Also, see French Strother, *Fighting Germany's Spies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1918).

[8] A counter example that includes Switzerland's involvement in the history of spies during the First World War is seen in Janet Morgan, *The Secrets of Rue St. Roch: Intelligence Operations Behind Enemy Lines in the First World War* (London, UK: Allen Lane, 2004), 95.

[9] The role of neutral resources for belligerent war efforts is fully described in Maartje Abbenhuis and Ismee Tames, *Global War, Global Catastrophe: Neutrals, Belligerents and the Transformation of the First World War* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2022).

strengthening the cohesion of their own public opinion; in return weakening the morale of the adversary; and finally, retain the favors of a neutral country which occupies an important strategic position in Europe."[10]

Germany recognized the strategic importance of influencing Swiss public opinion and established official propaganda institutions to target neutral states. The German military relied on Section IIIb, the *Nachrichtungabteilung* (News Section), led by Major Walter Nicolai, while the foreign office's *Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst* (Central Office for Foreign Service) handled on-the-ground agitation in Switzerland.[11] These activities were primarily conducted from the German diplomatic embassy in Bern. The German embassy in Bern was under the leadership of Gisbert von Romberg, who served as German ambassador throughout the war.[12] Appointed in 1912, Romberg was an experienced Foreign Service agent who oversaw both German-Swiss diplomatic relations and a sizeable intelligence network. Entente estimates suggested he managed approximately 500 operatives in Switzerland.[13] Romberg understood that successful German agitation required collaboration with domestic Swiss partners and cultivating "personal contacts" within the Swiss public sphere, emphasizing the importance of local influence to achieve Germany's wartime objectives.[14]

German agitation's influence on the Swiss public sphere rested in the pre-war relationship between German and Swiss civil societies. The nineteenth century saw significant social, cultural, and intellectual exchanges between the two nations, driven by their shared German-

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[10] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 17; 93-97.

[11] David Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I: Pacifism, Mobilization and Total War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 28-39.

[12] Alfred Erich Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland, 1914-1917* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 60-61.

[13] Thomas A. Bailey, *The Policy of the United States towards the Neutrals, 1917-1918* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), 244.

[14] Gisbert von Romberg to the Imperial Chancellory, February 20, 1917, cited in Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 224-225.

speaking populations.[15] Advances in communication technologies and institutions further facilitated transnational interactions. Despite their differing political systems, Germany as an imperial monarchy and Switzerland as a decentralized democratic confederacy, both countries experienced interconnected social revolutions during this period.[16] A key development was the explosion of voluntary civic associations during the nineteenth century, which facilitated a transnational "associative sociability" between individuals in Switzerland and Germany.[17] These associations connected individuals across national borders through conferences, journals, and correspondence via interstate postal services. International organizations also formed branches in both states, fostering a shared organizational culture that transcended face-to-face interaction. This interconnected sociability created a Central European communication network that enabled German wartime propaganda to integrate seamlessly into Swiss civil society.[18] The importance of Swiss-German support for Germany's efforts was emphasized by a German Foreign Service officer, Harry Kessler, who stated that "without the support of the Swiss-Germans, any forceful intervention by Germany would be useless."[19]

The proliferation of civic associations in the nineteenth century coincided with growing public interest in nationalism and national identity. To borrow Benedict Anderson's phrase, these

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[15] Edgar Bonjour, *Swiss Neutrality: Its History and Meaning,* trans. Mary Hottinger (London, UK: George Allen & Unwin, 1946), 15.

[16] Frank Trentmann, "Introduction: Paradoxes of Civil Society," in *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern Germany and British History,* ed. Frank Trentmann (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 13-14; Oliver Zimmer, *A Contested Nation: History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761-1891* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Oliver Zimmer, "Nation, Nationalism, and Power in Switzerland," in *Power and Nation in European History,* eds. Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 340-341.

[17] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Civil Society, 1750-1914* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 8-9; Annette Zimmer, and et al., "The Legacy of Subsidiarity: The Nonprofit Sector in Germany," in *Future of Civil Society: Making Central European Nonprofit-Organizations Work,* eds. Annette Zimmer and Priller Eckhard (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2004), 686.

[18] Daniel A. McMillan, "Energy, Willpower, and Harmony: On the Problematic Relationship between State and Civil Society in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in *Paradoxes of Civil Society,* ed. Frank Trentmann, 176-195.

[19] Harry Kessler, *Das Tagebuch, 1880-1937,* eds. Roland Kamselak and Ulrich Ott, vol. 6: 1916-1918, eds. Günter Riederer, Ulrich Ott, et al. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 2006), 320.

associations were built around a political-cultural ideology aimed at fostering a shared "imagined community" rooted in German national identity.[20] Language served as their cornerstone, reflecting a shared history, culture, and semiotic systems that extended beyond national borders. Despite Switzerland's political independence, German-speaking Swiss actively participated in these associations and embraced both Swiss patriotism and the idea of a greater German nation without perceiving any conflict between the two. In contrast, members of internationalist societies imagined themselves as part of a larger, often multinational community. These groups were unified by norms of humanitarian ethics or socioeconomic class, creating a sense of "fictive kinship" that transcended national boundaries.[21] Both nationalist and internationalist associations formed a transnational network of sociocultural relationships linking Switzerland and Germany before the war. These networks fostered personal friendships, common ideological identities, and shared visions of a transnational community.

This dissertation argues that Germans leveraged transnational sociocultural networks, primarily through civic associations, to influence Swiss civil society and achieve wartime goals. Despite Switzerland's official neutrality during the war, ordinary individuals often expressed sympathies for one side of the conflict. A significant portion of the Swiss public proclaimed pro-German leanings, driven by shared affiliations with German nationalist associations, recreational clubs, and international organizations. Civic associations provided a primary medium through which German-beneficial activity, encouraged by agitation, could operate across the guarded, political boundaries of wartime Europe. These associations allowed Germany to shape Swiss

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[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

[21] I borrow the term "fictive kinship" from Jay Winter and his usage of it while investigating how groups of individuals formed bonds over grief, memorialization, and memory after the end of the First World War. For an example of this, see Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 136-150.

public opinion and mobilize resources without violating Swiss political neutrality. By maintaining their pre-war social legitimacy and leveraging common ideological ties and shared identities within these networks, Germany effectively influenced Swiss society. This strategy underscores the importance of pre-existing relationships and the role of imagined communities in fostering cooperation across national boundaries during wartime.

0.2.1: Swiss Mobilization as a factor in Germany's process of Total War

In 1916, the Bernese newspaper *Der Bund* posed the question: "What is the purpose and what is the ultimate intention" of German and other foreign propaganda in Switzerland?[22] The article's author concluded that the propaganda's "war aims are not merely for the 'souls of the neutrals.'" Rather, it needed to be understood in the context that the "war is a people's war, drawing even the last civilians behind the front into the fight." This perspective aligns with historiographical debates about whether the First World War qualifies as a "total war." Traditionally, total war is characterized by full state mobilization of the military, economy, and national spirit to support the war effort.[23] Rather than focusing solely on whether Germany's actions fit this definition, this analysis supports John Horne's argument that the First World War experienced "the process of totalization," a mentality that sought to achieve a complete mobilization of the nation.[24] Horne describes this process as an imaginative, cultural and social phenomenon requiring cooperation between the state and civil society. Mobilization was not strictly top-down but relied on partnerships with civic associations. Religious, economic, cultural, and other associations set their own wartime agendas.[25] This enabled everyday

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[22] *Der Bund,* no. 544, ed. 1, November 24, 1916.

[23] Bessel, "Mobilizing German Society for War," in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, eds. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000)*,* 438-450.

[24] John Horne, "Introduction: Mobilizing for 'Total War,' 1914-1918," in *State, Society and Mobilisation in Europe during the First World War,* ed. John Horne, 1-18 (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-5.

[25] William Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 68.

individuals to experience and to participate in their own "self-mobilization" for their nation's cause.[26] In Switzerland, some civic associations actively supported Germany without external pressure. These groups perceived threats to their social institutions and culture, prompting them to transform their imagined communities into what David Welch terms "fighting communities."[27] Through this self-mobilization, these associations became agents of pro-German agitation, driven by their sense of cultural and institutional preservation.

German agitation operating in Switzerland can be understood as form of propaganda. Troy Paddock defines propaganda as "an attempt to influence the attitudes of a specific audience through the use of facts, fictions, arguments or suggestion – often supported by the suppression of inconsistent material – with the calculated purpose of instilling in the recipient certain beliefs, values or convictions which will serve the interest of the author, usually by producing a desired line of action."[28] While propaganda has traditionally been viewed as a state-led mechanism to manipulate public opinion, recent historiography on Germany and the First World War has challenged this top-down approach. For instance, Welch argues that propaganda and public opinion "can only be understood in the wider context of the everyday experiences of the home front."[29] This study expands on that view by examining how civic associations, either collaborating with official institutions or acting independently, produced and disseminated propaganda to meet wartime objectives. In one of the very few monographs to cover foreign propaganda in Switzerland during the First World War, Alexandre Elsig highlights that cultural

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[26] John Horne, "Introduction: Mobilizing for 'Total war,'" 5-7; for a good example of this in recent historiography, see Bart Ziino, "'Total War' in Australia: Civilian Mobilisation and Commitment, 1914-1918," in *Australians and the First World War: Local-Global Connections and Contexts,* eds. Kate Arlotti and James E. Bennet (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 172.

[27] Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I,* xi-xii, 1.

[28] Troy R. E. Paddock, "Introduction: Newspapers, Public Opinion, and Propaganda," in *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War*, ed. Troy R. E. Paddock (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 7-8.

[29] Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I,* 2-3.

mobilization by belligerent nations in neutral states relied heavily on private actors and social institutions operating within the perimeter of political neutrality.[30] German officials and civic associations depended on Swiss partners to effectively conduct agitation and secure resources. Importantly, some Swiss civic associations undertook pro-German agitation without external prompting, driven by pre-war sociocultural ties that aligned them with German interests. This self-mobilization allowed German agitation to manifest through writings, art, music, and other cultural forms that appeared native to Switzerland while promoting German values and convictions.

In regards to mediums of propaganda, German historian Geoff Eley differentiates between two types: formal and informal.[31] Formal propaganda "presents itself openly as propaganda, in the form of direct interventions to convey information or influence opinion." In contrast, informal propaganda operates through "hidden messages," where ideology is subtly disseminated, often unconsciously, through everyday mediums like school textbooks, novels, or lyrics. These forms of propaganda transmit values in a way that feels uncontroversial and consensual. Eley emphasizes that it is therefore "important to consider all areas of cultural life" to understand how ideology spreads. Some historians have examined these experiences through cultural products, often distinguished between high and low forms, and included art, literature, film, and theater. During wartime, these mediums often served as propaganda, with aesthetics designed to evoke emotions and mobilize viewers.[32] Antione Prost and Jay Winter describe "war cultures" as the use of artistic and discursive elements to give meaning to war and adapt to its

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[30] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 13-14, 196-197.

[31] Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 210-211.

[32] Jay Winter, "Cultural Mobilization: Henry Moore and the Two World Wars," in *A World at War, 1911-1949: Explorations in the Cultural History of War,* eds. Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 19; Tomás Irish, "Petitioning the World: Intellectuals and Cultural Mobilization in the Great War," in *A World at War, 1911-1949: Explorations in the Cultural History of War,* eds. Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 49.

challenges in daily life.[33] Although Switzerland maintained political neutrality, its interstate social connections with Germany allowed the Swiss public to engage with these "war cultures." German agitation, framed as cultural production, introduced messages into Swiss civil society with the aim of mobilizing civic associations for wartime goals. For this study, the routine cultural outputs of various associations served as channels for German agitation. These included club journals, articles sent to newspapers, published meeting minutes, and areas of sociability such as conferences held during the war and private correspondence. Such normalized practices became effective tools for transmitting ideology in an understated yet effective manner.

0.2.2: Civic Society and Civic Associations as a Transnational Network for German Agitation

The study of civil society has recently provided new insights into the history of the First World War. Historians have broadly defined civil society through Jürgen Habermas's principles: the social sphere of public group and individual discourse independent of the state that addresses issues of political action.[34] Drawing on Habermas's framework, civil society is understood as emerging alongside the European public sphere, gaining prominence in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century with the rise of the middle-class reading public, or *Bildungsbürgertum* in German.[35] However, in the later half of the nineteenth century, others such as the working class, women, and national minorities also became active participants in European civil society. Institutions such as self-organized newspapers, public assemblies, and especially civic

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[33] Antoine Prose and Jay Winter, *Penser la Grande Guerre : Essai d'historiographie* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 218.

[34] For example, see Gary B. Cohen, "Nationalist Politics and the Dynamics of the State and Civil Society in the Habsburg Monarchy 1867-1914," *Central European* History 40, no. 2 (June 2007), 245.

[35] For concise overview, see Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 421-461; for a wider discussion, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

associations created an interlinking and competitive space for communicative action.[36] Building on Horne's concept of mobilization, recent scholarship has explored how civil society functioned as a platform for voluntary, grassroots mobilization "from below" during the First World War.[37] Non-state organizations played a critical role in supporting their nation's war efforts, sometimes competing with state initiatives. Jay Winter's work on wartime Britain illustrates how British civil institutions mobilized mass entertainment to foster national support for the war, often entangling with the state's own propaganda efforts.[38] Despite these advances, limited research exists on the role of civil society across interstate political boundaries, especially in regards to the relationship between neutral and the belligerent states. Civil society's networks and communicative actions were not confined by national borders but formed transnational spheres that persisted despite the war. This study illustrates how pre-war socio-cultural relationships between Germany and Switzerland's civil societies facilitated German agitation among the Swiss public and the circumvention of Switzerland's neutrality.

Civic associations are central to this study's investigation of the national mobilization of civil society within a transnational framework. As defined by social scientists, civic associations are voluntarily organized by private individuals independent of the state, non-profiting, self-governing, and center on common goals, values, and activities.[39] Their purposes span a wide range of purposes and activities that include sporting entertainment, scientific research, and

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[36] Sven Reichardt, "Civil Society: A Concept for Comparative Historical Research," in *Future of Civil Society: Making Central European Nonprofit-Organizations Work,* eds. Annette Zimmer and Eckhard Priller (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2004), 45-46; Denise Phillips, *Acolytes of Nature: Defining Natural Science in Germany, 1770-1850* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 20-21.

[37] John Horne, "Conclusion," in *A World at War 1911-1949,* eds. Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 294-295.

[38] Jay Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918,* eds. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 330-331.

[39] Annette Zimmer, "Civil Society Organizations in Central and Eastern European Countries: Introduction and Terminology," in *Future of Civil Society: Making Central European Nonprofit-Organizations Work,* eds. Annette Zimmer and Eckhard Priller (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2004), 18.

humanitarian efforts. While many claim to be apolitical, civic associations often act as interest groups pursuing political, cultural, or social objectives.[40] Historian Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann outlines four phases for the expansion of civic associations in Europe: the enlightened sociability in the eighteenth century, expansion with the rise of the middle-class bourgeoisie between 1820 and 1848, liberalization and entanglement with nationalism from 1850 to 1890, and rapid inclusion of other non-bourgoeois classes and denomgraphics, especially those from the working class after 1890 and until the First World War.[41] Although distinct from the state, civic associations and state institutions are deeply interconnected and mutually influential.[42] Additionally, as Hoffmann demonstrates, the transnational phenomon of these associations in Europe naturally led to an interstate-connectiveness among its participants.[43] This relationship provided an outlet for the German state and its own civic associations to leverage pre-war sociocultural ties with Swiss civil society to achieve wartime objectives. At the same time, Swiss individuals could participate in the war, enacting political actions on a transnational stage.

Through their members' participation, civic associations develop their own rules, norms and semiotic systems that form the foundation of their organizational culture. These shared elements foster a sense of belonging and unity among members, even when they rarely or never meet in person. This phenomenon resembles Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities."[44] Organizations such as the ICRC exemplify this concept on an international scale, uniting dispersed members under a common purpose. This view also aligns with many of

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[40] Rainer Hering. *Konstruierte Nation: Der Alldeutsche Verband, 1890 bis 1939* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 2003), 92.

[41] Hoffmann, *Civil Society,* 4-5; 36-61.

[42] John Boli and George M. Thomas, "INGOs and the Organization of World Culture," in *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875*, eds. John Boli and George M. Thomas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 29.

[43] Hoffmann, *Civil Society,* 6-7.

[44] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 6.

the new historiographical innovations of alternative communities to the nation.[45] While many studies on imagined communities focus on micro-scales regional or national contexts, examining civic associations offers insight into how these communities function transnationally, across political boundaries. Political science has long recognized how civic associations and NGOs influence international political actions, but historical analysis reveals how these organizations have also shaped alternative forms of community that transcend national boundaries. This study explores how Swiss-German civic associations created transnational communities in ways that challenged traditional definitions of national identity.

0.2.3: Cultural Methodology: Organizational Cultures and Political Culture

This dissertation not only examines German agitation as a form of cultural work but also employs an anthropological approach to cultural methodology. It follows in the vein of historical study drawing on Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description," which seeks to describe norms and behaviors of rituals to reconstruct their subjective, symbolic meanings.[46] In this context, culture refers to the normative values that shape behaviors and actions, often expressed through symbol systems that convey beliefs and assumptions rooted in historical interpretations and shared experiences. This methodology has been particularly influential in the field of nationalism studies. For instance, Eric Hobsbawm's term "invented traditions" highlights how nationalists create ritualistic practices and rules to establish continuity with the past and promote certain

[45] Celia Applegate, "A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times," *The American Historical Review* 104*,* no. 4 (Oct. 1999), 1176.

[46] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); for a good summary of cultural methodology in the field of the First World War, see John Horne, "End of a Paradigm?: The Cultural History of the Great War," *Past & Present,* no. 242 (February 2019), 155-192.

values and norms.[47] Over time, this concept has become central in understanding nations as cultural constructs, a view now widely accepted by historians and other social scientists.[48]

This study also highlights that civic associations are both cultural and social constructions, with shared norms and behaviors serving as foundational elements for their membership. It emphasizes organizational culture as a key factor in shaping the trajectory of German agitation within Swiss civic associations. Isabel Hull's analysis of organizational culture is particularly relevant, as she explains that an organization's culture is built on hidden or subconscious basic assumptions.[49] These assumptions structure members' perceptions, guide their actions, and define what is considered acceptable or true within the organization. While some assumptions stem from innate values, they are also shaped by collective past experiences. Roger Chickering complements this perspective by noting that cultural phenomena contribute to a social groups' collective identity.[50] In the context of this study, organizational culture framed the acceptability of values and claims advanced by German agitation. This cultural framing played a critical role in mobilizing individuals within these associations. Moreover, pre-war experiences and sociocultural ties between Swiss associations and Germans in Germany shaped these basic assumptions, establishing patterns of legitimate behavior that facilitated the normalization of German agitation.

Lastly, political culture is a central concept in this study, approached through an anthropological and cultural methodology. James Retallack defines political culture as "the

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[47] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition,* eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

[48] Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1997), 182.

[49] Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005)*,* 92-98.

[50] Roger Chickering, "War, Peace, and Social Mobilization in Imperial Germany: Patriotic Societies, the Peace Movement, and Socialist Labor," in *Peace Movements and Political Culture,* eds. Charles Chatfield and Peter van den Dungen (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 4.

system of norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and sentiments that seem self-evident to groups and people involved in political activity."[51] Importantly, political culture extends beyond high politics and governmental decisions, encompassing a social dimension. Retallack ties political culture to civil society and social culture as "it focuses on the ensemble of codes and signs that condition the way citizens behave politically and how they interact with one another." In the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, civic associations played a central role in enabling private individuals to participate in political culture. Oliver Zimmer argues that these associations served as primary mediums for engaging with local and national political institutions.[52] Through their activities, civic associations acted as vessels of political culture, fostering collective identities among members who voluntarily joined. John Horne's article on the cultural historiography of the First World War underscores the need to recover and reintegrate diplomacy with cultural methodologies to address gaps in understanding the conflict's broader history.[53] This study responds to Horne's call by applying Zimmer's framework of political culture within civic associations to a transnational context. It demonstrates how civic association participation allowed individuals to engage with foreign political institutions, influencing diplomatic relations on an everyday level. Moreover, German agitation strategically adapted to align with various political cultures, leveraging pre-war sociocultural connections. By utilizing social actors with established legitimacy, German efforts resonated across multiple collective identities, enhancing their impact within diverse cultural contexts.

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[51] James Retallack. *The German Right, 1860-1920: Political Limits of the Authoritarian Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 17.

[52] Oliver Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life: German Communities in the Age of the Nation-State* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 156.

[53] Horne, "End of a Paradigm?," 168-170.

0.3.1: Frameworks of Organizational Culture, but with individual agency

These methodological concepts of civil society, total war, and cultural history form the foundation of this study's analytical framework. While civic associations provide the structural basis for analysis, individuals and their agency are understood as the primary actors and decision-makers. Cultural norms and social structures shaped the sociocultural environment through which German agitation flowed, but it was individuals who consciously or unconsciously leveraged these frameworks for political purposes.[54] Henry Cord Meyer's study on *Mitteleuropa* among German intellectuals in the nineteenth and twentieth century, before the historiographical culture or social turns, highlights that ideas "cannot be dissociated from the men and the situations that give birth to them."[55] This includes the various mediums of agitation and propaganda individuals employed to influence others. Borrowing from Boli and Thomas's terminology, individuals' "innovative enactment" of the organizational culture of their civic association draws on common norms and behaviors, but their self-directed actions in specific contexts "vary almost without limit."[56] However, the role of shared assumptions within an organization's culture cannot be dismissed, even amidst the plurality of its members.[57] To effectively promote and act upon German agitation, individuals relied on references to a common cultural denominator and ideological identities central to their civic associations.

In an effort to examine this relationship between private individual agency and organizational culture, this dissertation adopts a personal approach to investigating German agitation in Swiss civic associations by emphasizing individual narratives, actions, and how their

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[54] For a historiographical discussion of social fabric and individual agency in civic associations, see Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 86-88.

[55] Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa: German Thought and Action, 1815-1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), ix.

[56] Boli and Thomas, "INGOs and the Organization of World Culture," *Constructing World Culture,* 18.

[57] Vejas Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2-3.

unique perceptions of the Swiss nation shaped their identities.[58] It consciously seeks to highlight figures previously overlooked in the historiography. Pacifist historian Sandi Cooper describes such individuals as the "disappeared" people in First World War historiography.[59] Where they are mentioned, they are "stick figures or disembodied spirits" without "thick description," reduced to victims of large-scale wartime forces. Inspired by Cooper's perspective, this study seeks to recover these activists' personal histories and underscore their agency. While attention has often focused on political and cultural elites, this research also prioritizes social leaders who have been largely ignored. Additionally, it strives to recover the experiences of everyday members of these organizations, whose actions were equally vital to Swiss civil society's involvement in the war effort.

The study of civic associations during the First World War challenges the state-centric view of wartime mobilization by emphasizing the critical role if individual agency. While German officials may have hoped for Swiss citizens to unquestioningly align with their wartime objectives, this was far from reality. German agitation crossed the German-Swiss border in both directions, with individuals actively participating in military-political processes through their own agitation or actions. Even those without formal ties to government positions utilized transnational networks built by civic associations to influence political decisions and shape the actions of officials and military leaders from the bottom up.[60] Diplomacy in the early nineteenth

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[58] For an example of this approach already being used in Swiss historiography on the First World War, see Roger Durand, "Gustave Ador, Fondateur et Patron de l'Agence des Prisonniers de Guerre," in *La Suisse et la Guerre de 1914-1918: Actes du colloque tenu du 10 au 12 septembre 2014 au Château de Penthes,* ed. Christophe Vuilleumier (Genève: Éditions Slatkine, 2015), 61.

[59] Sandi E. Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism: Waging War on War in Europe, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9.

[60] Martha Finnemore, "Rules of War and Wars of Rules: The International Red Cross and the Restraint of State Violence," in *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875*, eds. John Boli and George M. Thomas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 162-164.

century was a highly public enterprise.[61] Foreign policy was openly debated in newspapers and public lectures, while social institutions, particularly civic associations, lobbied for issues aligned with their interests. Just as states attempted to steer public opinion on both domestic and international fronts, individuals harnessed this social power of public opinion to influence governments and assert their demands. The mobilization and self-mobilization of Swiss citizens in support of the German war effort illustrate how ordinary people could engage with and impact foreign policy and international diplomacy.

0.3.2: Switzerland's Active, not Passive, Neutrality in the First World War

A transnational perspective on neutral participation in the First World War constitutes the second component of this dissertation's framework. Since the cultural turn of the 1990s, with its focus on the everyday experiences of Europeans and the home front, there has been growing attention to transnational histories of the war.[62] Transnational is simply defined as a "realm of interdependence or relation that by definition supersedes national sovereignty and boundaries."[63] Transnational history can be spatial, encompassing area larger than a single state or spanning multiple countries, such as with regional histories.[64] It can also be mechanical, investigating the exchange of ideas or, in the case of this study, the interactions between individuals, associations, and other non-state actors.[65] Initially, transnational histories were comparative, analyzing case

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[61] Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals,* 160.

[62] For a history of this historiographical shift, see Catriona Pennel and Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, "Introduction," in *A World at War, 1911-1949: Explorations in the Cultural History of War,* eds. Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1-10.

[63] Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, "Comparative History, Cross-National History, Transnational History—Definitions," in *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective,* eds. Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (New York: Routledge, 2004), xiii.

[64] For example, see Applegate, "A Europe of Regions," 1157-1182; on the debate over the differences between international and transnational, see Heather Jones, "International or Transnational?: Humanitarian action during the First World War," *European Review of History* 16, no. 5 (October 2008), 697-713.

[65] Akria Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present and Future* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15.

studies within national frameworks.[66] More recently, truly transnational studies have emerged, focusing on interactions and experiences across political boundaries. Historian Ute Frevert highlights the Great War as a transnational flashpoint for multinational contact and exchanges.[67] This study aligns with such perspectives by tracing German agitation through civic associations that operated across borders. Akira Iriye argues that civic associations and their members' capacity for sociability independent of government are central to transnational civil society.[68] However, separate from the state does not mean isolation. Civic associations formed intricate networks that fostered social and political partnerships across international boundaries. These multilateral connections intertwined civil society and state functions, bridging governments and public spheres in different countries. By analyzing how these associations operated across political borders, this study provides fresh insights into Switzerland's role and participation in the war, even as it maintained political neutrality.

Neutrals and neutrality have often been overlooked in the historiography of the First World War. Most research on neutral nations has concentrated on the United States before its entry into the war in 1917. Chad Fulwider's *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* highlights how German mobilization targeted the United States, with pro-German Americans acting as intermediaries through cultural productions like film to counter efforts to align the U.S. with the Entente.[69] Fulwider's work demonstrates that a cultural history of U.S. neutrality reveals early American involvement in the war, starting in August 1915. However, European historians, particularly those focusing on Germany, have paid limited attention to

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[66] Jürgen Kocka, "Comparison and Beyond," *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (February 2003), 39-44.

[67] Ute Frevert, "Europeanizing German History," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 36 (2005), 13-15.

[68] Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 7.

[69] Chad R. Fulwider, *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2016).

neutrality's role during the First World War. For instance, Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites' edited collection, *European Culture in the Great War,* "sought balance by including as much as possible the 'small nations' of East-Central Europe that are so often marginalized in general histories."[70] However, they focus primarily on belligerents. Sophie de Schaepdrijver's valuable account of occupied Belgium and the interaction between German propaganda and Belgian cultural production is the only neutral perspective addressed in the work.[71] Despite this, Switzerland's role is essential. For instance, Peter Jelavich's chapter on German culture in the Great War acknowledges that Germany's wartime cultural productions depended on exchanges of people, ideas, and materials across the Swiss-German border.[72] This overlooked dynamic of Swiss-German interaction highlights Switzerland's critical role in shaping wartime cultural and political developments, contributing to a broader understanding of neutrals' impact during the First World War.

Maartje Abbenhuis's recent works have significantly reshaped the historiographical understanding of neutrals and neutrality during the First World War's total war regimes. Through her analysis of neutral Netherlands, Abbenhuis challenges the traditional perception that neutrals were detached or inactive participants in the conflict: "The word 'neutrality' implies passivity and inaction. […] In ascribing the term 'neutrality' to certain countries, at one level we taint them with the passivity of its meaning. By nature of the word, neutrals are removed from the

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[70] Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, "Introduction," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918,* eds. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

[71] Sophie de Schaepdrijver, "Occupation, propaganda, and the idea of Belgium," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, eds. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 267-294.

[72] Peter Jelavich, "German Culture in the Great War," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914-1918,* eds. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 32-57.

world of action, agency, and activity."[73] To counter this, she suggests reorienting the term "as an element that controls, limits, and directs change on the international scene," just as actively as belligerents.[74] Neutrals were deeply enmeshed in complex interstate political relationships, balancing belligerent demands with their own national interests and public concerns.[75] Far from being mere spectators, they influenced the course of the war. In *Global War, Global Catastrophe*, Abbenhuis and co-author Ismee Tames explore German agitation in the Netherlands to demonstrate how Germany's extensive efforts to sway neutral public opinion in its "war of words" underscored its importance.[76] Neutral public opinion shaped debates over violations of international norms and laws, compelling belligerents to adapt their rhetoric and strategies to maintain influence. For Switzerland, this dissertation aligns with Abbenhuis's view of active neutrality. Swiss civic associations operated within transnational sociocultural networks, enabling them to engage actively with wartime dynamics. The agency of their members in responding to German agitation highlights that neutrals were not passive bystanders but influential actors navigating and shaping the geopolitical landscape.

In the case of neutral Switzerland and the First World War, limited research exists on both transnational and national studies, primarily conducted by Swiss historians writing in German and French. Three key works are particularly relevant to this study. First, Max Mittler's *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg* investigates pro-German and pro-Entente sympathies in Switzerland, focusing on the political elite.[77] Although primarily a national history, it provides valuable insights into individual accounts and how personal histories and pre-war relationships shaped

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[73] Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals,* 2-3.

[74] Ibid., 23.

[75] Maartje Abbenhuis, *Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006)*,* 23-24.

[76] Maartje Abbenhuis and Ismee Tames, *Global Catastrophe: Neutrals, Belligerents and the Transformation of the First World War* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2022), 92.

[77] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg.*

wartime loyalties. Second, Patrick Kury's *Über Fremde reden* employs linguistic turn methodologies to evaluate shifting discourses in Swiss civil society regarding foreigners living in Switzerland.[78] This work offers a deeper understanding of societal dynamic during the war. Finally, Alexandre Elsig's *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* a crucial transnational study of propaganda in Switzerland, explores German propaganda entering the country from official sources and its reception by the Swiss public. Elsig argues that Switzerland's geographic and cultural position as a European crossroads made it an "imaginary theater of war," where belligerents attempted to mobilize its neutral population.[79] However, the Swiss public was not passive; they actively engaged with and responded to these influences, using cultural productions to participate in the "war cultures" of the First World War. This dissertation builds on Elsig's transnational perspective by focusing on the normative and behavioral aspects of culture tied to transnational social links established through civic associations. It also aligns with Jay Winter's conclusion in his study of British wartime culture, which highlights the fluid exchange of "cultural baggage" between home fronts and war fronts.[80] Following Winter's framework, this dissertation contends that cultural norms, individuals agency, and transnational connections challenge the binary distinction between neutrals and belligerents during the First World War.

0.3.3: Nationalism, Internationalism, and the Complexities of Imagined Communities

The third component of this study lies in its organizational structure and the selection of civic association case studies. These surveys explore the ideological frameworks and imagined communities that motivated individuals to join and actively participate in various types of associations. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" is a key theoretical

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[78] Patrick Kury, *Über Fremde reden: Überfremdungs-diskurs und Ausgrenzung in der Schweiz, 1900-1945* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2003).

[79] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 529-530.

[80] Jay Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," in *European Cultures in the Great War,* 332-333.

foundation here. In his seminal work on nationalism, Anderson argues that individuals imagine themselves as part of a national community through a shared mental image rooted in common values and behaviors, such as language, history, and media.[81] This shared sense of belonging allows individuals to envision themselves as members of a larger community, even without direct interaction with most other members. Alon Confino's idea of "common denominators" complements Anderson's theory by highlighting how shared cultural elements, such as symbols, normative values, and behaviors, help form collective identities.for the formation of a national community. While Confino originally applied this idea to the convergence of local memories as the common denominators for national memory, it can also be extended to other cultural elements, symbols, normative values, and behaviors.[82] In the context of civic associations, these shared elements fostered a sense of community among members who may have never met face-to-face but imagined themselves as part of a cohesive group based on common social membership and cultural norms. Civic associations not only reinforced these imagined communities but also provided a platform for members to engage with broader national identities. This dynamic is particularly evident in German nationalist associations, discussed in Chapter 1. Similarly, other associations offered unique interpretations of national identity through their diverse activities and shared norms.

This dissertation applies Anderson and Confino's theories to analyze communal ideologies, organizing its discussion around typological categories such as ethnic and civic nationalism, as well as nationalism and internationalism.[83] John Breuilly's definitions provide a

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[81] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 15.

[82] Alon Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 8.

[83] I borrow this categorization and the following warning on individual agency from Charles Chatfield, "Thinking about Peace in History," in *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective,* ed. Harvey L. Dyck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996)*,* 38.

helpful foundation.[84] He defines "nation" as a named human population occupying a historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members. "National identity" involves maintaining the values, symbols, memories, and traditions that "form the distinct heritage of the nation" as part of their continued identification with the nation. Nationalism represents the political expression of this maintenance, often through social groups like voluntary nationalist associations. However, these definitions require nuance. Celia Applegate and Rogers Brubaker emphasize that nations are cultural constructs shaped by a "set of practices."[85] Oliver Zimmer adds that the social context is critical, as "the ways in which people related to nationalism depended in important ways on the immediate social worlds they inhabited."[86] Abstract ideas of the nation are deeply intertwined with real-world relationships and contexts. Norms and behaviors create a shared framework within civic associations, but there are "seemingly infinite tactical variations" in each member's interpretations of community.[87] Each member adapts their imagined national community based on overlapping memberships in different social structures, resulting in unique amalgamations of identities. No two individuals' visions are identical, even within the same organization. Using this framework, this dissertation demonstrates how these diverse interpretations complicate rigid ideological distinctions such as civic versus ethnic nationalism. By examining how Swiss and German identities intersected with regional and international affiliations, it explores how

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[84] John Breuilly, "Changes in the political uses of the nation: continuity or discontinuity?," in *Power and the Nation in European History*, eds. Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68.

[85] Applegate, "A Europe of Regions," 1181; Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15.

[86] Oliver Zimmer, "Urban Economies and the National Imagination: The German South, 1860-1914," in *Nationalism and the Reshaping of Urban Communities in Europe, 1848-1914,* eds. William Whyte and Oliver Zimmer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 257-258.

[87] William E. Demars, *NGOs and Transnational Networks: Wild Cards in World Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 3.

individuals' adaptations fostered pro-German sympathies, agitation, and activities during the First World War.

The rise of nationalism in nineteenth century Europe is closely linked to the expansion of civil society and its associated civic associations.[88] Societal changes such as the establishment of institutionalized education systems, advancements in communication and transportation, and the proliferation of literature and newspapers, contributed to the increased politicization of public life.[89] In contemporary nationalism studies, the state is no longer seen as the sole architect of the nation.[90] Anderson, for instance, argued that "official nationalism" was shaped by elites functioning within the public sphere.[91] Educated and cultural elites formed nationalist associations to promote national unity and advocate for social and political actions on local and national levels. Zimmer challenges the idea that nationalism was imposed from above, contending that the "nationalization of the masses," as George Mosse famously described it, was the "result of an interplay between state-induced nationalism and the nation-oriented activity fostered with civil society."[92] Zimmer particularly highlights the role of popular, civic associations in nineteenth century Germany for this process. Through gymnastic, singing, and other cultural associations, members and their activities "literally embodies what they considered the central national values and virtues."[93] By the First World War, Len Scales, Zimmer's co-author in *Power and the Nation in European History,* observed that the "nation had become a mass phenomenon." However, Scales cautioned against viewing this as a single, hegemonic

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[88] Cohen, "Nationalist Politics and the Dynamics of the State and Civil Society in the Habsburg Monarchy," 243-244.

[89] Oliver Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe, 1890-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 27-43.

[90] For a counter perspective, see Jan Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity: The Dual Alliance at War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[91] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 67-82.

[92] Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe,* 14-33; also, see George L. Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 2.

[93] Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe,* 33-41.

concept of the nation; instead it was actively contested by everyday people across the public sphere.[94] For this study, these perspectives on nationalism and national identity are essential for understanding how German agitation manifested in Swiss civil society during the war. The adaptability of nationalist imagery within Swiss civic associations allowed for a diverse range of approaches to mobilizing individuals in support of the German war effort.

Ethnic nationalists united on a common denominator of kinship and linguistic ties, exemplified by groups like the Pan-German League in the nineteenth century. In contrast, civic nationalism emphasizes a national community based on shared civic values and historical practices. Switzerland is often regarded as a classic example of a civic nation. However, recent historiographical studies challenge the binary between ethnic and civic nationalism, emphasizing individual agency in shaping national discourse.[95] Zimmer's works on Central European nationalism is particularly relevant to this study. His research is among the few that investigate nineteenth century Swiss nationalism within a transnational context. In *A Contested Nation,* Zimmer highlights how Switzerland's liberal traditions of free speech and assembly fostered an intertwined nationalist dialogue between the state and civil society. Drawing on Confino's ideas, he argues that nationhood is a dynamic process shaped by people from diverse backgrounds redefining its meaning.[96] While individuals may share similar civic values or symbols, their interpretations of ethnic or civic nationalism vary significantly. Zimmer further posits that nationalism should be viewed as "a form of social exchange and interaction."[97] Evidence from Central Europe demonstrates that by the late nineteenth century, Switzerland, Germany, and

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[94] Len Scales, "Introduction," in *Power and the Nation in European History,* eds. Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21; also, see Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life,* 302-304.

[95] Katherine Verdery, "Whither Nation and Nationalism?," *Daedalus* 122, no. 3 (Summer 1993), 38-41.

[96] Zimmer, *A Contested Nation,* 2-3, 14; Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor,* 4.

[97] Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life,* 302-304.

other nations engaged in transnational discussions about concepts of nationhood. These dialogues transcended political boundaries, forming mental images of communities that extended beyond contemporary state definitions. Building on Zimmer's work, this dissertation explores the sociocultural cross-pollination between Swiss and German civil societies at the turn of the twentieth century. It argues that these interactions created sources of German sympathy within Swiss civil society during the First World War, highlighting how transnational exchanges influence national identities and allegiances.

By the onset of the First World War, civic associations rooted in internationalism played a significant role in Switzerland and served as another pathway for German agitation. Peter Jackson and William Mulligan define internationalism as a "belief system that attaches importance on values and exchanges across political communities."[98] While this definition provides a foundation, it requires further emphasis on the underlying social and cultural dynamics.[99] Similar to nationalism, internationalism is both a communal and political endeavor. It seeks to create an imagined community based on shared norms and behaviors. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, individuals who adhered to similar mindsets and values often came together to form international associations. Iriye notes that these groups fostered networks of shared interests and values across state boundaries, emphasizing the transnational nature of civil society.[100] Like nationalist societies, international organizations used their norms

[98] Peter Jackson and William Mulligan, "The Great War and the Political Conditions of Internationalism," in *Beyond the Great War: Making Peace in a Disordered World,* eds. Norman Ingram and Carl Bouchard (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2022), 23; for another, similar definition, see Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society,* 176.

[99] Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order,* 16.

[100] Iriye, *Global Community,* 6-7.

and activities to build a shared identity among members and common denominators for an internationally imagined community.[101]

The nineteenth century saw a surge in international organizations, driven by the same forces that led to the growth of civil society and nationalist associations. Interstate exchanges of publications, public congresses focused on scientific knowledge or other interests, and the migration of people all contributed to a pre-war international and cosmopolitan culture in Europe. As Glenda Sluga notes regarding pre-war social technologies in Europe:

> The act of posting a letter [through the Postal Union] demonstrated the realism of the new internationalism, as it drew the individual into an international realm of sociability. […] The effect of the existence of international administrative organizations literally repeated the institutional and sociological processes that had led to the creation of nations such as France itself, albeit on a new international scale.[102]

Switzerland emerged as a hub for major international organizations and became known for its leadership in international law and human rights.[103] Associations like the International Red Cross in Geneva, which championed the international laws first established by the Geneva Conventions, bolstered this reputation. Other internationally imagined communities were rooted in shared religious beliefs, pacifist anti-war movements, and environmental concerns. Socio-economic class further united individuals as a common denominator for an international community that bridged state boundaries, with working-class solidarity being particularly significant through international socialism and related political organizations.

Although nationalism and internationalism may appear to be opposing concepts, recent historiography reveals their complementary nature. Sebastian Conrad's analysis of globalization

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[101] Glenda Sluga, *Internaionalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Presss, 2013)*,* 150-160; Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order,* 16; see a historiographical example of this in the context of the First World War in Shai Dromi, *Above the Fray: The Red Cross and the Making of the Humanitarian NGO Sector* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020)*,* 66.

[102] Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism,* 150-160.

[103] Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals,* 169-170.

and nineteenth century Germany illustrates how nationalism depended on the growth of global interconnections, enabling individuals to imagine themselves as part of a larger nation.[104] German nationalists often engaged with other nationalities, and competition among nationalist movements was integral to shaping the imagined community. Additionally, the structure of international organizations often reinforced nationalist frameworks. Many international associations operated through national branches across Europe. For instance, German pacifist organizations addressed domestic issues while participating in international meetings held in Bern with other national societies. Similarly, the International Red Cross in Geneva coordinated a network of national Red Cross societies, fostering both global and local engagement. For Switzerland, participation in international organizations was a source of national pride. Humanitarian efforts were perceived as fulfilling Switzerland's national mission within Europe.[105] Consequently, individuals could simultaneously imagine both a national and international community, with these identities reinforcing rather than contradicting each other.[106]

Roshwald and Stites argue that European cosmopolitanism ceased in 1914 due to the war, but the continued activities of international associations refute this claim.[107] Despite direct closures between belligerents, transnational social connections, cultural exchanges, and shared imagined communities of cosmopolitan organizational culture persisted through neutral countries. National associations and individual members from opposing belligerent camps maintained communication with their central headquarters in Switzerland, often relaying

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[104] Sebatstian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany,* trans. Sorcha O'Hagan (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2-3.

[105] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 356-369.

[106] John Boli, Thomas A. Loya, and Teresa Loftin, "National Participation in the World Polity," in *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875,* eds. John Boli and George M. Thomas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 61-62; Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism,* 150-160.

[107] Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, "Conclusion," in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918,* eds. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 351.

messages across military lines. Chapter 5 highlights instances where individuals from warring states attended conferences together in Switzerland during the war.[108] Similar to nationalist associations, international organizations were mobilized to support their respective national war efforts. Crucially, the transnational ties between national associations and their Swiss counterparts provided an established route for agitation within Switzerland. This dynamic relied on the coexistence and intermingling of nationalist and internationalist identities. As Roshwald observes in *The Endurance of Nationalism,* individuals could "change their minds about which nation they belong to and what belonging to it means."[109] This fluidity allowed people to feel connected to multiple imagined communities simultaneously, both national and international.[110] For Swiss individuals, shared internationalist norms, behaviors, and common memberships with German ideological allies fostered German national sympathy. This transnational affinity became a channel for German agitation within Swiss civil society, enabling it to influence public opinion and mobilize resources effectively.

In conclusion, this framework of nationalism and internationalism reveals the multiplicity of national identities and imagined communities in Switzerland during the flashpoint of the First World War. The coexistence, and often competition, among ethnic nationalist, civic, and other cultural nationalist groups disrupts traditional perceptions of Swiss civic nationalism. By integrating internationalist identities and ideologies, this study underscores how Swiss national identity adapted to include transnational values that transcended state boundaries. German agitation provides a valuable lens for this analysis, as its successful mobilization unveils the intersections between German and Swiss national identities including Pan-German ethnic

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[108] Also, see Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace,* 10.

[109] Aviel Roshwald, *The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern Dilemmas* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6.

[110] Edward Shils, "Nation, Nationality, Nationalism, Civil Society," *Nations and Nationalism* 1, no.1 (1995), 93-95.

nationalism. Consequently, this dissertation disputes the historiographical notion of Switzerland as a *Sonderfall* or unique case among European states.[111]

0.4.1: Outline of Chapters

This dissertation investigates German wartime agitation in Swiss civil society through a broad range of civic associations with transnational sociocultural ties. The chapters are organized as case studies, spanning a spectrum of organizational and ideological identities from nationalist to internationalist perspectives. The analysis follows a chronological yet overlapping timeline, reflecting how each association shifted in relevance to German agitation as Germany's wartime objectives evolved. Additionally, the study explores the pre-war histories of these associations and how these shaped their involvement with German agitation during the war. Recognizing that these associations did not exist in isolation, the work highlights their interactions with broader historical contexts. While the structure mirrors an organizational history, significant focus is placed on individual participants, their relationships, decisions, and influence. This aligns with historian Sandi Cooper's concept of recovering the "disappeared people" of the First World War, everyday individuals who influenced the course of the war for both Switzerland and Germany despite their lack of fame.[112] By prioritizing personal narratives, this dissertation reasserts individual agency within civic associations, illustrating how they served as sociocultural spaces for collective action and community building.

Chapter 1 focuses on ethnic nationalism, specifically examining ethnic German nationalist and German language associations within Switzerland. The central civic association is the *Deutschschweizerischer Sprachverein* (DSV), which later evolved during wartime into the *Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft* (DSG). These associations trace their roots to nineteenth

[111] For an argument in favor of a Swiss *Sonderfall,* see Edgar Bonjour, "Gibt es noch einen Sonderfall Schweiz?," *Schweizer Monatshefte: Zeitschrift für Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur* 61, no. 9 (1981), 679-691.

[112] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism*, 9.

century Pan-German circles, with many members affiliated with the Pan-German League. Among its ranks were German scientists, doctors, and academics, many of whom were second- or third-generation naturalized Swiss citizens. Another significant segment of membership consisted of native Swiss-Germans who imagined themselves as both Swiss and a part of a broader German nation, connected through shared linguistic heritage. This shared identity was influenced by the lingering *Großdeutschland* ideals of a unified German Central Europe from the nineteenth century. By the outbreak of the war in 1914, these associations' members strongly sympathized with Germany and needed little external prompting from official German sources to self-mobilize cultural propaganda in support of Germany's war effort. The chapter follows the Fick family, academic and political reformists who immigrated to Switzerland after the failed 1848 revolutions. By the start of the war, they had become naturalized citizens, deeply embedded in both Swiss and German social spheres. As prominent figures in Pan-German associations in both countries, they played a key role in facilitating transnational exchanges of pro-German agitation in Switzerland.

Chapter 2 acts as a counterpart to Chapter 1, focusing on Swiss civic nationalism and its embodiment of democratic values often linked to Swiss national identity. The New Helvetic Society, founded on the eve of the war, attempted to promote this image of Swiss identity through grass roots efforts. Once the war began, the society shifted its focus to countering pro-German agitation and sympathies within Swiss public sphere, frequently clashing with Pan-German associations. While the New Helvetic Society achieved notable successes, this chapter demonstrates how pro-German agitation conducted by German sympathizers within Switzerland adapted their strategies. German nationalists often incorporated civic values into their ethnic-based nationalism and even established new organizations, such as *Stimmen im Sturm,* to obscure

their connections to pre-war Pan-German groups. The chapter also highlights the contributions of the Zurich chapter of the New Helvetic Society and its leader, Gustav Thurnherr. An engineer by trade, Thurnherr spearheaded many of the society's most effective campaigns against German agitation. However, his personal differences with the association's central leadership reveal the diversity of interpretations within Swiss national identity, even among prominent civic nationalist groups.

Chapter 3 explores the central role of the Alpine landscape in shaping Swiss national identity, focusing on the cultural nationalism of the Swiss Alpine Club. The club's members engaged in various mountaineering activities in the Alps, ranging from recreational climbing to sporting mountaineering and high-altitude scientific research. Their shared passion for the Alps and frequent interaction with mountaineering clubs in Germany and Austria-Hungary fostered a pre-war sense of community centered on this natural monument. Many Swiss Alpine Club members imagined themselves as part of a broader Germanic Alpine national community, similar to Pan-German ideals. This affinity motivated some Swiss mountaineers to self-mobilize for the German war effort, especially after the Italians declared war in May 1915, with heightened concerns about defending the Alps from foreign invasion. A notable example is Gustav Renker, a German-Swiss mountaineer with dual Swiss and Austro-Hungarian citizenship, who volunteered as a military consultant for the Central Powers on the Austro-Italian Front. The chapter also examines how German and Austrian mountaineering associations utilized established sociocultural exchange networks to influence Swiss civic associations. Rather than relying on official German sources, these groups leveraged their shared norms and practices to disseminate pro-German agitation within Switzerland, showcasing the transnational nature of these interactions.

Chapter 4 marks a transition in the dissertation by introducing civic associations with internationalist ideologies, focusing on international humanitarianism and its most iconic organization of the early twentieth century, the International Red Cross (ICRC). Founded in Switzerland in the mid-nineteenth century, the ICRC was built on universal values of charity and adherence to international law. Its call for humane treatment of wounded soldiers on the battlefield and advocacy for humanitarian action culminated in the Geneva Conventions, which gained broad European acceptance prior to the war. By 1914, the Geneva-based ICRC served as the hub of a global network of national Red Cross societies. Among these chapters, the German Red Cross stood out as one of the oldest and most highly regarded by the central office in Geneva. This status provided Germany with significant social authority and legitimacy, which it leveraged to promote its wartime interests. One example is Arthur Eugster's work on behalf of the ICRC in Germany at the start of the war. A National-Liberal who left his government post, Eugster volunteered as an ICRC representative in 1914-1915 to inspect prisoner-of-war camps in belligerent countries. Motivated by a sense of humanitarian duty and pride in Switzerland's neutral identity, Eugster's reports on German camp conditions reflected his sympathy for Germany. His findings prompted the ICRC to coordinate an international relief effort to deliver food to German POW camps, alleviating pressure on Germany's resource-strained home front. This chapter also examines how German agitation exploited the institutional and social overlap between civil society and state functions. The collaboration between the German military and the German Red Cross blurred distinctions between official and public initiatives. While this relationship allowed Germany to use the ICRC's humanitarian networks for its own objectives, it also created tension. Instances where military necessity led to breaches of international law

jeopardized the German Red Cross's credibility with the ICRC, ultimately undermining its effectiveness as a vehicle for pro-German agitation.

Chapter 5 examines the role of international pacifists during the First World War and their efforts to envision a post-war world built on international and democratic cooperation. Many of these pacifists were connected to the International Peace Bureau in Bern, but the war created significant identity crises for many European pacifists who ultimately supported their respective nations' war efforts. For example, German pacifists in the German Peace Society endorsed the *Burgfrieden* policy, believing Germany's actions were defensive and relying on the Kaiser's promise of democratic reforms after the war. In Switzerland, Franz Bucher-Heller, leader of the Swiss Peace Society, played a prominent role in coordinating with German pacifists. His pre-war relationships with German activists allowed him to work on shaping international public opinion toward a negotiated peace. This collaboration also opened a pathway for German agitation, merging official propaganda with pacifist rhetoric to obfuscate Germany's violations of international law, such as its breach of Belgium's neutrality. At the same time, Switzerland became a refuge for German pacifists who rejected their nation's war effort and sought exile abroad. These dissident activists used Switzerland as a base for their anti-annexationist propaganda, countering the expansionist ambitions of German military leaders. They utilized the same transnational sociocultural pathways leveraged by pro-German agitators to send messages back into Germany. Their efforts influenced public discourse within Germany, shaping alternative visions of a peaceful post-war future that contrasted with militaristic aims.

Chapter 6 examines the international working-class youth movement in Switzerland, focusing on the Socialist Youth Organization in Zurich. This association composed of young, working-class men and women embodied what historian Vernon Lidtke describes as an

"Alternative Culture" to the bourgeois, male-dominated civil society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[113] Though a Swiss organization, its membership included many foreign expats, especially young German immigrant workers. The group was led by Willi Münzenberg, a young German political exile with ties to Germany's youth movement. The organization's pre-war socio-political connections fostered a radical, revolutionary class-based ideology that stood in opposition to mainstream social democracy. While socialist parties across Europe aligned with their respective nations' war efforts in 1914, the international youth movement in Switzerland became a hub for revolutionary activity. It attracted key figures like Russian Bolsheviks in exile, including Vladimir Lenin. As Germany sought a separate peace with Russia, these international connections facilitated revolutionary agitation within Russia. However, by leveraging this network, German officials unintentionally fueled revolutionary agitation that destabilized both the German and Swiss home fronts.

The dissertation concludes with the end of the war in November 1918. While the Entente powers and many other neutral countries celebrated the war's conclusion, Switzerland faced unique challenges due to its wartime connections with German agitation. These connections exposed Switzerland to the post-war unrest that swept through Central and Eastern Europe. Economic strife, revolutionary agitation, and the collapse of the German Empire culminated in the November 1918 General Strike. This strike was perceived by Switzerland's bourgeois-dominated civil society as a fundamental threat to the Swiss Confederacy. In response, they organized a grassroots, militant effort to counteract the perceived danger. Notably, civic associations, which had previously competed during the war, united for this cause. This collaboration marked a significant moment of unity and served as a flashpoint for a common

[113] Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

denominator of Swiss national identity amidst the plurality of imagined communities present throughout the study.

0.4.2: Sources

The COVID-19 Pandemic from 2020 to 2023 significantly influenced the direction of this study. International travel was severely restricted, with Swiss archives closing to foreign researchers for most of this period. These archives only reopened with limited access in the fall of 2022. Fortunately, access to some U.S.-based archives remained available, leading to unexpected breakthroughs with previously overlooked materials. When European archives reopened, the study prioritized underutilized Swiss archives, which, despite their richness, have been largely neglected by historians.[114] Many German records relevant to this research are housed in Switzerland. For instance, the bulk of the German Red Cross's wartime records were destroyed during the Second World War; what survives is primarily what was preserved at the International Red Cross headquarters in Geneva. Similarly, the personal papers of Ludwig Quidde, a German pacifist central to Chapter 5, were largely destroyed by the Nazis. The remaining documents are divided between the United Nations Archive in Geneva and the Peace Collection at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, where Quidde had sent them to safeguard against Nazi confiscation. Consequently, this dissertation draws on published collections of German official records from the First World War and prior accounts by German historians who extensively examined German archives. It also highlights Swiss archives' untapped potential and how they contribute fresh perspectives to the historiography.[115]

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[114] This opinion is also shared by many local Swiss historians, see Konrad J. Kuhn and Béatrice Ziegler, "Dominantes Narrativ und drängende Forschungsfragen: Zur Geschichte der Schweiz im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Traverse: Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 18, no. 3 (2011), 135-137.

[115] For an outline of the status and displacement of German archival holdings useful for further study, see Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in the World War I,* 26n6.

Swiss archival research faces its own challenges due to Switzerland's decentralized cantonal system, which is mirrored in the distribution of its archival materials. While the Swiss Federal Archive provides a wealth of resources, particularly government records, gaining a comprehensive understanding of Switzerland's role in the First World War requires deeper exploration of cantonal records. These records remain a promising area for future research, particularly in relation to German agitation. The decentralized distribution of documents is also reflected in the organizational archives of Swiss civic associations. These organizations often mimicked the cantonal system, with small central administrative structures and highly autonomous regional chapters. For instance, individual chapters of the Swiss Alpine Club maintain most of their own records. Even their central archives are fragmented, with materials housed in multiple locations, such as the Swiss Alpine Club library at Zurich's Central Library, the Bürgerbibliothek, and Alpine Museum in Bern. Although this study has utilized both archival and other novel sources, there remains ample potential for localized studies to provide a deeper understanding of these civic associations' organizational histories during the First World War.

The dissertation focuses on the histories of civic associations and their members, shaping its research approach. It examines associational records, meeting minutes, internal memos, and societal news. To highlight individual agency, it gives special attention to private, often handwritten correspondence, allowing an investigation of organizational cultures and how internal social dynamics influenced attitudes and involvement in German agitation. The study also explores associations' publications aimed at a broader audience. These include cultural propaganda materials such as scientific and entertainment journals, internationally circulated news bulletins, and self-published works like books and essays. Public discourse mediums are another key focus, including newspapers that served not only as sources of information but also

as platforms for editorial debates between opposing associations. Cultural-academic journals further provided arenas for wartime discussions that mobilized pro-German sentiment within the wider public sphere.

The entanglement of civic associations and the state, especially in relation to German agitation, requires a thorough examination of governmental sources. Central to this investigation are Swiss government records and the surviving documents of German officials in Switzerland, particularly those linked to Gisbert von Romberg at the German embassy in Bern. Additionally, internal memos between offices and correspondence with private individuals involved in the civic associations under investigation offer critical insights. Given that German agitation often aligned with foreign intelligence operations in Switzerland, an analysis of police reports and investigations by Swiss federal authorities into wartime espionage is essential. Furthermore, as highlighted in Chapter 1, the connections between civic associations and the state also encompassed personal relationships with Swiss military leadership. Military records thus serve as valuable evidence of the longstanding socio-cultural connections between the Swiss and Germans, which facilitated German agitation and fostered pro-Germany sympathies.

Much of the source material for this investigation owes its preservation to the efforts of Zurich historian Klaus Urner. His work, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* examines the history of German associational life in Switzerland during the nineteenth century and serves as precursor to this study. Urner employed sociocultural methodologies in his research during the 1960s and 1970s, well before the full emergence of the Cultural Turn in historiography. During his research, Urner discovered that most archival records from Pan-German linguistic and nationalist associations active in Switzerland around the turn of the century had been destroyed. August Steiger, who served as secretary for many of these groups since their foundings in the 1880s and

1890s, had kept nearly all organizational records in his private collection until his death after World War II. However, it appears that his inheritors intentionally destroyed these documents due to their connection to German nationalism.[116] Undeterred, Urner painstakingly sought out surviving materials by contacting other members of these associations and conducting oral histories. Through these efforts, he compiled a significant collection of documents now housed at the Archive for Contemporary History (ETH) at the University of Zurich, which he himself founded. Without Urner's dedication five decades ago, this study on German agitation within Swiss civic associations would not have been possible.

[116] Klaus Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz: Von den Anfängen der Kolonienbildung bis zum Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Frauenfeld: Verlag Huber, 1976), 631n193.

Chapter 1: We Swiss Who Feel Most German

1.1.1: 1914 Swiss National Exhibition

In the summer of 1914, the Swiss Federal Government aimed to showcase Swiss national unity through a grand event. From May until October, officials organized the Swiss National Exhibition in Bern, the country's political capital. Bern's central location made it easily accessible, encouraging citizens from across Switzerland to pilgrimage to the exhibition. Its position near the internal linguistic border also symbolized harmony between the German- and French-speaking regions. The exhibition highlighted common symbols, values, and daily activities, in order to foster a national, collective identity.[1] The conscious placement of the fairgrounds against the backdrop of the Bernese Oberland Mountains served as a natural, shared monument for the exhibition visitors. Its layout followed that of the World's Fairs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Spanning 123 acres just north of Bern's historic old town, the exhibition modeled Switzerland in miniature. The grounds were divided into three sections: the Neufeld, Mittelfeld, and Viererfeld. Like the World's Fairs, the Neufeld emphasized the country's industrial and technical innovations.[2] It greeted visitors with a 16,000 square foot Machinery Hall showcasing power plant turbines, industrial machines and other electricity-powered equipment. The Mittelfeld highlighted cultural commerce, featuring chocolatiering, viniculture, and the hospitality industry. Lastly, the Viererfeld, located against the Bremgarten forest at the back of the exhibition, demonstrated agriculture and traditional trades classified as "home industries." Walking through these sections symbolized a journey from modern Switzerland to its traditional roots. However, not all visitors appreciated this interpretation. The

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[1] Béatrice Ziegler, "Der gebremste Katamaran," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 51, no. 2 (2001), 166-180.

[2] Marie Widmer, *Switzerland's National Exhibition in Berne, May 15th to October 15th, 1914* (New York: Official Information Bureau of Switzerland, 1914).

French-Swiss press criticized the contemporary architecture in the Neufeld for being overly modeled on Munich-style designs, hinting at internal disputes that emerged just months later.[3]

The National Exhibition opened on May 15 with great enthusiasm in the city. The Swiss military led a parade featuring local civic associations. Gustav Ador, president of the International Red Cross in Geneva (ICRC), delivered a keynote address at the event.[4] The Swiss National Exhibition was not solely a showcase of industrial achievements but also a reflection of the country's socio-cultural milieu. For instance, the Neufeld featured more than technical machinery; it included sections dedicated to workers' welfare innovations, such as buildings focused on education, workplace safety regulations, accident prevention, and healthcare. The exhibition grounds were not exclusively occupied by government entities or economic leaders. Major civic associations had their own spaces throughout the fairgrounds and actively participated in the event's processions. The Swiss Red Cross displayed an impressive exhibit alongside the Swiss military including models of new medical equipment for transporting wounded soldiers and photographs from its recent work during the Balkan Wars.[5] A large painting served as a backdrop, illustrating Red Cross efforts on an imaginary future battlefield in the Jura heights near the Franco-German border. From July 11 to 13, the Congress Hall hosted the Red Cross' celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Convention.[6] International organizations were prominently featured, reflecting their role in enhancing Swiss national prestige. To express the importance of international associations for Swiss national prestige, the organizers dedicated a building in the center of Neufeld to international bureaus like the

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[3] *La Tribune de Genève,* no. 111, 5 ed., May 15, 1914; *Der Bund,* no. 223, 2 ed., May 14, 1914.

[4] *Ausstellungs-Anzeiger,* no. 1*,* May 15, 1914*; Neue Zürcher Nachrichten (NZN),* no. 132, May 15, 1914.

[5] *Das Rote Kreuz Schweizerische Halbmonatschrift für Samariterwesen, Krankenpflege und Volksgesundheitsplege,* no. 12 (June 15, 1914).

[6] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 45, no. 180 (October 1914), 298-299.

Universal Postal Union and International Peace Bureau (IPB) in Bern.[7] The Swiss Peace Party also capitalized on this occasion, holding its annual meeting in Bern in July 20 to be a part of the exhibition's fanfare.[8] This reconstruction of Swiss identity was not merely a top-down invention, but a collaborative effort shaped by individuals and civic associations within the public sphere.

At the rear of the Viererfeld, the National Exhibition featured the Dörfli village, a recreated alpine town, alongside a sporting area showcasing traditional shooting competitions. In this section, the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) presented an impressive display, including a to-scale model of one of its alpine huts used by mountaineers for rest in the Alps. Its exhibit included a detailed relief map of the Bernese Oberland, complete with taxidermy animals of various native alpine species. Additionally, the SAC set out scientific findings, maps, photographs with backdrop artwork depicting iconic mountain peaks and landscapes.[9] Its exhibit drew widespread praise from the Swiss public and even caught the attention of the Belgian King Albert I, who visited on June 7 just weeks before Germany violated Belgium's neutrality at the onset of the First World War. For its compelling portrayal of a shared national identity and its exceptional quality, the SAC exhibit earned the Grand Prix prize, the highest honor awarded at the 1914 Swiss National Exhibition.[10]

The Dörfli village also featured a building constructed by the *Heimatschutz*, a civic association focused on preserving Switzerland's natural and historic sites. The structure housed a restaurant and a large theater hall where daily performances were held. Exhibition organizers selected comedic plays by Otto von Greyerz, a German language teacher at the University of

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[7] *Der Friede,* no. 9/10 (May 20, 1913).

[8] *Der Friede,* no. 7 (July 20, 1914).

[9] Daniel Anker, "Die Kraft der väterlandischen Berge: Die Sprachenfrage im Schweizer Alpen-Club von 1863 bis 1925" (University of Bern: Master's Thesis, 1982/1983), 30-31.

[10] F. Nussbaum, *Bericht über die Ausstellung des Schweizer Alpenclub an der Schweizerischen Landesaustellung in Bern 1914* (Bern: Buchdruckerei K.J. Wyss, 1915), 16-21.

Bern, to be one of its staple performances for the fair.[11] Von Greyerz safegaurded the Bernese dialect of Swiss-German, producing numerous works on the topic alongside his folk-inspired theatrical plays. His dedication to preserving local language brought him to the forefront of French-German linguistic disputes in the Jura region, where he combated the Romanization of German-speaking villages. This activism connected him with Pan-German nationalists in Zurich, leading to him helping co-found the *Deutschschweizerischer Sprachverein* (German-Swiss Language Association), an ally of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein* (General German School Association).[12] Thus, von Greyerz played a key role in shaping the cultural representations of Swiss national identity based on Pan-German conceptions at the National Exhibition.

The harmonious façade of a united Switzerland at the Swiss National Exhibition disintegrated in early August. While the state maintained political neutrality, everyday citizens freely chose sides, leading to a frayed social fabric divided between Entente and the Central Powers supporters. These divisions often followed linguistic lines, with some in the press describing a figurative "ditch" running north to south, not far from the exhibition grounds in Bern.[13] Civic associations that had previously collaborated at the exhibition splintered into opposing factions. Public displays of German support erupted in German-speaking regions, where eastern Swiss newspapers defended Germany's concept of a defensive war. However, this alignment went beyond shared language with the Kaiserreich and the Dual Monarchy. Over decades, Swiss-German civil society had cultivated deep socio-cultural ties within these nations.

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[11] *Ausstellungs-Anzeiger,* no. 3, May 15, 1914; *Der Bund,* no. 227, May 17, 1914.

[12] August Steiger, "Otto von Greyerz und der Deutschschweizerische Sprachverein," *Jährliche Rundschau des Deutschschweizerische Sprachvereins* 35 (1939), 32-38.

[13] Alexandre Elsig, "Entre discorde et concorde: La cohésion nationale à l'épreuve des propagandes," in *14/18 : La Suisse et la Grande Guerre,* eds. Roman Rossfeld, Thomas Duomberger, and Patrick Kury (Neuchâtel: Éditions Libreo-Alphil, 2019), 84.

Voluntary associations exchanged publications and direct communications, attended each other's meetings, and practiced shared rituals. Some Swiss groups even operated as chapters of transnational organizations that bridged state borders. These connections shaped individual sympathies at the war's outset and also encouraged actions in favor of belligerents' war efforts.

This chapter argues that Pan-German civic associations in Switzterland acted as mediums for pro-German agitation and mobilization as a consequence of pre-war socio-cultural relationships between Swiss and German intellectuals. At the start of World War I, Pan-German associations became conduits for circulating propaganda, mobilizing resources, and shaping neutral public opinion in favor of Germany. The most pro-German factions in Switzerland were the German language associations centered on the German-speaking intellectual community in Zurich. These included domestic organizations like Otto von Greyerz's German-Swiss Language Association and sections of Germany-based groups such as the *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (VDA). Despite being separate entities, their memberships often overlapped, with individuals registered in multiple groups simultaneously. At their core was the Zurich chapter of the radically nationalistic Pan-German League, the largest section outside of Germany. These men imagined themselves as both Germans and Swiss, intertwining their support for the German war effort with a belief in a shared ethnic-linguistic heritage and a sense of cultural superiority embodied by German *Kultur.*[14] This dual identity fostered an imagined community interwinned with Germany that challenged the unified image of Swiss nationalism promoted at the 1914 National Exhibition. Moreover, these associations served as transnational channels linking Switzerland to Germany, enabling German propaganda to influence Swiss society while maintaining Switzerland's official political neutrality.

[14] For a parallel with Swiss intellectual history during the war, see Bonjour, *Swiss Neutrality,* 106-107.

1.1.2: Historiography: The Transnational links of Pan-German Associations

The Pan-German League is a thoroughly researched topic in the historiography of nineteenth and twentieth century Germany. From Fritz Stern's *The Politics of Cultural Despair* in 1961 to James Retallack's *The German Right* in 2006, historians linked the League to Germany's march toward authoritarianism and as part of the radicalization of the German Right. Founded in Berlin in 1891, the Pan-German League emerged during a period of social upheaval among Germany's *Bildungsbürgertum*. These educated members of the middle class gravitated toward nationalistic ideologies due to a feeling that the "authority and cultural values that they represented were under attack in an era of rapid change."[15] While colonial concerns initially motivated the League, its scope quickly expanded to address broader issues deemed critical for Germany's future. Members championed an ethnic German nationalism based on shared linguistic ties and cultural superiority. For many, Bismarck's unification of Germany represented an incomplete project within the goal of creating of a true German nation state. Although its membership remained a small elite circle, the Pan-German League grew into a formidable force for political mobilization by the First World War. Geoff Eley highlights how it infiltrated Germany's hierarchical political structure enabling it to influence policy from a grassroots level.[16] Eley argues that the Pan-German societies' impact on the German political arenas depended on the character of its internal social relations. Similarly, Rainer Hering's work *Konstruierte Nation* demonstrates how the League shaped German political culture through bottom-up authority, through regional case studies like Hamburg.[17] The Pan-German League adapted effectively to local contexts, building an active following. Its activism and socio-

[15] Chickering, "War, Peace, and Social Mobilization," 8-9.
[16] Eley, *Reshaping the German Right*, 121-122.
[17] Hering, *Konstruierte Nation.*

political gravitas positioned it as a crucial player in crafting the ideological framework of German nationalism and inventing the image of the German nation.

A significant shift in the Pan German League's historiography occurred in the 1980s with the emergence of a new wave of social and cultural studies. This transition was spearheaded by Roger Chickering's pivotal work, *We Men Who Feel Most German,* which introduced a prosopographical approach to understanding the League's inner workings. Chickering demonstrated that the Pan-German League was not merely a faceless political entity run by a small group of ideologues. Instead, he examined its social composition and day-to-day operations at the local level, revealing how the League mobilized public support through extensive interpersonal network of relationships.[18] These socio-cultural connections extended beyond the League itself, linking it to broader civil society. Members of the Pan-German League were often involved in other nationalist associations and frequently collaborated with them.[19] These partnerships included politically driven pressure groups like the Navy League as well as voluntary associations that were less explicitly political in nature. Chickering's analysis underscored how these overlapping memberships and their practiced agitation techniques played a key role in mobilizing the German public on the eve of the war.

The VDA (formerly the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein,* founded in 1881) shared the Pan-German League's nationalist motivations, but prioritized community activism over direct political engagement. Its efforts focused on promoting German culture and language, particularly educational initiatives like establishing language schools in minority-German areas. Gerhard Weidenfeller's monograph on the VDA was among the first compare it to the Pan-German

[18] Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984).

[19] Chickering, "War, Peace, and Social Mobilization," in *Peace Movements and Political Culture,* 9.

League, outlining its difference as a non-political, cultural-humanitarian association.[20] He revealed how the VDA sought to counter the assimilation of emigrated Germans abroad, shaping the concept of a broader German nation while reinforcing the imperialist, colonial aspirations championed by the Pan-German League. Despite presenting itself as apolitical, Weidenfeller proves that overlapping memberships between the two groups enabled the VDA to function as a near-political entity, influencing imperial policy in Germany while maintaining a veneer of social neutrality. The VDA also provided avenues for transnational activity, contrasting with the Pan-German League's increasing focus on imperial politics as the war approached. A shift occurred with later studies by Tara Zahra in *Kidnapped Souls* and Pieter Judson in *Guardians of the Nation,* who examined the VDA from socio-cultural and grassroots perspectives. Both historians focused on its operations in linguistic borderlands within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For example, Zahra highlighted conflicts between German and Czech languages in Bohemia, showing how civic associations like the VDA contested who belong to either German or Bohemian nationalities. Zahra found that these groups adapted their ideologies to local conditions, blending nationalistic goals with community-specific socio-cultural elements. In interwar Czechoslovakia, this hybridity even led German nationalist groups to align with democratic and liberal values.[21] Zahra also demonstrated that such civic associations played a significant role in fostering "official nationalism," providing public services and mobilized political support where Habsburg state structures faltered.[22] Judson expanded on this by illustrating how associations like the VDA coordinated empire-wide activities, from German-

[20] Gerhard Weidenfeller, *VDA, Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland. Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein (1881-1918): Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Nationalismus und Imperialismus im Kaiserreich* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1976), 7-11.

[21] Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008)*,* 272.

[22] Ibid.*,* 80-81.

Italian border communities in the Alps to German colonies in Transylvania.[23] Collectively, their localized nation-building work constructed an image of a transnational, German-speaking community within Austro-Hungary's multi-ethnic empire.

Efforts to explore the international connections of Pan-German civic associations remain limited, particularly regarding their activities in Switzerland and their relationship with the broader German nationalist movement from a transnational perspective. Klaus Urner's seminal 1976 work, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* is one of the few foundational texts in this field. His analysis, preceding Chickering's methods, traces Pan-German ideological currents through personal relationships and transnational networks linking Switzerland to the German empire. He examines the German expatriate community in nineteenth century Switzerland, primarily in Zurich, categorizing it into two main groups: the national-liberal bourgeois and the working class. The bourgeois included political exiles and *Bildungsbürterum* teaching at Swiss universities, who provided early support for organizations like the Pan-German League and VDA. They also found allies among the German-Swiss citizens who aligned with German interests due to factors such as "profitable economic relations, lively cultural exchanges, admiration of Prussian military discipline and solidarity based on linguistic nationalism."[24] However, Urner ends his study at the outbreak of the First World War, acknowledging that further research is required to fully document the associational histories of Pan-German civic associations.[25] As such, comprehensive transnational history of the Pan-German connections between individuals and civic associations in Switzerland and Germany, particularly in relation to pro-German activities during this period, remains a significant gap in historiography.

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[23] Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8-18.

[24] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 204.

[25] Ibid, 68-73.

At the heart of pro-German associational life is the concept of a shared imagined community that transcends political borders, built upon semiotic systems of shared norms and behaviors. Jan Vermeiren's *The First World War and German National Identity* extensively surveys this through the interplay between culture, national identity and the First World War.[26] Vermeiren concentrates on the cultural dynamics of German national identity between the German Empire and Austro-Hungary, illustrating how interconnected, interstate interest groups offered alternative visions of the German nation during the war. While many radical right-wing politicians in Germany sought to centralize power further within the imperial state as the war progressed, Vermeiren shows how cooperation between Germany and Austria-Hungary revealed the enduring appeal of nineteenth century *Großdeutsch* concepts of a unified, regional nation-state in Central Europe.[27] These alternative imaginations were closely tied to wartime goals, with both civic associations at the grassroots level and state institutions promoting closer ties between the Central Powers as a means of mobilization. Intellectual currents during this period also revived ideas of tighter economic integration and even proposals for a federal political system to unite the German people as part of the vision for a post-war Central Europe.

This chapter explores how transnational, socio-cultural currents of German nationalism influenced Pan-German individuals and associations in Switzerland. While Switzerland remains underexplored in this historiography, recent studies on other neutral countries and German nationalism provide valuable insights. For example, Ismee Tames's recent work on the Netherlands during the First World War uncovers a similar case of Pan-German activism and pro-German agitation in a neutral country. In the Netherlands, pre-war German nationalists established the pro-German paper *Die Toekomst*, which became a domestic source of German

[26] Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity.*
[27] Ibid, 8.

propaganda supporting the wartime goals of the German state.[28] The paper's intellectual content and the socio-cultural networks of its contributors not only challenged Dutch neutrality but also questioned whether Dutch national identity aligned with a shared linguistic heritage tied to a greater Central European Germany. Drawing on Tames's framework, this chapter examines Switzerland's neutrality and national identity in a similar light. It argues that Pan-German civic associations in Switzerland, such as the Pan-German League and VDA, acted as conduits for pro-German activity as a result of pre-war socio-cultural and transnational organizational networks. These networks formed a common organizational culture through personal relationships and shared imaginations of Greater German community. In doing so, they contested the notions of Swiss neutrality as well as both German and Swiss national identity. Especially during the first year of the war, these civic associations functioned as domestic, ready-made channels for pro-German agitation, allowing Germany to leverage them for its wartime objectives.

1.2.1: The Revolutions of 1848/1849 and German Emigration to Switzerland

The *Kleindeutschland/Großdeutschland* debate served as the bedrock of Pan-Germanism in Switzerland in the nineteenth century. Following the Napoleonic Wars, a new "German Question" emerged, as intellectuals debated the political shape of the German nation. At the same time, German nationalism's ideological development gravitated around uniting a common people defined by cultural and linguistic heritage. However, disagreements arose over the degree of political unification that this national identity should pursue. After the Vienna Congress, German-speaking people in Central Europe were divided among the German Confederation, the Austrian Empire, and Prussia. Intellectuals also considered other areas like Switzerland and

[28] Ismee M. Tames, "How a Pro-German Minority influenced Dutch Intellectual Debate during the Great War," in *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies,* eds. Jenny MacLeod and Pierre Purseigle (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 261-277.

German-speaking colonies in Eastern Europe as parts of a "Greater Germany." Proponents of this *Großdeutschland* envisioned a union incorporating all the German-speaking Central Europe, particularly uniting the German Confederation with the Austrian Empire. Conversely, supporters of *Kleindeutschland* favored excluding the Habsbug Monarchy's crown lands, advocating instead for a smaller union dominated by Prussia.

Switzerland's role in this debate primarily came through the activities of German-speaking expatriates rather than native German-Swiss populations. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the liberal atmosphere of the Swiss cantons drew German intellectuals engaging in scholarly activity. Political activists sought refuge in Switzerland, using it as a safe haven to disseminate their agitation across Central Europe. These immigrants formed German colonies in Swiss-German cities such as Zurich and Basel while also maintaining ties with the larger German-speaking community in Central Europe. By the latter half of the century, many of these activists were integrated into local Swiss communities, constructing a socio-cultural network between Switzerland and other German states. It was at the end of the century that German nationalists began finding receptive German-Swiss supporters, who were brought up in this milieu of German intellectual exchange, for their nationalist agenda.

Between 1815 and 1848, German immigration and transnational academic exchange marked the first period of significant German influence on Switzerland's collegiate development. For much of this time, the University of Basel was the only university in Eastern Switzerland, forcing Swiss youth to study abroad in German states. Upon returning, these students brought ideas from the *Vörmarz* era, including romanticism, nationalism, and liberalism. The University of Zurich opened in 1833, followed by the University of Bern in 1844. These institutions heavily relied on faculty recruited from their German neighbors, fostering Swiss-German academic

ties.[29] In particular, the University of Zurich consciously recruited prominent German natural scientists, such as Johann Lucas Schönlein and Lorenz Oken, in its mission to become a premier scientific institution.[30] Recruitment was not difficult as Switzerland's universities were particularly attractive to liberal, reformist academics seeking socio-political asylum. German professors brought their political agendas to Switzerland, influencing Swiss students while using their positions to send agitation back into Germany.[31]

German-Swiss academic exchange had a marked effect on Swiss political thought and institutions. Until this period, the Swiss cantons operated as largely independent entities, with a Diet—established in the sixteenth century—serving as its only form of centralized governance. However, throughout the 1840s, public demands rose for political reforms emphasizing centralization, federalism, and liberal principles. Several cantons opposed these changes by forming the Sonderbund alliance within Swiss Confederation in 1845. In 1847, a majority of the Diet declared the Sonderbund illegal, triggering a brief civil war. The conflict, known as the Sonderbund War, was primarily between Protestant reformists and Catholic traditionalists, rather than along the French-German linguistic divide that characterized later tensions in the early twentieth century.[32] The war lasted only a month and was relatively bloodless, with fewer than a hundred casualties. Federalist, protestant forces successfully compelled the Sonderbund cantons to surrender. In 1848, representatives from all cantons drafted a new constitution, establishing a federal government with a bicameral legislature.

The conclusion of the Sonderbund War in late 1847 and the subsequent reformation of Switzerland's political structure sparked the Europe-wide revolutions of 1848. The revolutionary

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[29] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 443-445.
[30] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 99-105.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Joachim Remak, *A Very Civil War: The Swiss Sonderbind War of 1847* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

upheavals in the German states that began in March drew inspiration from Swiss federalists, but they were also directly fueled by Swiss-sourced agitation. Switzerland became a hub for radical liberal propaganda, with many Swiss traveling north to join rallies and engage in street fighting, particularly in Baden. Such activities prompted Frederick William IV of Prussia to label Switzerland a "rat's nest" (*Brutstette für Ratten)* of radicalism.[33] The German states, led by Prussia, demanded that Switzerland extradite its foreign agitators.[34] However, the Swiss cantons maintained their neutrality, citing their long-standing freedoms of association and asylum as grounds to refuse these demands. At the Frankfurt Assembly, Switzerland played no official role in debates over *Großdeutschland* versus *Kleindeutschland* solutions for a German state. Nonetheless, Swiss federalist mentors influenced some assembly members, and representatives questioned what Switzlerland's relationship would be with a new federal state in Central Europe. Despite these discussions, infighting over the German Question, Prussia and Austria's rejection of constitutional drafts, and successful military suppression of street protests ultimately doomed the Frankfurt Assembly's goal of achieving a federalist state.

The conclusion of the 1848 revolutions marked the beginning of a second phase in the transnational links underpinning Pan-Germanism in Switzerland. Switzerland's role as a refuge for political exiles expanded as 1848 revolutionaries, known as 1848ers, sought asylum.[35] Many were academics who benefited from the socially accepted presence of radical German professors at Swiss universities. A new wave of political exiles, primarily National Liberals ejected from the failed Frankfurt Assembly, also arrived. They viewed Switzerland as an open society where they could continue their political activism while envisioning a unified German nation-state. One of

[33] Frederick William Dame, *History of Switzerland: Modern Switzerland from the Restoration to the Future* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 3:225-226.
[34] Zimmer, *A Contested Nation,* 143-144.
[35] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 17-18.

the most influential groups for Pan-Germanism in Switzerland was the Wislicenus family.[36] The patriarch, Gustav Adolf Wislicenus (1803-1875), was a Thuringian Biblical scholar and radical reformist. During the 1840s, he became involved with gymnastics clubs in Germany, transforming them into ideologically liberal training centers. After the revolution, he fled in 1853 to avoid imprisonment for subversive political pamphleteering. Initially relocating his family in the United States, he returned to Europe in 1856 and settled in Zurich. Of his eight children, three sons—Johannes (1835-1902), Hugo (1836-1866), and Paul (1847-1917)—became fixtures of Zurich's socio-cultural and academic life. Johannes studied chemistry at Harvard and the University of Halle before earning his doctorate at the University of Zurich in 1860. He continued teaching there and became a full professor in 1867.[37] Hugo earned a doctorate in German language, literature, and folklore at the University of Zurich in 1862 and later taught at a school in Küsnacht. He was an avid mountaineer associated with social circles in the Eastern Alps but tragically died during a climb on the Tödi massif in 1866 (see Chapter 3). Paul pursued history at the University of Zurich before completing his doctorate in Berlin in 1868, but retained close ties to Zurich's academic community. As a student, he founded the *Gesellschaft Deutscher Studirender* (German Student Society) in 1865—a social club for German and German-Swiss students and professors.[38] Originally focused on social gatherings, the group quickly grew into a political and cultural forum with over 200 members, reigniting discourse on German unification. This transition marked a shift from individual Pan-German activism to the first organized social clubs involving both Germans and Swiss. Although the society lost momentum by the 1870s, its

[36] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 534-535.

[37] Ernst Gagliardi, Hans Nabholz, and Johannes Strohl, *Die Universität Zürich, 1833-1933, und ihre Vorläufer: Festschrift zur Jahrundertfeier* (Zürich: Verlag der Erziehungsdirektion, 1938)*,* 559-607.

[38] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 521-523.

establishment solidified the Wislicenus family's lasting influence on Pan-German organizational culture up to the First World War.

1.2.2: Greater German Dreams after Imperial Unification in 1871

Alongside the Wislicenus family, the Fick family formed the second major cornerstone of German expatriates who shaped Pan-German nationalism in Switzerland. Originating from Marburg in Hesse-Kassel, the Ficks, like the Wislicenus family, were academics spanning both the humanities and the natural sciences.[39] The three brothers—Franz Ludwig (1813-1858), Heinrich (1822-1895), and Adolf (1829-1901)—studied at the University of Marburg before the 1848 revolution. While Franz Ludwig and Adolf pursued anatomy and medicine respectively, Heinrich focused on law, becoming a lawyer in 1847. Heinrich was an unapologetic political radical and participated in the Heidelberg Assembly in March 1848, which served as a preparatory parliament for the Frankfurt Assembly.[40] Following the revolution's failure, Heinrich fled Hesse-Kassel and found refuge in Switzerland through an unpaid professorship in legal studies at the University of Zurich in 1851.[41] Over the next decade, Heinrich became an expert source on Swiss commercial law, earning him a full professorship in 1864 and he frequently worked as a consultant for Swiss governmental institutions. Adolf joined his brother in Zurich in 1852, taking up a professorship in physiology at the University of Zurich.[42] He gained international recognition for his research on muscular systems, particularly those of the eyes and heart, developing several key scientific laws regarding cardiac movement and output. His academic work connected him to Johannes Wislicenus, forming a close friendship that bridged

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[39] Fritz Fick, "Pro Patre: Gedenkblätter zur Erinnerung an Prof. Dr. jur. Heinrich Fick," *Schweizerische Monatshefte für Politik und Kultur* 2, no. 8 (November 1922), 379-388.

[40] Fritz Fick, "Pro Patre: Gedenkblätter zur Erinnerung an Prof. Dr. jur. Heinrich Fick," *Schweizerische Monatshefte für Politik und Kultur* 2, no. 6 (September 1922), 269-275.

[41] Fritz Fick, "Pro Patre: Gedenkblätter zur Erinnerung an Prof. Dr. jur. Heinrich Fick," *Schweizerische Monatshefte für Politik und Kultur* 2, no. 7 (October 1922), 325-335.

[42] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (*NZZ*), no. 478, March 17, 1937.

their families' socio-political views around *Großdeutschland* ideals. Franz Ludwig remained in Marburg as an anatomy professor until his death in 1858. With his wife's passing three years earlier in 1855, he left his six-year-old son, Adolf Eugen Fick, orphaned. The namesake uncle adopted the young Adolf Eugen and raised him in Zurich.

Heinrich Fick steered the Fick family into becoming naturalized Swiss citizens rather than remaining legal resident aliens. Heinrich Fick gained Swiss citizenship in 1854 with Johannes Wislicenus doing the same for his family when he became a citizen in Zurich in 1861.[43] This distinction added complexity to the divide between being Swiss or German. By the late 1860s, the Fick family had integrated into Swiss socio-cultural circles, with many of their children fully raised in Switzerland and attended school at the University of Zurich. Although they identified as nationalists rooted in post-1848 National Liberalism, their experiences in Switzerland influenced their image of the German nation. Their Swiss environment fostered retention of early federalist ideals found in pre-1848 *Großdeutschland,* federalist advocacy, allowing them to reconcile being both German and Swiss without contradiction. Despite their political activism and ideological writings advocating German unity, they never challenged Swiss sovereignty or their federal structure. For example, Heinrich Fick was careful "not to show chauvinistic feelings in any way" towards his "adopted fatherland," though this did not mean he stopped feeling German while acting Swiss.[44]

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 and the unification of Germany under Prussian imperial authority profoundly influenced the 1848ers living in Switzerland, shaking their *Großdeutschland* dreams. While the Swiss federal government officially declared neutrality and

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[43] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz*, 212-213.

[44] Helene Fick, *Heinrich Fick: Ein Lebensbild*, *nach seinen eigenen Aufzeichnungen und Briefen dargestellt und ergänzt* (Zürich: J. Schabelitz, 1908), 2, 385-393.

mobilized its military to guard the northern border, public opinion was divided.[45] Many German-Swiss and some circles of Protestant French-Swiss supported Prussia, driven by lingering resentment against France from the Napoleonic era.[46] For Pan-Germans, their traditional opposition to Prussia converted to a rally of enthusiastic support. In November 1870, Heinrich Fick expressed his views, describing the war as "an event that can hardly be compared in importance to any other in world history. It is the victory of Germanism and the Reformation over Romanism and Papism."[47] The eighteen-year-old Adolf Eugen Fick showed his support by volunteering for service in the German military. However, Swiss public enthusiasm waned after France's defeat and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine out of fear that Switzerland might become the next multilingual target of Prussian expansion.[48]

Johannes Wislicenus originally opposed the German wars of unification, seeing the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 as a fratricidal civil war within *Großdeutschland.* Like many others, his stance shifted during the Franco-Prussian war, where he became an adamant supporter of Prussia's efforts for German unification. To celebrate Prussia's victory and German unification, Wislicenus organized a public event at Zurich's Tonhalle on March 9, 1871, along with other professors and students.[49] He and a fellow 1848er, the historian Johannes Scherr, delivered speeches to an enthusiastic crowd. Heinrich Fick was scheduled to speak next about Switzerland as a model for Central Europe following German unification, but was interrupted by pro-French protestors, including French soldiers interned in Zurich under the auspices of the International Red Cross.[50] A confrontation of stone-throwing and fist fights erupted into street violence lasting

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[45] Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals,* 129.
[46] Bonjour, *Swiss Neutrality,* 98.
[47] Fick, *Heinrich Fick,* 2: 226.
[48] Weidenfeller, *VDA,* 80-81.
[49] Fick, *Heinrich Fick,* 2:231.
[50] Fritz Fick, "Pro Patre: Gedenkblätter zur Erinnerung an Prof. Dr. jur. Heinrich Fick." *Schweizerische Monatshefte für Politik und Kultur* 2, no. 6 (September 1922), 275-277.

two days, resulting in four deaths. Order was restored only after intervention by cantonal troops from Glarus and federal forces.[51] Although Wislicenus had been a Swiss citizen since 1861, the anti-German demonstrations left a negative impression on him. In 1872, he returned to Germany, accepting a chemistry professorship at the University of Würzburg. There, he rejoined Adolf Fick, who started lecturing at the university in 1868.

Prussia's implementation of a *Kleindeutschland* through the imperial state did not spell the end of *Großdeutschland* idealism, particularly within the educational spheres of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Switzerland.[52] Some of the 1848er exiles in Switzerland returned to Germany after unification, marking their reintegration and acceptance of the *Kleindeutschland* solution. Yet, their Swiss social connections endured, influencing their brand of German nationalism. Many, such as the Fick family, maintained dual ties to Switzerland and Germany as their homelands. The vision of a *Großdeutschland* imagined community shifted from emphasizing political, even democratic, consolidation to focusing on the cultural-linguistic unity of the German people. This evolution aligned with the form of German nationalism developed by German intellectual exiles in Switzerland since 1848. From a German-Swiss perspective, this approach was attractive as it respected Swiss sovereignty without threatening the existing political structure. With the establishment of Imperial Germany, new German patriotic civic associations also emerged in Switzerland. What once revolved around university student groups now expanded into the broader German-Swiss public sphere after decades of academic influence. The German Reich Association thrived in Zurich, organizing gymnastics and socio-cultural activities for German speakers. It also held events inspired by the Reich's founding, such as Sedan Day and the Emperor's Birthday celebrations. Swiss citizens not only accepted but

[51] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 171.
[52] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa,* 24.

actively participated in these rituals, emphasizing Swiss-German cultural connections through figures like Friedrich Schiller and Gottfried Keller, without deserting their Swiss loyalty or identity.[53] In sum, a transnational social base nurtured the ideological development of German nationalism in Switzerland in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

1.2.3: Preserving the Nation through Education: The *Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein*, 1881

It was not long before German nationalists grew dissatisfied with German small-state unification. Though the nationalist ideologues celebrated the empire's foundation and Bismarck's accomplishments, they believed the unification process remained incomplete, particularly concerning Germans living outside the empire's borders. Significant German populations resided in Switzerland, Austria-Hungary, and immigrant colonies in the Americas and Eastern Europe. German nationalists expressed an anxiety over German linguistic communities abroad losing their cultural identity through passive assimilation and predatory acts from other nations.[54] As Susan Marchand illustrates, advances in travel and communication by the turn of the century facilitated international, sociocultural connections through events such as world fairs, scholarly associations, and special interest conferences. These interactions intensified nationalist competition, particularly in scientific and educational achievements, fostering chauvinism.[55] This scramble for national communities beyond Imperial Germany's borders led to Pan-Germans' fixation on imperialist expansion. However, during the 1880s under Bismarck, imperialism aimed at protecting greater Germany's image was not a priority for the state. Additionally, Imperial Germany did not challenge the sovereignty of Austria-Hungary and Switzerland.

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[53] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 493-498; Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 576-577.
[54] Weidenfeller, *VDA,* 319-323.
[55] Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 228.

Instead, Pan-German nationalists worked to promote and preserve German national identity across political boundaries through civic associations. The rise of international social relationships allowed these associations to operate transnationally and conduct a sort of cultural imperialism, without violating political sovereignty, which ensured their influence extended beyond Germany's borders while maintaining diplomatic respect for other states.

German nationalists used educational humanitarian and local infrastructure building as a means of preserving a community's German identity. Toward the late nineteenth century, numerous German school associations emerged, with the most notable being the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulveren* (ADV), later renamed *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (VDA) in 1908.[56] The society's origin traces back to Austria-Hungary and the Italian-German confrontations in the Tyroleon Alps. In 1867, a transnational group of German educators established a society called the *Komitee zur Unterstützung der deutschen Schulen in Welschtirol*. Adolf Fick was among its influential members, who collaborated with Ernst Hasse, a statistics professor at the University of Leipzig. The society funded German language schools along Austrian-Italian borderlands to combat the growing influence of Italian education after Italy's unification in 1871. By 1880, nationalist anxiety about German populations in Austria-Hungary's other linguistic borderlands intensified, leading to the creation of the *Deutschen Schulverein* by Viennese students.[57] Enthusiasm for such initiatives spread throughout the German-speaking world, with local school associations forming throughout Austria-Hungary, Imperial Germany, and Switzerland. In 1882, Berlin's ADV group, founded a year earlier, expanded its focus to support German language schools worldwide. At the same time in Switzerland, François Wille led the establishment of the *Deutscher Schulverein in der Schweiz* (DSS), which became an

[56] Weidenfeller, *VDA,* 103-108.
[57] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 75-76.

allied yet independent member of this transnational web of German language school associations.

François Wille came from a wealthy Hamburg commercial family with roots in Neuchâtel during its Prussian ownership.[58] While studying at the University in Göttingen, Wille befriended Otto von Bismarck while, on the other hand, becoming a staunch ideologue of German unification through liberal democracy.[59] Like Heinrich Fick, he participated in the preliminary parliament of the Frankfurt Assembly in 1848, which drove him to withdraw into political exile in Switzerland in 1851. He settled his family in the town of Meilen on Lake Zurich, transforming his home into a salon for German-speaking celebrities throughout Central Europe.[60] Frequent visitors included Swiss-German literary figures, such as Gottfried Keller and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, as well as Germans like Richard Wagner. Wille also cultivated friendships with other German exiles, including the Fick family. Adhering to 1848ers' *Großdeutschland* idealism, Wille embraced a cultural image of the Greater German nation after 1871. Inspired by the establishment of Berlin's school association group, he saw Swiss-German participation in the project as essential: " I was guided in my now successful efforts to found a German school association in Switzerland, not only by my interest in the matter, but also by the desire to see Switzerland once again take part in a German national affair."[61] However, Wille insisted on maintaining independence for Swiss associations rather than subsuming them under the ADV. He recognized that direct oversight from Berlin might be perceived by the Swiss public as unwelcome foreign influence.

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[58] Prussia relinquished its control over Neuchâtel after the 1848 Revolution and it became a Swiss Canton.
[59] Weidenfeller, *VDA,* 201-203.
[60] Fick, *Heinrich Fick,* 2:213.
[61] *Das Deutschtum im Ausland: Monatsheft des Allgemeinen Deutschen Schulvereins zur Erhaltung des Deutschtums im Ausland* (January 1896), 3, quoted in Weidenfeller, *VDA,* 201-203.

Wille began the DSS began in 1882, first in Zurich with subsections quickly opening in Basel and Bern.[62] François Wille leveraged his personal connections to attract prominent figures, including Conrad Ferdinand Meyer and Gottfried Keller as founding members. Membership flourished by the turn of the century, comprising influential Pan-Germans, both Swiss-Germans and German expatriates. Notably, the Fick family played a significant role, with Adolf Eugen Fick serving as a chairman on the board. By 1892, the DSS boasted an exclusive yet influential circle of 400 members, with the Zurich chapter being the largest German language association outside of Germany and Austria-Hungary.[63] The DSS also started the cross-border traffic of Pan-German literature into Switzerland. It received publications from the associations in Germany and Austria-Hungary and then circulated them to the broader public through Zurich's museums and libraries.[64] Wille boasted that the existence and success of the school association in Switzerland proved "the pride of being German stock also lives in German-Swiss people, undeterred by it."[65]

After Upon François Wille's death in 1896, the DSS's leadership transitioned to Gerold Meyer von Knonau, a native Swiss historian and University of Zurich professor who studied under Leopold von Ranke in Berlin.[66] Wille's death also marked a social change in its membership from German expatriates to more native Swiss involvement. Its Swiss members were equally committed to preserving the German nation, as reflected in its recruitment pamphlets at the time:

> The political boundaries of states are determined and measured with the greatest precision; […] the boundaries of language are completely different; they are not precisely

[62] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 11, Der Vorstand der Ortsgruppe Zürich des Deutschen Schulvereins in der Schweiz*, Für den deutschen Schulvereins in Zürich* (April 1897).
[63] *Korrespondenzblatt des Allgemeinen Deutschen Schulvereins* 1 (1883).
[64] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 342.
[65] *Mitteilungen des Allgemeinen Deutschen Schulvereins* 2 (1890), 20.
[66] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 11, Der Vorstand der Ortsgruppe Zürich des Deutschen Schulvereins in der Schweiz*, Für den deutschen Schulverein in Zürich* (April 1897).

> defined. […] Protecting this language border against violations and shifts is not one of the tasks of the state government. […] Who then is supposed to protect the language border? The Germans themselves, all of us who are of German descent and speak German as our mother tongue, we want, we must, be the guardians of the German language border! And that requires action. Because while the state borders are respected by neighbors and are only threatened in the event of war, the language borders are attacked in the midst of peace and are all too often shifted.[67]

Yet, they still emphasized the DSS's independence and avoided an official, subordinate affiliation with the ADV. Its primary activities involved collecting funds and donating material support for German language initiatives abroad in Austria-Hungary and regions like Tyrol, Bohemia, Galicia, and the Balkans.[68] However, concerns grew among members about the lack of focus on Switzerland's own linguistic challenges, especially along its internal language borders. Under Gerold von Knonau's leadership, the DSS shifted its priorities toward domestic efforts, such as maintaining a German language school in Bosco, a German-speaking village in the majority Italian-speaking canton of Ticino bordering Italy.[69] Here, the DSS faced competition from the Dante Alighieri Society, an Italian nationalist organization promoting Italian language education across Switzerland and Austria-Hungary.[70] Despite these efforts, DSS received little reciprocal support from Berlin or Vienna, leading to persistent funding shortages that weakened its operations. By 1904, membership in the Zurich group had declined to just 103 members.[71]

1.2.4: The Zurich Origins of the Pan-German League, 1890

Otto von Bismarck's resignation as chancellor in early 1890 coincided with growing imperialistic ambitions for German nationalists. German nationalists, previously focused on cultural imperialism, began advocating for Germany to claim its "own place in sun" as part of

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[67] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 11, H. Blümner, J. Brunner, Theodor Curti, etc., [Untitled], 1890.
[68] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 11, *Satzungen des Deutschen Schulvereins der Schweiz* (October 1890).
[69] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 11, Der Vorstand der Ortsgruppe Zürich des Deutschen Schulvereins in der Schweiz*, Für den deutschen Schulverein in Zürich* (April 1897).
[70] Weidenfeller, *VDA,* 135.
[71] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 12, *Aufruf des Allgemeinen Deutschen Sprachvereins* (1904).

the European scramble for overseas colonies. On June 17, 1890, outrage erupted when the *Deutsche Reichsanzeiger* published a pre-signed version of the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty between Germany and Britain.[72] The treaty exchanged the German colonial territory of Uganda and Zanzibar in Southeast Africa for Heligoland, an island off Germany's North Sea shore intended for coastal defenses. However, Pan-Germans viewed the deal as sacrificing Germany's colonial destiny to British interests. While objections surged across Germany, it was the Zurich colony that mobilized German nationalist efforts into an organized protest movement.

Beginning on June 24, several German newspapers published an article titled "Germany, Wake Up!" ("Deutschland, wach' auf!"). The piece highlighted Germany's recent military, economic, and cultural achievements, arguing that these accomplishments justified the nation's right to overseas expansion. The authors declared:

> Who can prevent a people of 50 million who dedicate their best strength to military service, who spend over half a billion a year on warfare, who can prevent such a people from tearing up a treaty that is obviously intended to cheat the future generations of their inheritance on the planet?! Truly, our sacrifices in blood and money would be too great if our military power did not even give us the opportunity to assert our right even where it does not receive the high approval of the English. […] We can also demand that we receive a price that is worth the sacrifice, and that price is: to belong to a master race that takes its share in the world for itself and does not seek to receive it from the grace and goodwill of another people. Germany wake up![73]

They concluded with a rallying call for mass petitions to be sent to the Reichstag, urging the revocation of the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty.

The undersigned authors of the article were Zurich-based Pan-Germans, not from within Imperial Germany. The four signatories included medical professors Dr. Adolf Eugen Fick, Dr.

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[72] Hering, *Konstruerte Nation,* 112-114.

[73] Appeal reprinted in Otto Bonhard, *Geschichte des Alldeutschen Verbandes* (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1920), 233-237; examples of the appeal's appearance in *Frankfurter Zeitung,* June 27, 1890; *Kölnischen Zeitung,* June 28, 1890.

Walther Felix and Dr. Otto Lubarsch, and Albert Müller, a bookseller.[74] Adolf Eugen Fick led this group, inheriting the mantle of German nationalism in Switzerland from his uncles Heinrich and Adolf. After serving in the Franco-Prussian War, he studied ophthalmology at the University of Würzburg and Zurich.[75] After receiving his medical doctorate in 1876, he immigrated to South Africa, establishing a private practice in the Boer Republic. Returning to Zurich in 1887, he resumed work as an ophthalmologist, lectured at the university, and gained renown for the inventing the contact lens.[76] He also married Marie Catharina Wislicenus, daughter of Johannes Wislicenus. Fick's time in South Africa strengthened his support for German imperialism. Upon returning to Zurich, he joined the Pan-German social circles of the medical-intellectuals at the university as well as served on the board of the DSS with François Wille.

Despite the article's loud reception, the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty was officially signed on July 1, 1890. Nevertheless, Adolf Eugen Fick and his Zurich-based Pan-Germans' article ignited momentum for creating a new German nationalist organization. Among those who answered Fick's call was Alfred Hugenberg, who would later lead the Krupp Company.[77] Like many German nationalists, Hugenberg was disappointed by the lackluster reactions from political parties and established civic associations such as the Colonial Society. He directly contacted Fick, prompting the Zurich group to release a second article on July 15 advocating for a new, nationalist organization: "The unification achieved is only the basis for the development of the German people into a cultural and political world power position. The association wants to work for an energetic colonial policy, for the spread of interest in Germany's overseas

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[74] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 331-332; For biographies of all the doctors, see Wolfang U. Eckart, *Medizin und Kolonialimperialismus: Deutschland, 1884-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997), 30.

[75] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 530-531;756.

[76] Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German,* 105.

[77] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 331-332.

commercial and civilizational tasks and for the unconditional representation of these views against any indolence."[78]

Adolf Eugen Fick recruited his father-in-law, Johannes Wisliscenus, to spearhead organizational efforts in Germany from his teaching position at the University of Leipzig. On September 28, 1890, Wisliscenus convened a small gathering of eight men in Frankfurt am Main, including Alfred Hugenberg, to plan the next steps for promoting the new organization.[79] Another preliminary meeting in Frankfurt on January 25, 1871 showcased the success of their campaign, drawing 63 attendees including influential intellectual leaders, Reichstag members, and industrial magnates. The meeting also secured Carl Peters' endorsement, famed for his adventurous role in the German colonial expansion in East Africa. Often celebrated as a trailblazing figure who carved out German territories single-handedly, Peters lent crucial public legitimacy to the Pan-German movement with his support.

The Pan-German League's founding meeting took place on April 9, 1891, in Berlin, led by Johannes Wislicenus, Carl Peters and Alfred Hugenberg.[80] Attendees agreed to establish a new association initially called the *Allgemeine Deutsche Verband*, which was renamed the *Alldeutscher Verband* (Pan-German League) three years later. The League outlined three primary goals:

1. Revitalization of patriotic consciousness at home and combating all directions opposed to national development
2. Nurturing and supporting German national aspirations in all countries where members of our people have to fight to assert their individuality, and bringing together all German elements on earth for these goals.
3. Promoting an active German interest policy in Europe and at sea. In particular, the continuation of the German colonial movement to practical results.[81]

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[78] Text reprinted in Bonhard, *Geschichte des Alldeutschen Verbandes,* 238-239.
[79] Hering, *Konstruierte Nation,* 113-114; Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German,* 48-50.
[80] Hering, *Konstruierte Nation,* 113-114.
[81] Text reprinted in Bonhard, *Geschichte des Alldeutsche Verband,* 248-251.

The founding statutes also emphasized that membership was also open to Germans abroad.[82] This approach ensured involvement from Zurich-based groups and established the League as a transnational association advocating broader German, Central European involvement. The motto, "Remember that you are German," symbolized its mission. An executive board was appointed to oversee operations, including Johannes Wislicenus, Adolf Eugen Fick, Adolf Fick, and Berlin banker Karl von der Heydt, who became the League's first chairman.[83]

Von der Heydt's tenure as chairman was short-lived. He sought to transform the association into a German political party, conflicting with the Zurich group and its allies who wanted a "non-partisan" agitation organization focused on foreign affairs rather than domestic German politics.[84] This internal conflict almost crippled the fledging society, causing membership to plummet from 21,000 in early 1892 to 5,000 by 1893.[85] Von der Heydt was ousted in 1893 and replaced by Ernst Hasse, a statistics professor at the University of Leipzig and a colleague of Johannes Wislicenus and Adolf Fick.[86] Hasse brought valuable experience from his involvement in other Pan-German initiatives, including the German Tyrolean school projects with Adolf Fick. Hasse revitalized the League by launching its flagship journal, *Alldeutsche Blätter*, in 1894, which quickly became the primary venue for Pan-German writings, news, and correspondence. Additionally, Hasse and the executive board adopted a strategy of covert influence, focusing on influencing political leaders and public opinion through allied newspapers and leveraging members' personal connections.[87] This approach compensated for the

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[82] *Mitteilungen des Allgemeinen Deutschen Verbandes* (1891), 5.

[83] Text reprinted in Bonhard, *Geschichte des Alldeutsche Verband*, 248-251; for biography on Ernst von der Heydt, see Eley, *Reshaping the German Right,* 49n20.

[84] Eley, *Reshaping the German Right,* 51.

[85] Hering, *Konstruierte Nation,* 115-116.

[86] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkreig,* 332; For a biography on Ernst Hasse, see Eley, *Reshaping the German Right,* 51n26.

[87] Hering, *Konstruierte Nation,* 171.

League's chronic funding shortages, allowing thoughtful apportionment of resources to impactful events such as its successful campaign for the Navy Bill in 1898.[88]

Under Adolf Eugen Fick's leadership, the Zurich branch of the Pan-German League was the most active outside of Imperial Germany, maintaining an average membership of about seventy. Like the DSS, the Zurich branch of the Pan-German League attracted both German expatriates and German-Swiss supporters. Unlike its counterparts in Germany, the Zurich branch rarely lobbied the Swiss government, instead focusing on steering international public opinion. A notable example was its anti-British campaign during the Boer War from 1899 to 1902, aligning with the Pan-German League's support for the Transvaal and Orange Free State.[89] The Boers established a press office in Munich, which maintained direct communication with Pan-German associations, including the Zurich branch. Leveraging this connection, the Zurich branch orchestrated a comprehensive anti-British media campaign in Switzerland. It framed the Boers' struggle as a fight for independence by a small nation, drawing parallels to people like its own. Its agitation gained traction in major Swiss newspapers, particularly the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (*NZZ*), one of eastern Switzerland's most internationally recognized publications. German allies supplied additional materials, including documentation of alleged war crimes by the British that violated international law. This strategic collaboration successfully swayed Swiss public opinion against Britain while providing Pan-Germans valuable experience in transnational agitation, a skill they later applied during the war.

The Pan-German League, like the school associations, constructed its vision of a Greater German imagined community rooted in ethnic-linguistic heritage. Both shared a central goal: advancing German success in the Darwinian struggle for global dominance. Its ideological

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[88] Eley, *Reshaping the German Right,* 72;141-142.
[89] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 324-325.

underpinnings for an imagined German community were clearly defined by Hasse in his 1905 work, *Das Deutsche Reich als Nationstaat:* "We understand a nation as a totality of people of common descent who speak one and the same language, have undergone a common political and cultural development and have the consciousness of belonging together."[90] For the Pan-Germans, not all prerequisites were necessary, but language was a common, *a priori* base for the nation's existence. Additionally, nation and state did not have to be identical, allowing for the coexistence and participation of both an imperial German nation-state and the German-speaking people of Switzerland in the mental map of greater Germany.

However, the two organizations operated in distinct spheres. While the school associations concentrated on socio-cultural initiatives at the community level, the Pan-German League focused on influencing government policies, both foreign and domestic. The Pan-German vision for Switzerland in its mental map of Central Europe was a nuanced and delicate matter. Adolf Eugen Fick did not advocate for political changes to the Swiss state. Instead, he believed that "just as people become happy in their own way, every German tribe also becomes German in their own way."[91] However, his ally Ernst Hasse viewed Switzerland's future more critically. Hasse supported increased German immigration into Switzerland as a means to protect Germany's borders and prevent the Swiss from losing their national consciousness.[92] Hasse doubted Switzerland's longevity within a continental Europe dominated by powerful, imperialist empires. He anticipated that the German-Swiss population would inevitably be absorbed into the Reich-driven German client state.[93] In the interim, Hasse and other Pan-Germans revived the nineteenth-century idea of a Central European customs union as a mechanism to unite

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[90] Ernst Hasse, *Das Deutsche Reich als Nationstaat* (München: J.F. Lehmann, 1905), 10.

[91] A[dolf Eugen] Fick, "Deutsches aus Schweiz," *Kalender aller Deutschen auf das Jahr 1894: für den "Allgemeinen Deutschen Verbandes"* (1894), 191-197.

[92] Ernst Hasse, *Deutsche Grenzpolitik* (München: Lehmann, 1906), 169.

[93] Hasse, *Das Deutsche Reich als Nationstaat,* 88.

Großdeutschland under a shared economic and political alliance.[94] Overlap in membership and leadership blurred the organizational boundaries between the two groups. As the Pan-German League gained notoriety for its political efforts, nationalists continued contributing to school associations without attracting undue public or state scrutiny. This dynamic was especially advantageous for Pan-Germans in Switzerland, enabling them to maintain sociocultural connections with counterparts in the Reich, engage in imperialist politics, and advocated for their agenda without undermining Swiss sovereignty.

The Zurich group's influence on the Pan-German League waned around the turn of the century. Key leaders passed away, including Adolf Fick in 1901 and Johannes Wislicenus in 1902, leaving Adolf Eugen Fick as its sole remaining member of the Fick-Wislicenus familial network on the executive board. This gradual loss of leadership culminated in a dramatic shift with the death of Ernst Hasse in 1908.[95] Heinrich Claß, the new chairman, radicalized the Pan-German League, diverging from its original path established by earlier leaders. Claß revived von der Heydt's vision of transforming the League into a nationalist party, redirecting its focus toward German foreign and domestic policy along with his own racist radicalization of its ideology.[96] This pivot represented a departure from the *Großdeutschland* aspirations favored by the Zurich group towards an incomplete *Kleindeutschland* driven by Prussian militarism. The change alienated Swiss Pan-Germans and led to a steady decline in Zurich's section of the League until the First World War.[97] Yet, their relationships across political borders remained amicable, and pathways for nationalist agitation continued within their social network, with the Swiss-Germans pivoting back to the cultural work of the language associations.

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[94] Ernst Hasse, *Weltpolitik, Imperialismus und Kolonialpolitik* (München: Lehmann, 1908), 49; also, see Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German,* 78-79.

[95] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 335-336.

[96] Hering, *Konstruierte Nation,* 190-219; Eley, *Reshaping the German Right,* 242-253.

[97] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 68-73.

1.2.5: A Swiss-German Nationalist Association: The German-Swiss Language Association

The passing of the old guard marked a new era for the Pan-German community in Zurich, led by Alfred Eugen Fick and Fritz Fick, son of Heinrich Fick, who had died in 1895. Fritz followed his father's ideological and professional footsteps, becoming a highly respected lawyer recognized across Switzerland. Leadership of the Pan-German movement in Switzerland now transitioned to second- and third- generation descendants of families who had settled there after the 1848 revolution. Additionally, native German-Swiss now constituted the majority of German nationalists, replacing expatriates and naturalized citizens. One of the prominent figures embodying this German-Swiss nationalism was Eduard Blocher, a Protestant pastor born in Basel to a factory owner with close economic ties to Germany.[98] Blocher studied theology at the Universities of Basel, Marburg, and Berlin. After finishing his studies, he served as a pastor attached to the French Foreign Legion in Algeria from 1884 to 1888. Upon returning to Switzerland, Blocher preached in bilingual communities within the canton of Valais and pursued writing and journalism. He cultivated a dual identity: loyalty to Swiss civic values and patriotism alongside advocacy for German ethnic-linguistic nationalism.

At the turn of the century, the DSS experienced a similar crisis to that of the Zurich branch of the Pan-German League. Its annual meeting in 1904 revealed a sharp decline in membership, down to just 103 members, down from its height of 400 in the mid-1890s. The association achieved little within Switzerland, offering only minimal support to the Bosco school while focusing most of its efforts abroad. During the meeting, an unnamed Swiss member voiced concerns about this imbalance:

> A member, […] pointed out that although it is absolutely necessary for a German school association and for all German speakers, including us German-Swiss, to strongly support the defense against the Czech and Magyar 'culture' in the interest of preserving

[98] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 194-196.

> Germanness in Central Europe, the German association in Switzerland is primarily responsible for its activities should be aimed at Switzerland. He pointed out how, in our case, its most natural rights were impaired and ultimately its existence was threatened by the unfavorability of even state authorities, such as in the Bernese Jura, and partly by the arrogant and reckless disregard of the most obvious needs of the population by the railway and postal administration. He therefore requests that the association's funds be used exclusively in Switzerland.[99]

While many attendees agreed with these sentiments, they argued that reconstituting the association's purpose would conflict with its original mission. In response, a group of German-Swiss nationalists—including Eduard Blocher, Jakob-Brodbeck-Arbenz, and Fritz Fick—initiated a call for a new German-Swiss nationalist organization.[100] Otto von Greyerz authored the invitation circular for a founding meeting held on November 20, 1904.[101] This gathering established the *Deutschschweizerischer Sprachverein* (DSV), whose goals echoed those of earlier school associations: "It aims to awaken love and understanding for the German mother tongue; […] to help the German language to gain its rights on Swiss soil."[102] The DSV set clear boundaries: membership was restricted to Swiss citizens, it avoided political affiliations or party involvement, and it emphasized the German language as the basis for its common history, ethnicity, as well as "the true reflection of our democratic form of government."[103] The official connections to the Pan-German League and other language associations were also dripped to avoid public mistrust and accusations of foreign influence.[104]

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[99] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 11, Ortsgruppe Zürich*, Hauptversammlung des Deutschen Schulvereins in der Schweiz* (February 28, 1904).

[100] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 13, Ed. Blocher, J. Brodbeck-Arbenz, E.F. Garruax, etc., [Untitled], October 1904.

[101] Reprinted in August Steiger, "Otto von Greyerz und der Deutschschweizerische Sprachvereine," 32-38.

[102] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 13, *Satzungen des Deutscheweizerischen Sprachvereins* (November 20, 1904).

[103] Otto von Greyerz, "Mundart und Schriftsprache in der Schweiz: einst und jetzt," *Jährliche Rundschau Deutschschweizerischen Sprachvereins* 11 (1915), 23-24.

[104] August Steiger, "Vierzig Jahre Sprachverein: Zur Feier des Vierzigjahrigen Bestandes des Deutschschweizerischen Sprachvereins am 29. Weinmonat 1944," *Rundschau des Deutschenschweizerischen Sprachvereins* 40 (1944), 17-18.

The DSV's activities blended elements of both school associations and the Pan-German League. It focused on promoting German language education, offering resources for proper German usage and preserving Swiss dialects. These efforts included publishing and donating books on grammar and vocabulary, as well as pocket guides for replacing foreign words with German equivalents in daily speech, many authored by Otto von Greyerz.[105] It also recommended "good" German authors like Swiss-German Gottfried Keller, alongside Germans such as Herder and Schiller.[106] The DSV also broke with the mold of other language associations by actively lobbied cantonal and federal governments on issues concerning the "fair" treatment of the German language. One of its earliest initiatives in 1904 involved Eduard Blocher's campaign for equal recognition of the German language in the Upper Valais/Wallis region, where commercial and governmental practices often used only French names and writings despite the area being bilingual.[107] In May of that year, Blocher submitted an article to the *Zeitschrift des allgemeinen deutschen Sprachvereins* in Germany to leverage his transnational connections with other nationalist associations. At its founding meeting, the DSV embraced Blocher's campaign and launched a two-pronged approach of agitating the public as well as government officials.[108] Publicly, it pressured companies to print postcards and travel pamphlets using both French and German place names.[109] Locally, it influenced governments to change train time tables and other signage to include German names. Finally, it petitioned the Federal Council to ensure customs officials used both languages equally.

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[105] Steiger, "Otto von Greyerz und der Deutschschweizerische Sprachvereine," 32-38.
[106] Greyerz, "Mundart und Schriftsprache in der Schweiz: einst und jetzt," 24-27.
[107] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 12, Schweizerische Ober-Zolldirektion to H.C. Oswald, September 5, 1904.
[108] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 13, Der geschäftsfuhrende Ausschuss, *Deutschschweizerischer Sprachverein* ([1904]).
[109] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 13, Deutschweizerischer Sprachverein, *Flugblatt 1* (January 1906).

The DSV's primary focus remained on German-language schooling along the linguistic border regions following its early agitation campaigns. It provided new support to schools in Ticino, including Bosco, and propped up the *Tessiner Zeitung,* a local newspaper promoting news and nationalist propaganda for the German-speaking minority.[110] Its most significant pre-war initiative, however, centered on the Bernese Jura, a historically French-speaking area administered by the predominantly German-speaking canton of Bern. Since the late nineteenth century, this region was growing due to immigration from German-speaking areas of Switzerland. The DSV saw this expansion as analogous to German efforts with Alsace-Lorraine and supported local German-language schools as part of a broader effort to expand German linguistic territory. While publicly framing its efforts as advocating for the equal treatment of German and French, it feared locals might be "Romanized" by French nationalist associations also in the region, particularly *Action Française*[111]. Blocher led the project with involvement from regional experts such as von Greyerz and Emil Garraux. In 1911, the DSV discreetly sought funding from Berlin's VDA to support Jura schools. To avoid public perceptions of foreign interference, these donations were recorded under vague categories like "Alpine countries except Tyrol."[112] The money was funneled to ecclesiastic officials, mostly Mennonite or Anabaptist, operating the schools. Despite their formal separation in 1904, the collaboration between the DSV and German language associations continued until the start of the war, demonstrating ongoing transnational ties between the two organizations.

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[110] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 342.

[111] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 44.

[112] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 8, Speier to Blocher, October 18l, 1911. For the cooperation between Blocher and the VDA over the German funding of Jura schools, see all the letters between Hans Speier and Blocher in AFZ, NL Eduard Blocher 8.

In 1910, Fritz Fick published a work titled, "Is there a Swiss nation and culture?," arguing that Swiss democracy and citizenship were fundamentally rooted in a German soul.[113] This was followed by Blocher with an article of a similar nature in *Wissen und Leben,* unleashing a flurry of responses among the Swiss intellectual elite.[114] Serving as a forum for Swiss intellectual-cultural debates since 1907, *Wissen und Leben* became a battleground over the nature of Swiss national identity.[115] These polemics continued until 1914, highlighting divisions between French- and German-speaking Switzerland in the years leading up to the war. This cultural and linguistic "ditch" was evident even to outsiders, with the German press acknowledging the national discord within Switzerland.[116] As such, the image of Swiss national unity displayed at the Swiss National Exhibition was truly an illusion on the eve of the war. Nearly a century of Pan-German associational activity cemented a pro-German element within Swiss civil society. Initially composed of exiles, this network evolved into a close-knit social circle of Germans and German-Swiss, bound by personal relationships, the *Kleinarbeit,* or everyday work, of their organizational culture, and a shared vision of a linguistically-unified greater Germany.[117] Over decades, Pan-Germans cultivated German nationalism and pro-German sentiment among the German-speaking population of Switzerland. Although organizations like the VDA and the Pan-German League were in decline in Switzerland, they were replaced by the uniquely Swiss DSV. By 1914, the DSV had over 200 members, double that of the VDA, and far outpaced the Pan-German League's Zurich chapter.[118] Its membership directory included cultural leaders in Switzerland, like the DSS's Gerold Meyer von Knonau and the writer Ernst Zahn.

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[113] Fritz Fick, *Gibt es eine schweizerische Nation und Kultur?* (Zürich: Verlag von Rascher & Cie, 1910).

[114] Eduard Blocher, "Sind wir Deutsche?," *Wissen und Leben* 5 (October 1, 1909 – March 15, 1910), 436-453.

[115] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 591.

[116] For examples, see Fritz Simon, "Französischer Chauvinismus in Genf," *Dresdner Nachrichten,* March 18, 1913; [N.A.], "Der Gotthartvertrag und die Westschweiz," *Kölnische Zeitung,* March 18, 1913.

[117] Eley, *Reshaping the German Right,* 139-140.

[118] *Jährliche Rundschau des Deutschschweizerischen Sprachvereins* 9 (1913), 50-53.

Offering a distinctly Swiss public face, the DSV avoided charges of foreign interference while maintaining direct transnational ties to organizations and individuals in the Reich. Thus, Germany entered the war with an experienced and well-prepared network for agitation within Switzerland.

1.3.1: The German War Effort on the March in Switzerland, August-December 1914.

The immediate outbreak of war in Europe in early August 1914 turned Eastern Switzerland into a spontaneous rally for the German cause. The mood in Zurich mirrored the atmosphere of German cities experiencing what Peter Fritzsche describes as the public *Volksgemeinschaft* of the "Spirit of 1914."[119] The exuberance of returning German expatriates attracted willing participation by the German-Speaking Swiss, who "experienced the collective intoxication" of the German triumphal processions in their streets.[120] Crowds of locals lined the streets daily while waving red, white, and black imperial German flags and singing *Die Wacht am Rhein* as thousands of men "marched in military columns to the train station to rush to the aid of the fatherland."[121] The only counter to their singing of *Die Wacht am Rhein* was the working-class youth led by German socialist exile Willi Münzenberg belting *Die Internationale,* but their demonstrations were too small to disrupt this pro-German public unity.[122]

On August 3, 1914, the Federal Council declared the Switzerland's official neutrality. Despite this, German-Swiss citizens publicly demonstrated their enthusiastic support for the Central Powers. The Federal Council struggled to contain the outpour of chauvinistic sentiment

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[119] Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3, 107-108.
[120] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 609-616.
[121] G.W. Zimmerli, *Durch Frankreich und Deutschland während des Krieges 1914/1915: Beobachtungen und Erlebnisse eines Schweizers* (Berlin: Verlag Karl Curtius, 1915), 14-19.
[122] Willi Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front: Aufzeichnungen aus 15 Jahren proletarischer Jugendbewegung* (1930; repr., Berlin: Litpol Verlagsgesellschaft, 1979), 141-142.

in the German-Swiss press.[123] In Zurich, publications like the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* (NZN) endorsed Germany's interpretation of the war as a defensive response to Russian aggression.[124] They condemned England for joining the war and warned that a German defeat would threaten Switzerland's very existence. Even major outlets like the *NZZ* occasionally displayed bias—for instance blaming Belgium's lack of military preparedness and pre-war diplomacy for Germany's violation of Belgium neutrality.[125] Meanwhile, the opposite end of the country rallied in support of France, rupturing the "ditch" between the language groups. The DSS's members described the scene as an "internal war, like the external one between France and Germany."[126]

Many individuals within the Pan-German associations in Switzerland were not content with simply lending their pens to the German war effort and took direct action, extending their involvement beyond propaganda. Members of the Fick family personally volunteered for military service and were scattered across the various theaters of the war. Adolf Fick's son, Friedrich, served as an officer on the Western Front, while another son, Rudolf, worked in a surgical clinic in Innsbruck for Austria-Hungary. Adolf Eugen Fick was appointed as a Colonel and served as a medical officer overseeing military hospitals on both the Western and Eastern Fronts.[127] His sons followed suit: Roland served in the German military on the Western Front, while Roderich joined colonial forces fighting in Cameroon.[128] Fritz Fick, Heinrich's Fick son, remained in Zurich, becoming a key figure for coordinating transnational Pan-German agitation efforts. Collaborating with Eduard Blocher, Fritz ensured that the DSV maintained contact with

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[123] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#788, Hoffmann to Bundesrat, September 29, 1914; also, see Carlo Moos, "Neutralité(s) Suisse(s) à l'époque de la Première Guerre mondiale: La mise en œuvre difficile d'un concept controversé," trans. Valentine Meunier, in *14/18 : La Suisse et la Grande Guerre,* eds. Roman Rossfeld, Thomas Buomberger, and Patrick Kury (Neuchâtel: Éditions Livreo-Alphil, 2019), 208.

[124] *NZN,* no. 212, August 4, 1914; see a non-Zurich example in *Basler Volksblatt*, August 5*,* 1915.

[125] *NZZ,* no. 1251, 1 ed., August 24, 1914.

[126] *Jährliche Rundschau des Deutschschweizerischen Sprachvereins* 11 (1915), 8-9.

[127] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 9, A[dolf Eugen] Fick to E. Blocher, November 14, 1914.

[128] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 9, A[dolf Eugen] Fick to E. Blocher, February 5, 1915; A[dolf Eugen] Fick to E. Blocher, February 23, 1915; A[dolf Eugen] Fick to E. Blocher, April 11, 1915.

Pan-German activists in Germany and Austria-Hungary. He frequently crossed borders to meet with other nationalists, including visits to the home of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a British-German racial theorist turned anti-British propagandist for Germany. Early in the war, Fritz and Chamberlain met with other pro-German activists like Swedish alpinist Sven Hedin (see Chapter 3).[129] Locally, Fritz organized fundraising events such as "Kriegsbilder Abend" in Zurich that supported Swiss-based aid associations for wounded German soldiers, like the *Deutschen Hilfsverein* (See Chapter 4).[130]

Despite Switzerland's official commitment to neutrality, the Swiss government took minimal action to prevent Germans or Swiss-Germans from enlisting in foreign militaries at the start of the war. German consulates operated as recruitment and mustering centers, conducting health examinations and other enlistment procedures on Swiss soil. Pro-German advertisements and propaganda even appeared in French-Swiss regions like Neuchatel and Lausanne.[131] When questioned, the Federal Council ruled that these domestic activities did not violate Switzerland's neutrality. It also permitted Swiss citizens without German citizenship to receive German military benefits, including pensions and injury support.[132] Families of volunteers were allowed to receive financial assistance from foreign sources, particularly from German aid and humanitarian organizations. The only significant restriction arose in the case of Max Schulthuss, a Swiss man who volunteered for the German army at the start of the war.[133] The Swiss military department ruled that Swiss citizens must first fulfill their obligations to Switzerland's mobilization before joining foreign armies. In 1916, police even found German War Ministry

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[129] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 10, F. Fick to Blocher, February 19, 1915.
[130] *NZZ*, no. 1558, 3 ed., November 20, 1914.
[131] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#229, F. Leuenberger to Chef du Département de Police, September 1, 1914 ; Chef du Département de Police to Département fédéral de Justice et Police à Berne, September 4, 1914.
[132] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#1843, Schweizerische Gesandtschaft in Berlin, *Aufzeichnung,* ([N.D.]).
[133] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#1843, Schweiz. Militärdepartment to the Schweiz. Politische Departement, August 18, 1915.

officials using the Basel central train station as a mustering office. Instead of causing a diplomatic incident, officials politely asked the Germans to move their activities to the local consulate office.[134] While exact numbers are uncertain, German humanitarian associations estimated that 35,000 to 40,000 individuals of Swiss origin volunteered for service in the German military.[135] In comparison, Alan Kramer estimates that there were only 8,000 volunteers from Imperial Germany's own multilingual, French and German speaking region, Alsace-Lorraine.[136] Switzerland's population was double that of Alsace-Lorraine, 3.8 million to 1.8 million, but had double the volunteer rate per capita.

The social integration of Pan-German elites in Switzerland provided Germany with an important and immediate military advantage. On August 1, the Swiss Federal Council ordered the general mobilization of the Swiss military to safeguard its borders. Two days later, the Federal Council elected Ulrich Wille as the army's commanding general.[137] The son of exiled Pan-German François Wille, Ulrich inherited his father's Germanophile sympathies, amplified by a strong alignment with Prussian militarism. As a young officer, he trained at the German artillery school in Berlin and married Clara von Bismarck, cousin of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. This familial connection proved advantageous for Germany, as Major Herbert von Bismarck, a nephew of Chancellor von Bismarck, served as the German military attaché in

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[134] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#229, Miescher, Basel Police Department to Political Department, November 23, 1916; Political Department to Police Department Basel, November 28, 1916.

[135] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Erster Jahresbericht für 1916* (Zürich: Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, 1917), 6.

[136] Alan Kramer, "*Wackes* at war: Alsace-Lorraine and the failure of German national mobilization, 1914-1918," in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War,* ed. John Horne (Cambrdige, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 107-108.

[137] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 620-628; for a summary on the inner workings between the Swiss government and military, see Angelo M. Codevilla, *Between the Alps and a Hard Place: Switzerland in World War II and Moral Blackmail Today* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2000), 39.

Switzerland during the war.[138] Wille's pre-war career was defined by his efforts to modernize the Swiss military, transitioning from a cantonal militia system to one modeled on Prussian drills. His reforms were so effective that the American military attaché under Pleasant A. Stovall, US Ambassador in Bern remarked that the Swiss "out German the Germans" upon witnessing Swiss mobilization in August 1914.[139] However, Wille was unpopular among French-speaking Swiss citizens due to his refusal to speak any language other than High German.[140] Despite this opposition, any protests against his leadership within the Federal Council were overturned by Councilor Arthur Hoffmann, whose intervention underscored his own pro-German leanings to many French-Swiss representatives.

Colonel Theophil Sprecher von Bernegg, Chief of the Swiss General Staff in August 1914, represented another pro-German influence within the Swiss military. The position of General in the Swiss army was only elected by the Federal Council for immediate military operations during times of emergency while the Chief of the General Staff maintain military's administration even during peace time. Sprecher von Bernegg, who had held this position since 1905, came from a Graübunden aristocratic family with roots in Austria-Hungary.[141] His cousin, Arthur Heinrich Sprecher von Bernegg, was a Major General in the Austrian army and held Austrian-Swiss dual citizenship. Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg mistrusted Italy and anticipated a future military confrontation between the two countries. Before the First World War, he developed contingency plans with Germany and Austria-Hungary for potential conflicts

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[138] Alfred Erich Senn, *Diplomacy and Revolution: The Soviet Mission to Switzerland, 1918* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1974), 27.

[139] Heinz K. Meier, *Friendship under Stress: U.S.-Swiss Relations, 1900-1950* (Bern: Herbert Lang & Co., 1970), 21-22.

[140] P. Moeyes, "Neutral Tones: The Netherlands and Switzerland and their interpretations of Neutrality, 1914-1918," in *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940,* eds. Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 71-72.

[141] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 302-303.

involving France or Italy.[142] While Switzerland's neutrality precluded formal alliances, they made an informal under-the-table defensive pact for a possible confrontation with Italy. In 1912, both Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg and General Wille hosted Kaiser Wilhelm II during his visit to Switzerland, with public fanfare of Swiss and German flags in Zurich.[143] The German Emperor inspected the Swiss military while also meeting local Pan-German association leaders during the visit.

Both General Wille and Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg had indirect ties to Pan-German associations in Switzerland through their sons. Major Ulrich Wille Jr. and Dr. Anton Sprecher von Bernegg were leading voices in the German-Swiss Language Association during the war (See Chapter 2). Despite their fathers' high-ranking military positions, they actively authored pro-German propaganda throughout the war, frequently drawing sharp criticism from the French-speaking Press. The two sons also maintained close personal relationships with Fritz Fick, who leveraged these connections to gain access to their fathers during the war, further reinforcing Pan-German influence within the Swiss military.[144]

These entangling relationships between Swiss Pan-Germans and German military officials yielded significant advantages during the onset of hostilities in July-August 1914. On July 31, Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the German General Staff, secretly sent a telegram to Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg, warning him of the impending war.[145] In their exchange, Moltke secured Swiss military cooperation to defend the border against France while promising that Germany would respect Swiss neutrality. Acting on these plans, General Wille positioned the

[142] Codevilla, *Between the Alps and a Hard Place,* 42.
[143] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 558-568.
[144] AfZ, StAAG NL A-0244 Hektor Ammann 8, Fritz Fick to Hektor Ammann, December 6, 1916.
[145] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 616-617.

Swiss Army along the northwestern border with France on August 6.[146] German Ambassador Gisbert von Romberg reported to Berlin that Wille's election as general exemplified Switzerland's Germanophile attitude. He wrote:

> As soon as news of the German mobilization reached Bern, Switzerland decreed the general mobilization of the army and immediately placed it on its northwest border. The disposition of the troops was directed exclusively against a French attack. It provided complete cover for the German army. Since the first day of mobilization, Switzerland has communicated to us, day after day, all of its secret military information; it informs us of the telegrams it intercepts, when their content may be useful to us, and of important information from its representatives abroad. […] Is it not comforting that little Switzerland stands so faithfully and courageously at our side and exposed day after day to the danger of a break without enemies by its continual violations of neutrality in our favor?[147]

Decades of Pan-German activity in Switzerland proved instrumental for Germany's immediate strategic needs at the start of the war in August 1914. Pre-war agitation by German nationalistic associations effectively normalized pro-German sentiments within the Swiss public sphere, fostering emotional ties between the German colony and Greater Germany. These efforts facilitated the enlistment of German expatriates and German-Swiss allies into the German military, bolstering manpower for what was anticipated to be a swift and decisive victory. Domestically, Swiss-based propaganda networks self-mobilized, creating enough societal division to keep public opinion receptive to German influence. Additionally, the triangular network of personal relationships linking German officials, transnational Pan-German associations, and Swiss military leadership allowed Germany to leverage Switzerland strategically. This alignment enabled Germany to protect its southern flank while preserving Swiss neutrality and conserving its own military resources. These initial pro-German agitation efforts were spontaneous without the need for an official propaganda German institution.

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[146] Ibid.

[147] Gisbert von Romberg to Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, September 29, 1914, cited by Pierre Luciri, *Le prix de la neutralité: La diplomatie secrète de la Suisse en 1914-1915 avec des documents d'archives inédits* (Genève: Institute Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales, 1976), 25.

1.3.2: Pro-German Propaganda and the Foundation of the German-Swiss Society

At the beginning of 1915, Pan-German sources in Switzerland recognized that the war would likely be long and drawn out, ushering in a second phase of German agitation focused on propaganda and public opinion rather than immediate military manpower. This shift also marked a change in the sources of pro-German agitation. At the start of the war, agitation stemmed from individuals rooted in pre-war nationalist social circles, with little time or preparation for organized efforts by civic associations. Now, remaining Pan-German actors in Switzerland began coordinating their efforts more systematically. This period also saw their initiatives working alongside newly established German state propaganda offices operating both in Germany and Switzerland. Key organizations like Germany's *Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst* and the *Deutsche Nachrichtenstelle für die Neutralen* collaborated with Pan-German associations. The latter office recruited Hermann Kramer, a Zurich born professor at the University of Stuttgart, to handle its operations in Switzerland. His office used intermediary intellectuals and publicists in Switzerland, including DSV members like the writer Ernst Zahn, to create and circulate propaganda.[148] This path allowed German agitation to have a Swiss cover for its Germanophile articles, concealing its foreign origins.

From 1914 to the end of 1915, Germany's propaganda efforts in Switzerland focused on three primary areas: justifying the war's origins, countering accusations of international law violations, and addressing criticism over the violation of Belgian neutrality. To influence the narrative about the war's causes, Germany distributed curated diplomatic document collections, such as the "color" books, with the German white book being a notable example.[149] These were circulated to sympathetic Swiss publications, like the Pan-German-allied NZN, which endorsed

[148] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 75-76.
[149] Ibid.*,* 72-73.

Germany's interpretation of events.[150] The NZN published articles defending Germany against accusations of atrocities committed in Belgium. In its October 1, 1914 edition, the paper covered a supposed firsthand account by a British war correspondent who heard Belgian farmers bragging about ambushing German couriers on horseback and how it was retreating British armies who were destroying infrastructure in towns, not Germans.[151] In defending against claims of atrocities, German propaganda adopted a strategy of deflection rather than denial. Instead of trying to debunk claims, like the accusation of shooting Belgian and French civilians, it resorted to point to violations of international law by Entente armies, particularly Russian actions on the Eastern Front.[152] Reports and pamphlets were sent across borders and disseminated by associations like the DSV, ensuring that Germany's counter-narrative reached Swiss audiences.[153]

Germany's invasion of Belgium was a sensitive issue in Swiss public opinion, as the Swiss saw parallels between Belgium's situation and their own internationally guaranteed neutrality. To address this, Germany relied on Swiss voices for its agitation rather than its official documentation. The DSV were at the forefront of this propaganda effort in 1915, using its publications to shape public discourse. For example, Eduard Blocher authored a booklet titled, *Belgian Neutrality and Swiss Neutrality,* arguing that Belgium's neutrality was rightfully violated because it was an artificial state dependent on France, with no independent national identity.[154] This provoked heated, public response, particularly from the French-speaking press (See Chapter

[150] *NZN*, no. 284, October 14, 1914.
[151] *NZN,* no. 271, October 1, 1914.
[152] Isabel V. Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 6-7.
[153] AfZ Eduard Blocher 0, P. Wernle to Blocher, September 13, 1915.
[154] Eduard Blocher, *Belgische Neutralität und Schweizerische Neutralität* (Zürich: Stimmen im Sturm, 1915).

2).[155] The controversy surrounding the DSV's agitation was not limited to the content of its arguments but also extended to its social origins. Despite presenting itself as an entirely Swiss organization, the DSV's pre-war educational activities and transnational connections with Pan-German associations still made it susceptible to accusations of being foreign agents. By 1915, as the initial wave of pro-German sympathies in Switzerland waned, the general public viewed overt demonstrations of support for any belligerent suspiciously as being orchestrated by foreign intelligence operatives.[156] This shift in perception turned the tables on the DSV, as its historical ties to Pan-Germanism became a liability and "Pan-Germanism" itself turned into a watchword for foreign influence.

By the end of 1915, both the German nationalists within the DSV and the Central Powers recognized the need for a new domestic platform to promote pro-German agitation in Switzerland.[157] In April 1916, a circle of German-Swiss Pan-Germans from Basel began organizing for a solution to this stalemate. A gathering, including leaders of the DSV, convened in Brugg on September 23 through 25. They established of the *Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft* (DSG), designed to project a distinctly Swiss identity while continuing its pre-war Pan-German activities under a fresh, new Swiss façade.[158] The DSG adopted rhetoric emphasizing Swiss federalism and civic values, consciously portraying itself as a defender of Switzerland rather than an agent of foreign agitation. Fritz Fick summarized its goals as promoting federal unity, cultivating German-Swiss identity, and maintaining ties to broader

[155] Example in the French-Swiss Press in *La Tribune de Genève,* no. 5, January 7, 1916.
[156] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 82-83.
[157] Weidenfeller, *VDA,* 351-371.
[158] AfZ, StAAG NL-0244 Hektor Ammann 6, Der Vorstand der deutschweizerischen Gesellschaft Basel to [Anonymous], September 25, 1916.

German culture.[159] These three objectives were embedded in the organization's charters and publications. The DSG framed itself as an opponent of foreign agitation and defenders of Swiss neutrality, claiming:

> The current war would perhaps not have broken out if brave men had fought against the propaganda of a certain press years ago among various nations. Since this did not happen, the states living peacefully side by side prepared for war by stirring up an unhealthy hatred between nations. And since the war broke out, we have seen that neutral nations have been drawn into it by the same agitation and have thus fallen into misfortune and great distress.[160]

The DSG also deflected criticism by accusing pro-French and anti-German agitation as the true culprits to blame for Switzerland's internal division: "We would like to counter the activities of our French-speaking confederates, which aim to cast suspicion on the political and military leadership of the Confederation through slogans, phrases, and protests and to push them into paths incompatible with the principle of true neutrality."[161] Careful to avoid alienating non-German Swiss citizens, the DSG stressed that it "want neither the Germanization nor Romanization of Switzerland, but a state in which German and Romance Swiss feel equally at home."[162] Nevertheless, the organization's rhetoric consistently reinforced cultural ties between German-Swiss citizens and greater German culture:

> While we understand the sympathy of our French-speaking Confederates for France, we must nevertheless take a stand against those demonstrations of antipathy and hatred directed on neutral Swiss soil against the German people, with whom we feel bound by language and culture. […] Overheated minds that have lost all calm and just judgement and intrusive foreign advertising and subversive activities must not succeed in dividing us from a people that has always maintained good neighborly relations with us. […] What we want is unity within and peace abroad. Both will be secured, not through weak

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[159] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 1, *Protokoll der Brugg Tagung der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft* (September 23, 1917); AFZ Eduard Blocher 2, *Satzungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft* (October 5, 1916).

[160] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft,* no.1, November 9, 1916.

[161] AfZ, StAAG NL-0244 Hektor Ammann 6, Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft, *Werte Mitbürger!* (October 1916).

[162] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft,* no.1, November 9, 1916.

> surrender and patient acceptance on our part, but through the resolute assertion of our German-Swiss standpoint, which in this case is also the correct federal standpoint.[163]

Thus, this strategic rebranding adapted pro-German efforts with Swiss neutrality while still maintaining deep cultural links to Germany.

Despite adopting a new name, the leadership and membership of the DSG heavily overlapped with those earlier German language associations. Eduard Blocher returned to the executive committee, and figures like Anton Sprecher von Bernegg retained influential roles.[164] Fritz Fick chose to exert his influence more privately through personal communication with the DSG.[165] The society's public operations were entrusted to a young secretary Hektor Ammann, who became a prominent symbol of Pan-German, German-Swiss nationalism during the First World War. Born in Aarau in 1894, Ammann grew up during the height of German nationalism in Switzerland at the turn of the century.[166] His middle-class family proudly traced its roots in the canton back to the sixteenth century, emphasizing his Swiss pedigree. After completing public school in 1914, Ammann fulfilled his military service obligations during mobilization before starting his college studies. Even as a teenager, Ammann was connected to Pan-German circles in both Switzerland and Germany. He contributed articles to German nationalist publications, such as *Deutsche Erde*, with topics like the historical expansion of Italian ethnicity in Switzerland.[167] The DSV supported Ammann's university studies financially, enabling him to study at the University of Berlin from 1915 to the start of 1916. Upon returning to Switzerland, he continued his history studies under Gerold Meyer von Knonau, at the University of Zurich.

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[163] AfZ, StAAG NL-0244 Hektor Ammann 6, Deutschweizerische Gesellschaft, *Werte Mitbürger!* (October 1916).

[164] SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft, [Untitled] (July 1917).

[165] AfZ, StAAG NL-0244 Eduard Blocher 5, Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft Zürich, *Mitgliederverzeichnis* (December 23, 1916).

[166] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 1, [Untitled], 1938.

[167] AfZ, StAAG NL-0244 Hektor Ammann 6, Amman to der Obmann der 'Deutschweiz. Gesellschaft,' October 8, 1916.

Ammann also distributed propaganda for the Pan-German League, which sent him materials to circulate among his personal connections.[168] Still university student, the DSG appointed Ammann as its general manager after its founding in October 1916.[169] His contributions were so important that Fritz Fick requested Ulrich Wille Jr. and Anton Sprecher von Bernegg to intervene with their fathers to delay Ammann's military service. Notably, Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg even sought to appoint Ammann to his personal staff to enhance its pro-German character.[170]

The primary activity of the DSG involved circulating agitation through the Swiss press. Its publication, *Mitteilungen,* included club updates and propaganda articles. It was distributed to major and local newspapers across Eastern Switzerland. Regular supporters included the *Aargauer Tagblatt, Basler Nachrichten,* and *Basler Anzeiger,* while even *Der Bund* and the *NZZ* occasionally featured their content.[171] Privately, the DSG sourced materials from Germany and facilitated connections between Pan-Germans abroad and Swiss presses through personal relationships.[172] One notable campaign supported the German Peace Note campaign in December 1916-January 1917, garnering widespread backing from sections of the Swiss public (See Chapter 5).[173] After the United States entered the war, the DSG shifted focus to defending Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare, characterizing it as a legitimate parallel to Britain's North Sea blockade.[174] The DSG also agitated against President Wilson's "nationality principle," arguing that Swiss endorsement of such post-war plans risked undermining Switzerland's

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[168] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 2, Fritz Baumann, *Meine Begegnungen mit Hektor Ammann* (March 1985), 6-7.

[169] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 15, Verband der deutsch-schweizerischen Gesellschaften, *Bericht über die Sitzung der Hauptvorstandes* (October 11, 1916).

[170] AfZ, NL StAAG A-0244 Hektor Ammann 8, Fritz Fick to Hektor Ammann (December 6, 1916).

[171] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 5, Verband der deutsch-schweizerischen Gesellschaften, *Verzeichnis der Zeitungen für die Versendung der Mitteilungen* (Nov. 8, 1916); AfZ, StAAG NL A-0244 Hektor Ammann 6, Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft Basel, *An die Mitglieder der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft Basel!* ([March 1917]).

[172] AfZ, StAAG NL-0244 Hektor Ammann 6, Joachim von Bülow to Deutsch-Schweizerische Gesellscahft, (February 8, 1917).

[173] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 1, Christian Beyel to Blocher, January 24, 1917.

[174] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft,* no. 6 (May 1917), 22-23.

multinational federalism, a proposition widely accepted as an existential threat to Switzerland's identity.[175] The DSG leveraged fears of nationality-based governance to resonate with public sentiment. It also highlighted pro-French activity in Geneva through German-Swiss press outlets. Reports included examples of mistreatment toward German-speaking Swiss residents, public ovations for English officers in cafés, and Alsatian attempts to reach the French consulate office in order to join the French army, all aimed at painting a picture of anti-German sentiment among French-speaking Swiss communities.[176]

The DSG extended its agitation beyond the Swiss press, using Switzerland's neutral status as a cover to influence other belligerent countries during the war. On October 25, 1917, Swiss Ambassador to Paris Charles Lardy informed the Political Department of the arrest of Pierre Lenoir and G. Desouches in Paris "on charges of commerce with the enemy and perhaps intelligence service of the enemy."[177] The accusations centered on their acquisition of *Le Journal,* a French newspaper used to disseminate German propaganda, particularly on industrial and economic topics. Parisian investigators claimed that the funds for this purchase were provided in 1915 by Arthur Schöller, a Zurich-based wool industrialist who owned the Schöller & Cie Mill. The money was reportedly funneled through Swiss diplomatic channels. These revelations prompted an internal investigation by the Swiss government, aimed at mitigating Entente accusations that Swiss government officials had knowingly participated in German subterfuge.[178]

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[175] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft,* no. 3 (January 25, 1917), 12; AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 1, Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft, [Untitled] (November 30, 1917); Büchli to Blocher, November 30, 1917.

[176] *NZN*, no. 199, 2 ed., July 21, 1917; *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft,* no. 1 (November 9, 1916), 4.

[177] SFA, E21#1000/131#13912, Lardy to Swiss Political Department, October 25, 1917.

[178] SFA, E21#1000/131#13912, *Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des Schweizerischen Bundesrates* (November 17, 1917).

Arthur Schöller, born in Breslau in 1852 to a German industrialist family, became a naturalized Swiss citizen in 1866. In addition to operating his own mill in Zurich, he was tied to his family's other factories in Breslau and Eitorf in Germany and Schaffhausen in Switzerland.[179] A member of the DSG, Schöller and his extended family, particularly his cousin Cäsar (Caesar) Schöller, had longstanding connections to Pan-German associations which included a friendship with Fritz Fick.[180] During the Swiss internal investigation, an interview with Schöller revealed that a German consortium approached him in early 1915 to gain influence in the French press for post-war commercial purposes. He insisted that private individual, not German officials, asked him to mediate the purchase of the Parisian *Le Journal*, leveraging his Swiss citizenship.[181] Schöller sought approval on June 9 from Arthur Hoffmann, director of the Swiss Political Department, to use Switzerland's diplomatic courier service to send a large sum of money to France without harassment from mail inspectors.[182] This was a common use of its protected courier services during the first year of war, and Hoffmann approved the shipment. On July 12, the Swiss embassy in Paris received two locked suitcases containing 10 million Swiss Francs, which were collected by Schöller's business associate Max Hürlimann.[183] Although Schöller defended himself as merely a middleman with no involvement in the paper's operations post-funding, a contract surfaced showing he was promised editorial control over its commercial section, albeit after the war. The Swiss Justice and Police Department acknowledged his role in facilitating subterfuge but concluded that criminal proceedings would likely fail. Officials argued that his actions did not constitute a breach of Paragraph 2 of the Neutrality Ordinance issued on

[179] SFA, E21#1000/131#13912, [Interview with Arthur Schöller], November 28, 1917.
[180] DSG membership confirmed in AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 5, *Verzeichnis* ([Undated]). Cäsar Schöller's membership in DSG confirmed in Deutschschweizersiche Sprachverein, *Zweiter Jahresbericht*, 1906; AfZ, StAAG Hektor Ammann 4, Blocher to Hektor Ammann, June 4, 1914.
[181] SFA, E21#1000/131#13912, [Interview with Arthur Schöller], November 28, 1917.
[182] SFA, E21#1000/131#13912, Arthur Schöller to Hoffmann, June 9, 1915.
[183] SFA, E21#1000/131#13912, Legation de Suisse en France, to Political Department, July 12, 1915.

August 4, 1914. The ordinance stated that "no hostilities of any kind may be undertaken, prepared, supported or in any way encouraged against any of the belligerents from Switzerland." The debate over Schöller's conduct centered on the term "hostility," which by international law standards of the time was understood to mean "for the purpose to wage war," as in activities aimed at military harm (e.g., wounding, killing, capturing). The Justice and Police Department ruled that extending "hostility" to include indirect propaganda or economic manipulation was not the legal norm and would excessively restrict individuals' ability to engage in legitimate business or social interactions with belligerents, potentially jeopardizing Switzerland's neutrality and independence.[184]

The DSG also adopted tactics from the Pan-German League, including direct petitions to government officials, particularly to counter agitation by Entente sources within Switzerland. Similar to Pan-German propaganda, pro-French operations relied on the press and private individuals to spread its message. One of the DSG's first campaigns, launched in its inaugural issue of *Mitteilungen* in November 1916, targeted French army lieutenant Paul Loyson.[185] Loyson was traveling through Switzerland, delivering pro-French and anti-German propaganda disguised as historical lectures. The DSG worked to sway public opinion against him by publishing critical articles in major newspapers like the *NZZ* and petitioned officials for a blanket ban on all foreign lecturers. Eduard Blocher wrote to Zurich's cantonal government advocating for a local ban, arguing that "such events, which experience has shown always leads to attacks on states with which Switzerland lives in peace and friendship, contradicts both the Federal Council's regulations on the neutrality policed during wartime and the serious concept of

[184] SFA, E1004#1000/9#11214, *20. Sitzung des Schweizerischen Bundesrate* (February 26, 1918); also, see unofficial note clippings in SFA, E21#1000/131#13912, Affäre Schöller.

[185] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft*, no. 1 (November 9, 1916), 2-3.

neutrality that fortunately still prevails in German-speaking Switzerland."[186] The Zurich council declined, citing that banning public speech was a matter for the Federal Council, not local government. In response, the DSG escalated its petition to the Federal Council on November 10, listing multiple examples of Entente agitation by foreign lecturers.[187] This included Lt. Loyson; Lyon's mayor Herriot, who promoted French economic dominance over Switzerland; former Alsatian Reichstag member Wetterle, who targeted POWs interned in Switzerland; a Belgian representative advocating for Luxembourg's annexation by Belgium post-war; and Italian Professor M.B. Mastronardi, who argued a pro-Italian interpretation of the war's origins.[188] Despite some support for the DSG's petition, the Federal Council voted against the measure, fearing unrest in French-speaking cities.[189] Nevertheless, the Police and Justice Department began enforcing its own measures against foreign lecturers based on the DSG's information, leading to several bans in 1917 that included Lt. Loyson's activities.[190] The DSG continued targeting pro-Entente lecturers, including native Swiss figures like Vaudois professor Reiß. In March 1917, it stirred public opinion against Reiß by accusing him of being funded by Serbian, French, and English sources to discuss Central Powers' war atrocities.[191]

The DSG actively investigated and reported on suspected foreign propaganda infiltration in the Swiss press, focusing on anti-German content within French-Swiss outlets. These efforts often aligned, albeit separately, with similar complaints made by the German embassy on

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[186] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 3, [Blocher] to Höhen Regierungsrat der Kanton Zürich, November 10, 1916.

[187] SFA, E27#1000/721#13899, Wolfgang Börlin, Hans Baur and E. Probst to hohen Bundesrat der Schweizer. Eidgenossenschaft, November 10, 1916.

[188] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft*, no. 2 (November 23, 1916), 5-7.

[189] SFA, E27#1000/721#13899, *Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des November Bundesrates,* (November 22, 1916).

[190] SFA, E27#1000/721#13899, Schweizerischer Justiz- & Polizei- Departement to dem Bundesrat., November 20, 1916.

[191] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft*, no. 5 (April 1917), 19-20.

newspapers and periodicals being published in Switzerland.[192] The DSG reveled when federal censors targeted papers like the *Gazette de Lausanne* and *Journal de Geneve* for pro-French propaganda.[193] Additionally, it publically exposed foreign propaganda networks, such as Britain's Central Committee for War Propaganda. In 1917, its efforts successfully stirred public opinion against British-funded propaganda in Switzerland, pressuring the Federal Council to deport English journalist Julian Grande.[194] A notable adversary in the public sphere was the *Freie Zeitung,* an anti-German newspaper established by German pacifists in exile and supported by Swiss allies with French and American funding.[195] The rivalry escalated in mid-1917 when the *Freie Zeitung* accused the DSG of operating as German agents.[196] The accusations highlighted the DSG's ties to the VDA and the Pan-German League, claiming its leadership consisted of "sons of Germans living in Switzerland." The DSG countered by emphasizing that its leadership, including figures like Hektor Ammann, comprised "alte Schweizer," while asserting "the sons of Germans can also be good Swiss."[197] The DSG cheered when police raided the *Freie Zeitung*'s Geneva office in August 1917, though insufficient evidence prevented a full shutdown. Undeterred, the DSG continued its campaign against the paper through public criticism and direct petitions to the Federal Council until the war's end.[198]

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[192] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#786, [Press Control Commission] to Schweizerische Politische Departement, January 31, 1918.

[193] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft*, no. 9 (August 1917), 33-34.

[194] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft*, no. 12 (December 1917) 45-46.

[195] *Jahresbericht 1916/1917 des Verbandes der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaften*, (September 19, 1917); AfZ NL Eduard Blocher 1, *Protokoll der Brugg Tagung der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft* (September 23, 1917).

[196] *Freie Zeitung,* no. 26, July 11, 1917.

[197] *Mitteilungen der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft*, no. 9 (August 1917), 33-34.

[198] Ibid.

By the end of 1917, the DSG consisted of 656 members—three times the membership of the DSV before the war.[199] This growth reflected the strategic shift from addressing immediate military concerns at the war's outset to focusing on long-term agitation rooted in German cultural ties and countering Entente propaganda within Switzerland. Around the end of the war, the Swiss Intelligence office reviewed foreign operations in Switzerland, acknowledging that pro-German agitation proved adaptable and resilient, recasting themselves and German nationalism as defenders of Swiss federalism, internal unity, and neutrality.[200] A critical factor in this success was the DSG's ability to retain German-Swiss allies. These partners not only collaborated closely with German interests but also operated autonomously to advance Germany's wartime goals. The DSG's ideological blend of promoting German national identity alongside Swiss civic rhetoric proved effective in shaping public opinion and influencing government officials. While its efforts never fully swayed Switzerland into aligning exclusively with Germany, it maintained and reinforced the division between the French- and German-speaking regions. This division ensured that Swiss civil society remained open to German influence, enabling broader agitation throughout the war.

1.4: Conclusion

On October 5, 1915, the *NZZ* published an article highlighting members of University of Zurich's faculty, staff, and students serving in the German military.[201] The article noted that Dr. Adolf Eugen Fick, a lecturer in ophthalmology, had been awarded the Iron Cross for his work in military hospitals on the Western Front. His family's sacrifices during the war were also documented: his son Roderich survived the retreat of German colonial forces from Cameroon in

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[199] *Jahresbericht 1916/1917 des Verbandes des Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaften* (September 19, 1917).

[200] SFA, E27#1000-721#13893, *Note sur les Ecrits de Propaganda Allemand* ([N.D.]); similar conclusion found in Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despoir*, 87.

[201] *NZZ*, no. 1320, 5 ed., October 5, 1915; also in *NZN*, no. 271, 4 ed., October 2, 1915.

1916, while another son, Roland, was killed in action near Tahure, France, in February 1916.[202] Fritz Fick, meanwhile, remained actively engaged in pro-German activities in Zurich throughout the war. In July 1917, he gained national attention for representing three Austrians imprisoned for working for the Austrian Intelligence Office in Switzerland.[203] They had been apprehended while attempting to establish an aerial smuggling across the Alps to gather intelligence in Italy. Fritz Fick secured a lenient sentence of only two months' imprisonment for them by arguing that their actions were officially sanctioned wartime duties rather than private espionage efforts and that they had been mistreated by Zurich police during their detention. The Fick family maintained their German nationalist leanings through personal relationships and involvement with transnational Pan-German associations across Central Europe. For them, their wartime service and activities underscored their dual identity as both Swiss and German without apparent internal conflict.

Ethnic-linguistic German nationalism demonstrated remarkable adaptability within the Pan-German community in Switzerland, often blurring the line between German and Swiss national identities. The *Großdeutschland* imagined community of the 1848ers endured in Switzerland until the start of the war. While the original ideals of federalism and liberal reformism persisted, they coexisted with newer elements such as Darwinian racial theory and imperialistic aspirations, even amid the radicalization marked by the founding of the Pan-German League in the late nineteenth century. A notable shift occurred in the composition of German nationalist associations. Initially, German exiles and expatriates in academic hubs of German-speaking cities dominated these organizations; as the second and third generations became naturalized citizens, German-Swiss began joining their ranks. By the First World War,

[202] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 9, A[dolf Eugen] Fick to Blocher, December 13, 1915; *NZZ*, no. 478, March 17, 1937.

[203] *NZZ*, no. 1317, July 18, 1917.

German-Swiss personalities led most Pan-German activities in Switzerland. Nevertheless, these groups remained deeply interconnected with transnational German nationalist networks through enduring personal relationships. By this time, associations like the DSV and the DSG operated exclusively with Swiss membership. These organizations successfully fused traditional Swiss values of neutrality and federalism with a distinctly German national identity, demonstrating their ideological flexibility within Switzerland's socio-political landscape.

Many historians argue that Germany's wartime agitation was inadequate due to a lack of official preparation before the war. However, in Switzerland, such preparation proved largely unnecessary. Germany found ready-made allies in Pan-German associations, which allowed them to agitate within Swiss borders without attracting accusations of violating neutrality. By 1914, many German nationalists in Switzerland were naturalized German-Swiss citizens, projecting the appearance of grassroots domestic activism. The report by the Swiss Intelligence Office on foreign propaganda reinforced this perspective, concluding that pro-German agitation succeeded because it relied on civic associations rather than state mechanisms:

> To allow this propaganda as much flexibility as possible, the German government thought it necessary to leave the greatest possible initiative to private organizations. The most widespread publications abroad are not those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but those of the private companies. […] The official body or bodies seem to have the main mission of controlling these organizations, providing them with indications and suggestions and occasionally subsidizing them.[204]

The pre-war, transnational infrastructure established by Pan-German associations facilitated immediate support for Germany among its colony in Switzerland. After the first year of conflict, pro-German Swiss groups assumed leadership in promoting German propaganda and countering Entente agitation. Organizations like the DSV could not fully align Swiss public opinion with Germany and the Central Powers, but this was unnecessary. Instead, by maintaining

[204] SFA, E27#1000/721#13893, *Note sur les Ecrits de Propaganda Allemand* ([N.D.]).

Switzerland's officially neutrality while fostering public divisions, Pan-German activists ensured that Switzerland remained open to German influence across various interest groups and voluntary organizations, enabling Germany to achieve its broader wartime objectives.

Chapter 2: The New Helvetic Society: Civic Nationalism and the Fight over National Unity

2.1.1: Carl Spitteler's "Our Swiss Standpoint"

By the end of 1914, German agitation from both domestic and foreign sources threatened Switzerland's stability. The "ditch" between German and French-speaking regions pushed the country to the brink of a real, political division. Although the federal government proclaimed official neutrality on August 3, public sympathies split between the Central Powers and the Entente. On October 1, the Federal Council issued an "Appeal to the Swiss People" urging unity among language groups and adherence to Switzerland's tradition of neutrality:

> The difficult period of trial we are now experiencing must become the starting point for an intellectual, economic, and political upswing; for this, we need the mobilization of all the forces slumbering within the people. Therefore, there must be no irreconcilable differences of race or language within the nation. We see the ideal of our country in a cultural community that transcends race and language. First and foremost, we Swiss are paramount; only secondarily are the Romance and Germanic peoples. Higher than any symbolism for those with whom we share a common heritage is the well-being of our one shared fatherland. To it, everything else is subordinate.[1]

The appeal failed to quell nationalist agitation within the country. The lack of government infrastructure and slow implementation of censorship measures in order to counter foreign propaganda further compounded the situation. Switzerland's tradition of press freedom made restrictions on publications and speech highly unpopular. As a result, ethnic nationalist agitation undermined the façade of Swiss national identity built on shared civic norms, leaving the government unable to effectively respond to internal divisions.

On December 14, the Swiss poet Carl Spitteler delivered a speech in Zurich titled "Our Swiss Standpoint" (*Unser Schweizer Standpunkt)* on behalf of the New Helvetic Society (NHG).[2] Founded on the eve of the war, the NHG aimed to strengthen Switzerland's unity through a "revitalization" of shared civic principles. Famous in the German-speaking world as an

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[1] *NZZ*, no. 1375, 3 ed., October 2, 1914.
[2] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 1 (January 1915).

author and poet for works such as *Olympic Spring* (*Olympischer Frühling*), Spitteler had avoided political engagement but the current climate compelled him to speak out against rising pro-German sympathies threatening Swiss neutrality.[3] In his address, Spitteler reinforced the border between the Swiss and Germans:

> Do we want or do we not want to remain a Swiss state, which displays its political unity vis-à-vis the foreign countries? In case the answer is no, if everyone may let himself float to where his private inclination is taking him and where he is directed to go from outside, I do not have anything to tell you Then, as far as I'm concerned, let it run as it goes, shaking and wobbling. In case we say yes, however, we must become aware that our national borders also represent guidelines for our political attitudes. All those who live beyond our national borders are our neighbors, and until further notice they remain kind neighbors; all those, who live on this side, are more than neighbors, they are our brothers. The difference between a neighbor and a brother, however, is tremendous. Even the best neighbor can shoot at us with cannon, while our brother fights the battle on our side. A greater difference may not be imagined. […] We must become aware that the political brother is closer to us than the best neighbor and race relative. It is our patriotic duty to strengthen that awareness. This duty is not easy to fulfil. We shall feel united, without being uniform. We do not have the same blood, nor the same language, we do not have a dynasty to mediate our conflicts, we do not even have a common capital. We must not be mistaken that all these things are elements of political weakness. And now we are looking for a common symbol, which might overcome the elements of weakness. Fortunately, we possess this symbol. I do not need to name it: the Swiss federal flag. Therefore we have to get closer and assemble around the Swiss federal flag and distance ourselves accordingly from those, who pledge obedience to another flag.[4]

Spitteler's speech, at the time and historiographically, was widely regarded as a turning point for Switzerland during the war.[5] By the end of 1914, the speech quickly appeared in both German and French-speaking newspapers. There appeared in its wake a seemingly spontaneous, public opinion in favor of strict neutrality. The popular interpretation was that Spitteler's address marked the defeat of foreign agitation and the emergence of a Swiss identity rooted in shared civic-political norms and behaviors rather than ethnic origins. The speech clarified Switzerland's

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[3] Corrine de Tscharner-Hentsch, "Une Réponse de la Société civile à la Guerre: La Nouvelle Société Helvétique," in *14/18: La Suisse et la Guerre de 1914-1918: Acts du colloque tenu du 10 au 12 septembre 2014 au Château de Penthes*, ed. Christophe Vuilleumier (Genève: Éditions Slatkine, 2015), 580.

[4] Carl Spitteler, *Unser Schweizer Standpunkt* (Luzern: Pro Libro, 2009).

[5] de Tscharner-Hentsch, "Une Réponse de la Société Civile," 582-584.

potential to pursue a third path of wartime conduct, centered on its idealized tradition of neutrality. By early 1915, the unrest seemed to have dissipated, giving rise to the myth that Spitteler's words transformed public sentiment overnight. He was celebrated as a modern William Tell, standing firm against foreign influence. His legacy remains significant in both popular discourse and historiography of Switzerland's role in World War I.

The NHG members who organized the December 14 lecture played a largely anonymous role in the event's myth and legacy. In October 1914, NHG's Zurich group learned of Spitteler's personal opposition to pro-German agitation and his support for patriotic Swiss neutrality. Spitteler initially attempted to rally other Swiss writers and press associations to counter foreign agitation but he failed to gain traction.[6] Recognizing Spitteler's popularity in German-speaking Switzerland and his influence in cultural-intellectual circles, NHG Zurich leaders contacted him, hoping he would deliver a public lecture. Its president, Gustav Thurnherr, first contacted Spitteler on October 26, but the poet declined, citing his focus on a new poem to maintain his apolitical stance.[7] Subsequently, its secretary, Rudolf Grob, wrote to Spitteler emphasizing the organization's primary goal: "the unity of the people, the unity that can only be achieved through a transformation and revitalization of our Swiss national feeling."[8] However, it was Albert Baur's letter that ultimately persuaded Spitteler.[9] Baur stressed their shared concerns of German agitation in the Swiss press and argued that only a respected figure like Spitteler could articulate the idea of a third, Swiss path between the belligerents. Spitteler finally agreed to be one of

[6] *NZZ,* no. 1435, 3 ed., October 19, 1914.
[7] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-3, Gustav Thurnherr to Carl Spitteler, October 26, 1914.
[8] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-7, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, November 5, 1914.
[9] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-g-8, Albert Baur to Carl Spitteler, November 7, 1914.

several speakers at the December 14 event, but it was his address that became its defining moment.[10]

Gustave Thurnherr, an engineer and lecturer at Zurich Polytechnic, remains an understudied figure in the leadership of NHG Zurich during the war. The NHG was dominated by intellectuals tied to the literary arts or the press at the start of the war. In contrast, Thurnherr was an engineer living in Zurich and lectured on the subject at Zurich Polytechnic.[11] He was also a military officer, rising to the rank of Major in the Swiss military by the war's conclusion. Despite his staunch advocacy for reconciling French and German-speaking Switzerland and building a unified Swiss national identity based on civic ideals, Thurnherr showed personal biases. In correspondence with Spitteler before the address, he expressed clear antipathy toward England and his preference for a German victory in the war:

> What I personally dislike about the English is not the people, but their economic policy. The English are doing the 'business' in today's war anyway. If Germany is to be shattered, it would achieve its purpose, if France were to collapse, England would take over at least part of its trade. Because even the winner, in this case Germany, needs years, perhaps a decade to recover. Meanwhile, England is exploiting world trade and it achieves this with paid soldiers, with mercenaries while France and Germany have to use their best sons. The Englishman is not a soldier, in my opinion, he wouldn't be standing on the Isere [River] if he had to risk his life instead of his money. […] I have become more sympathetic to the English since I read your opinion, but I didn't want to neglect to explain my antipathy to you.[12]

Under Thurnherr's leadership, NHG Zurich became one of the organization's most powerful and influential sections. It was not only one of the largest groups but also wielded significant influence through its robust social connections and financial resources.

The myth surrounding Spitteler's address suggests it was an impromptu expression of national unity and patriotism. In truth, the speech was the product of meticulous preparation by

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[10] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-10, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, November 23, 1914.
[11] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-7, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, November 5, 1914.
[12] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-13, Gustav Thurnherr to Carl Spitteler, December 3, 1914.

Thurnherr, Grob, and Spitteler, who all collaborated extensively on multiple drafts in the days before its delivery.[13] The final version strategically combined a vision of Swiss civic nationalism with a caution against succumbing to German agitation. Although the address was delivered in Zurich to a German-speaking audience, it was designed to resonate across all of Switzerland. Spitteler positioned himself as a mediator between the country's eastern and western regions. He carefully avoided criticizing the Welsch (French-Swiss) for pro-French agitation while cautioning German-speaking Swiss against assuming widespread support for pro-German sentiments.[14]

"Our Swiss Standpoint" had a profound impact both within Switzerland and abroad. The address received strong support from the mainstream German-Swiss press. It resonated even more deeply with French-speaking Swiss, who saw the speech as evidence that bridging the divide between linguistic groups was possible.[15] However, Spitteler's foray into politics sparked controversy among German intellectuals. In Zurich, particularly at the University of Zurich, the heart of the Pan-German community, the reaction was sharply divided. Many of Spitteler's literary colleagues severed ties with him; for instance, Adolf Frey, a writer and literary historian, sent Spitteler a scathing personal letter and refused further contact throughout the war.[16] In Germany, the backlash was even more severe. Several signatories of the "Manifesto of the Ninety-Three" branded him a traitor to his language and called for the removal of Spitteler's work from libraries and bookstores.[17] Nevertheless, his words galvanized segments of the Swiss

[13] All of these drafts are archived in Carl Spitteler's papers at the Swiss National Library

[14] Spitteler, *Unser Schweizer Standpunkt*.

[15] SNL, NHG A 54, [N.A.], *A Carl Spitteler* (February 1915).

[16] J. R. von Salis, *Schwierige Schweiz: Beiträge zu einigen Gegenwartsfragen* (Zurich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1968), 254-261; Frey also became a member of the DSG after its founding in 1916, AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 5, *Mitglieder der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft Glarus* (October 4, 1916).

[17] Vermeiren, *The First World War and German National Identity,* 219; Salis, *Schwierige Schweiz,* 259.

literary community. By April 1915, a group of Swiss writers published a thesis countering the German manifesto, advocating for neutrality and a Swiss national conscience.[18]

Thurnherr and Grob meticulously planned the widespread distribution of Spitteler's address in the weeks leading up to its delivery.[19] They secured an agreement with the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (*NZZ*), the largest newspaper in German-speaking Switzerland, whose staff supported the NHG's mission.[20] The *NZZ* received a copy of the speech to publish immediately after the lecture. The NHG also organized the publication of the address as a brochure through Rascher publishing house in Zurich. It arranged translations into French, Italian, and eventually Romansh to reach audiences across linguistic regions.[21] To cater to smaller presses, it divided the speech into excerpts for easier dissemination. Many German-Swiss newspapers connected with the NHG published these segments, while others simply reprinted the full address from the *NZZ* without permission. Rather than objecting, the NHG saw this as evidence of its success in promoting Spitteler's message of Swiss unity and neutrality.[22]

Spitteler received numerous honors during and after the war for his pivotal role in addressing the "ditch" dividing Switzerland.[23] The University of Lausanne awarded him an honorary doctorate. His advocacy for Swiss neutrality against German agitation earned him international acclaim, including recognition from the French Society of Letters.[24] On his 70th birthday in 1915, Spitteler was celebrated throughout Switzerland. In 1919, he was honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming the only Swiss recipient of the prestigious award. After

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[18] Alain Clavien, "Les Intellectuels suisse et la Grande Guerre: un engagement vigoreux," in *14/18: La Suisse et la Grande Guerre,* eds. Roman Rossfeld, Thomas Buomberger, and Patrick Kury (Neuchâtel: Éditions Livreo-Alphil, 2019), 107.

[19] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-13, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, November 27, 1914.

[20] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-15, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, December 10, 1914.

[21] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-19, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, December 23, 1914.

[22] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-19, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, December 23, 1914.

[23] Elsig, *Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 110.

[24] SFA, E2001A#1000/454#757, Légation de Suisses en France to Département politique suisse, December 30, 1916.

delivering his transformative address, Spitteler withdrew from public life. The New Helvetic Society took charge of shaping and propagating the myth surrounding his speech, leveraging it as a powerful tool to promote its vision of a unified Swiss national identity.

Yet, this chapter argues that German agitation proved adaptable to the civic nationalist discourse espoused by the NHG. Despite the NHG's best efforts to combat the linguistic division in the country, civil society's flexibility enabled pro-German ethnic nationalists to form new associations with fresh, neutral faces. These new social institions allowed German agitation to continue to operate in the Swiss public sphere. They were also formed by previous German-sympathetic individuals of the DSV and other Pan-German groups, retaining their previous relationship under the façade of a new association. In the course of this, ethnic nationalists integrated the democratic values of Swiss civic nationalism into their rhetoric, allowing German agitation leveraged Swiss national identity to mobilize for their wartime goals and needs. In doing so, Pan-German agitation demonstrates malleability of imagined, national communities and confuses the boundary between civic and ethnic nationalism.

2.1.2: The Historical Memory of the NHG in the First World War

The public memory of Switzerland and the First World War has largely upheld the narrative that Carl Spitteler's address and the NHG were pivotal in fostering national unity and identity. This myth persisted throughout most of the twentieth century, with historical surveys published in the interwar years and in the wake of the Second World War reinforcing a vision of Swiss identity rooted in civic nationalism. This interpretation served contemporary purposes, particularly as a counterpoint to ideological threats like Nazism and communism. Only in the late 1950s did Swiss historians begin critically reexamining Spitteler's speech and the NHG's historical role. Johann Gotfried Guggenbühl first challenged this narrative, arguing that the

NHG's purported success in bridging tensions between French- and German-speaking Switzerland was exaggerated.[25] He highlighted that mistrust between the two linguistic groups persisted throughout the war, surfacing during several key crises often omitted in earlier accounts. Despite Guggenbühl's findings, critical reassessment gained limited traction for decades. Even as late as 1989, Catherine Guanzini and Peter Wegelin published a detailed history of the NHG, which continued to promote the idea that the organization effectively mediated linguistic and cultural divisions whenever controversies arose during the war.[26]

Recent historiographical challenges to the myth's narrative stem from a wave of works criticizing the *Sonderfall Schweiz* concept, or Switzerland's perceived status as a "special case" in Europe. Historically, Switzerland's democratic practices have been viewed as distinct from other European nations, immune to the ideological turmoil such as fascism that plagued the continent during the twentieth century. In Nationalism Studies, this view is often linked to Switzerland's reputation as a model of civic nationalism and unified national identity. Scholars attribute this perception to factors such as Switzerland's tradition of proto-democratic governance, geographic isolation in mountain communities, and its multilingual society fostering tolerance.[27] This blend of socio-political values and practices, not ethnic origin, has been seen as the foundation of Swiss democracy and political culture. The narrative surrounding the NHG's success in countering German agitation during the war is a center piece of this perspective. With the federal government taking a hands-off approach to debates over national identity during the war, the NHG was mythologized as embodying Swiss official nationalism.[28]

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[25] Johann Gotfried Guggenbühl, *Carl Spitteler in der politischen Legende* (Stäfa: T. Gut, 1958).

[26] Catherine Guanzini and Peter Wegelin, eds., *Kritischer Patriotismus: Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, 1914-1989* (Bern: Verglag Paul Haupt, 1989), 37-41.

[27] Edgar Bonjour, "Gibt es noch einen Sonderfall Schweiz?," 679-691; Oliver Zimmer, "In Search of Natural Identity: Alpine Landscape and the Reconstruction of the Swiss Nation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 4 (Oct. 1998), 650-651.

[28] On the bottom-up development of Swiss nationalism, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 133-139.

Jakob Tanner's work has offered significant critiques of Switzerland's perceived exceptionalism in European history. In *Geschichte der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert,* Tanner argues that Switzerland faced many of the same tribulations as its continental neighbors during the twentieth century.[29] Though he approaches the question from an economic perspective, he shows that Switzerland experienced similar issues like questions on foreign immigration, radical political ideologies, and social upheavals. In the introduction of *14/18: La Suisse et la Grande Guerre*, Tanner examines these dynamics within the context of the First World War, addressing the social divisions that persisted within Switzerland. He specifically critiques the myth surrounding Spitteler's address, contending that its reputation as a unifying moment for Swiss civic nationalism was not an organic development but rather a product of wartime propaganda.[30] Tanner suggests that this myth was deliberately crafted to promote a specific vision of Swiss national identity, influenced by transnational propaganda practices prevalent across Europe during the war.

Despite these new critical lenses, a "thick description" challenge to the NHG's wartime narrative has been less forthcoming. Many historians have focused on the NHG's organizational history and highlighted its supposed success in bridging the linguistic divisions in the country. New biographical accounts of NHG leaders provide a new scope of critique to the association's previous faceless histories. In reality, the NHG's definition of Swiss national identity was far from monolithic, reflecting the diverse perspectives and ideologies of its individual members that often mirrored the linguistic "ditch" that divided Switzerland during the war. A prime example

[29] Jakob Tanner, *Geschichte der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2015).

[30] Jakob Tanner, "La Suisse dans la Grande Guerre: Plaidoyer pour une Histoire Transnationale," trans. Valentine Meunir, in *14/18: La Suisse et la Grande Guerre,* eds. Roman Rossfeld, Thoman Buomberger, and Partick Kury (Neuchâtel: Éditions Livreo-Alphil, 2019), 22-23.

of this is Aran Mattioli's biography on Gonzague de Reynold, one of the NHG's founders.[31] Mattioli reveals de Reynold's affinity for ethnic nationalist movements like *Action Française*, exposing his aspirations to model the NHG after such groups. Despite the NHG's public stance on promoting civic nationalism, de Reynold harbored ideological leanings toward totalitarianism, suggesting tensions between the organization's professed ideals and some members' personal beliefs. This chapter follows Mattioli's approach of investigating the NHG's everyday members, including s section leaders like NHG Zurich's Gustav Thurnherr, but also the writers and publicists the association relied upon to craft and to distribute its propaganda.

This chapter showcases how German agitation persisted in spite of the Spitteler Address and the NHG's actions in 1915. Civic and ethnic nationalism is viewed as opposite sides of the same coin. However, in reality, the competition between civic and ethnic nationalism is not a zero sum game, where one triumphs over the other to win the totality of the hearts and minds of an imagined community. Instead, the two existed in a messy, overlapping reality that more often than not results in them borrowing characteristics from one another. Alexandre Elsig is among the few historians who contextualize the NHG within Switzerland's broader propaganda battles. In *Les shraphnels du mensonge,* Elsig demonstrates how the NHG participated in the Swiss press's ongoing struggle for influence over public sympathies for the belligerent states, particularly favoring Germany.[32] Building on Elsig's analysis, this work examines how the NHG and Pan-German associations interacted directly, aiming to shape public opinion.

2.2: The Founding of the New Helvetic Society, 1912-1914

> The military encirclement of our southern front, the financial debt to France, the industrial conquest of Germany are not pipe dreams, but facts. And instead of seeing our people defend themselves energetically, we are observing day by day a decline in Swiss

[31] Aran Mattioli, *Zwischen Demokratie und Totalitäler Dikatatur: Gonzague de Reynold und die Tradition der autoritären Rechten in der Schweiz* (Zürich: Orell Füssli, 1994).

[32] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge.*

> individuality and indifference to the issues of maintaining the state. […] What wonder of the world are we waiting for before we open our eyes?[33]

The founding meeting of the New Helvetic Society on February 1, 1914, just months before the outbreak of the war, foreshadowed the challenges Switzerland would face by August. The above speech delivered by Gerhard Steck, a well-respected Bernese lawyer and soon-to-be president of the NHG, was one of many divinations of a looming European calamity during the congress. The association's organizers, deeply aware of growing tensions in Europe since the turn of the century, had their concerns heightened by the series of political crises leading up to 1914. Although Switzerland had remained unscathed throughout the last century, they perceived the rise of ethnic nationalism and escalating national rivalries as existential threats to their multilingual state. Wedged between a unified Italy, Germany, and France, each driven by nationalist ambitions, the Swiss lacked a unifying language or shared ethnic identity. Despite possessing national symbols, a shared history, and common democratic values, the NHG's founders believed the federal government had done little to foster a stronger sense of official nationalism. This void prompted them to form a civic association that could articulate and promote Swiss national identity to unify the population. They feared that without such efforts, foreign agitation would exploit internal divisions when the anticipated conflict erupted.

Most of the crises leading up to the war seemed distant from Swiss concerns. As a nation without imperial ambitions, why should Switzerland care about disputes over Morocco or other colonial rivalries? By 1910, however, Swiss intellectuals began to grasp that Great Power imperial ambitions were no longer confined to far-off continents, but encroaching on Switzerland's borders. The Italo-Turco War of 1911 marked a turning point for many NHG

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[33] Gerhard Steck, "Gefahren und Bedürfnisse unserer Zeit," in *Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft: Bern, 1. Feb. 1914* (Biel: Der Rosius Verlag, 1914), 17-18.

founders, who saw it as a sign of an impending European confrontation.[34] Though the war was fought in the Mediterranean, Italy's military preparations extended to fortifying its northern border with Switzerland. Strategic roads were constructed in Alpine valleys, and fortresses were built in the mountains. For many intellectuals at the NHG's founding, Steck's view resonated:

> It doesn't matter to us whether these military measures directed against Switzerland or against attacks by foreign states from Swiss territory; the one, like the other, shows that Italy also considers our paper neutrality (*papierene Neutralität*) to be vulnerable. And when the maps are revised at a new Congress of Vienna, the imperialist tendencies in Italy, which have grown powerfully since the Libyan campaign, will probably also extend their hand to the Italian-speaking areas of our fatherland.[35]

The NHG founders faced its second major crisis during the Gotthard Convention controversy in 1913. In 1909, the Swiss federal government began negotiating an agreement with Italy and Germany regarding the use of the newly constructed Gotthard Railway tunnel.[36] Although located on Swiss territory, the tunnel had been funded by Germany and Italy during the late nineteenth century. The Gotthard Pass was not only crucial for Swiss commerce but also a significant national symbol, making its control a sensitive issue. French-speaking Switzerland was particularly alarmed by the prospect of this economically and symbolically important railway falling under foreign influence. The negotiations initiated in 1909 discussions aimed to nationalize the railway, but in March 1913, it was revealed that Germany and Italy would be compensated for their investments. The agreement granted them special access to the railway, along with rights to customs duties and tariffs from its usage. Public outrage erupted across Switzerland, especially in French-speaking cities, where citizens condemned the "favored nations clause" as a loss of economic independence and a concession to Imperial Germany. A

[34] Ibid., 5-7.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 42-43.

nation-wide petition gathered 116,000 signatures, two-thirds of which came from German-speaking regions. Nevertheless, the Federal Assembly ratified the agreement in April 1913.[37]

The NHG founders recognized that broader issues of foreign influence in Switzerland underpinned these political crises. They believed government and public responses revealed a loss of the national unity felt after the Sonderbund War in 1847 and the formation of the federal state in 1848. By the turn of the century, decades of unchecked nationalist agitation had significantly shaped Swiss political and social institutions. According to the NHG founders, the loss of unity led Switzerland to compromise its independence and neutrality in favor of economic interests. In one of their earliest pamphlets, the organizers expressed this concern:

> Economic issues are not what unite us, but what divides us. They risk dragging the different parts of our people, each into its own particular path which it, most of the time, the orbit of large neighboring nations. They necessarily loosen the moral bond which above all constitutes the unity of our people. Let's go further: they open the door wide to influence, if not foreign influence.[38]

The NHG founders also emphasized the challenges posed by Switzerland's growing immigrant population, particularly in the industrial cities. Immigrants from neighboring Germany, Italy, and France often retained strong ties to their home countries, supporting nationalist associations such as the *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (VDA).[39] These connections heightened concerns about foreign influence and agitation within Swiss borders. Referencing French agitation in Geneva, Steck addressed this issue at the NHG's founding meeting:

> It has been calculated that in 60 years the Swiss will make up the minority of our population. It is obvious that rapid help is needed here if we do not want to see our border towns flooded by strangers. We also do not want to allow the tricolor to be unfurled on our soil. […] Geneva already has 53 French associations, 26 of which pursue political or military purposes. The influence of foreigners in Geneva has grown to such an extent that the position of the authorities can often hardly be described as Swiss.[40]

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[37] Guanzini and Wegelin, *Kritischer Patriotismus,* 25.
[38] SNL, NHG A 1, [N.A.], *Pro Helvetica Dignitate et Securitate* (March 1912), 2.
[39] Guanzini and Wegelin, *Kritischer Patriotismus,* 25.
[40] Steck, "Gefahren und Bedürfnisse unserer Zeit," 9-10.

These anxieties over foreign influence underscored how foreign nationalist agitation was central to the NHG founders' concerns in 1914. Their fears extended beyond economic manipulation; by 1912, they believed foreigners would drag Switzerland into the inevitable war.[41] To counteract this, they sought to revive unity and patriotism among Swiss citizens through civic nationalist agitation capable of competing with ethnic-linguistic associations.

The idea of the NHG emerged in 1912 from a group of young French-Swiss intellectuals determined to combat foreign influence and educate the population. These individuals were connected through French-speaking press circles or their involvement in the Zofingue Student Society, an elite, *Belles-lettres* association promoting intellectual and cultural exchanges between cantons.[42] The group's leadership included writers such as Robert de Traz, Alexis François, Richard Bovet, Marcel Godet, and Gonzague de Reynold.[43] They first began publishing pamphlets that warned against political and spiritual crises while advocating for a national identity they termed "Helvetism."[44] This vision emphasized Switzerland's shared history and civic-political traditions rather than ethnic or linguistic ties. The association's early motto, *Pro Helvetica ac Securitat,* was chosen before the group officially adopted the name New Helvetic Society at its founding meeting in February 1914. The motto represented *dignitas, "*the principles of freedom, democracy and federalism," and *securitas "*the safeguarding of intellectual and material values worth of being, as well as the exercise of a certain influence on practical, social, and economic problems."[45] From 1912 to 1913, the founders organized gatherings that steadily grew in size. They distributed questionnaires to prominent intellectuals

[41] SNL, NHG A 1, [N.A.], *Pro Helvetica Dignitate et Securitate* (March 1912), 3.
[42] Guanzini and Wegelin, *Kritischer Patriotismus,* 27-29.
[43] de Tscharner-Hentsch, "Une Réponse de la Société Civile," 571-578.
[44] Kury, *Über Fremde reden*, 48-49.
[45] Roger Ballmer, forward to *Kritischer Patriotismus: Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, 1914-1989,* eds. Catherine Guanzini and Peter Wegelin (Bern: Verglag Paul Haupt, 1989*)*, 9.

across Switzerland, focusing primarily on concerns about foreign influence. Initially, German-speaking intellectuals showed little interest, leaving participation largely confined to French-speaking cities. Godet persuaded Steck, a Bernese representative, to attend a November 1913 meeting in Auvernier. This helped bridge the divide between Switzerland's French- and German-speaking regions. By December 7, 1913, during a meeting in Olten, representatives from numerous German-speaking cities, including Zurich, joined the discussions, marking a significant shift toward broader national participation.[46]

Although Steck's reputation earned him the role of the NHG's first president, the association's direction, both before and after its founding, was largely shaped by Gonzague de Reynold.[47] A Catholic Swiss historian from Fribourg, Reynold devoted his writings fostering a distinct Swiss mentality rooted in the nation's historical heritage. He believed that combating the growing influence of ethnic nationalist organizations in Switzerland required establishing a comparable organization. Known for his skepticism of pure liberal democracy, Reynold advocated for a stronger federal government to offset cantonal independence. His admiration for *Action Français*, the French nationalist association akin to the Pan-German League, deeply influenced the NHG's structure, activities, and ideology. Therefore, despite its roots in civic nationalism, many aspects of the NHG mirrored those of ethnic nationalist organizations.

On February 1, 1914, 250 participants gathered in Bern to establish a new Swiss national society.[48] These men represented the original eighteen groups of the NHG: seven French-speaking, eight German speaking, one Italian-speaking (Ticino), and two mixed-language assemblies from Bern and Biel. In their founding articles, they defined the mission of the society

[46] *Journal de Genève,* February 1, 1914.
[47] de Tscharner-Hentsch, "Une Réponse de la Société Civile," 577-578.
[48] SNL, NHG A 2, Provisorische Zentralsektretariat*, Liebe Eidgenossen!* (1914).

as "awakening and preserving the patriotic conscience of the Swiss Nation."[49] The inaugural lectures focused on two key topics: "National Education" and the "Foreign Question." The participants formalized the association's organizational structure, elected officers, and outlined its primary activities. These included studying solutions to national challenges, lobbying government bodies for reforms, and disseminating propaganda to the masses. By the end of the meeting, the representatives officially named the association the New Helvetic Society.

By adopting the name, New Helvetic Society, the founders sought to invoke the symbolic and historical significance of the original Helvetic Society, which existed from 1761 to 1858.[50] This earlier society was established by Swiss intellectuals inspired by the patriotic and scientific ideals of the Enlightenment in order to unite citizens of the cantons around a common Helvetic community. It served as a forum for discussions on reforming the Swiss Confederacy through practical economic measures and philosophical debates. However, its activities were cut short following Napoleon's invasion of the confederacy and the formation of the Helvetic Republic in 1789. The society was later revived after the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna in 1819, evolving into a "laboratory of democratic progress."[51] Its reestablishment infused it with more patriotic fervor and connected its assemblies and discussions with the liberal-radical movement. Its contributions during this period are credited with helping lay the groundwork for Switzerland's federal state in 1848, earning it recognition as one of the "founding fathers" of

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[49] SNL, NHG A 1, Marcel Godet, *Pre Helvetica Dignitate et Securitate: Einige Gedanken zur Gründung der Vereinigung* (November 1914).

[50] SNL, NHG A 1, The Standing Secretary, *Pro Helvetica Dignitate ac Securitate* (January 1914); also, see Zimmer, *A Contested Nation*, 47-51; Ulrich Im Hof and François de Capitani, *Die Helvetische Gesellschaft: Spätaufklärung in der Schweiz,* 2 vols (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1983).

[51] SNL, NHG A 10, Arthur Freymond, "Notre but, nos aspirations," in *Neue helvetische Gesellschaft* (February 1, 1914), 30-31; on them calling the original Helvetic Society a "Laboratory of Democratic Progress," also, see Marc Lerner, *A Laboratory of Liberty: The Transfromation of Political Culture in Republican Switzerland, 1750-1848* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 59-68.

modern Swiss history.[52] By claiming this name, the founders of the NHG positioned themselves as inheritors of this patriotic tradition, using it to establish legitimacy and authority for their future activities. They claimed, however, that their approach differed from that of their predecessors: "we not only want to act as a circle of intellectuals above the people, but also work with and among them."[53] Thus, the NHG fused the historic legacy of the original Helvetic Society with a contemporary mission to mobilize and nationalize the masses.

The NHG's leadership revolved around a management committee, initially comprising five members: two French speakers, two German speakers, and one Italian speaker.[54] These members were elected annually at a general assembly, presided over by the NHG's president who served a two-year term. Although elections were open, the management committee was consistently dominated by representatives from the largest groups, Zurich, Geneva, and Bern, during the war. It convened regularly to manage day-to-day operations. However, the NHG's primary decision-making and coordination responsibilities were entrusted to the delegate assembly. This assembly consisted of representatives from all member groups and could be convened as needed. As the voting and legislative body of the NHG, it oversaw decision-making and served as a forum for resolving conflicts and addressing crises, issues that arose frequently between 1914 and 1918. Due to wartime challenges, the assembly met on a monthly basis or more frequently when necessary. Representatives were appointed by individual groups, but the demands of war, such as rotating military service or professional obligations, often meant that groups sent whichever members were available at the time.

The NHG's social life revolved around its individual chapters, which were organized by city. Membership size varied significantly; Zurich had approximately 250 members by the end of

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[52] Steck, "Gefahren und Bedürfnisse unserer Zeit," 4.
[53] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-7, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, November 5, 1914.
[54] SNL, NHG A 1, [N.A.], *Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft: Unsere Grundsätze* (January 1914).

1914, while smaller municipalities like Schiers had only a dozen participants. Regardless of size, chapters were formed wherever individuals actively supported the association's mission. Although the management committee and delegate assemblies established the direction for the entire organization, chapters were "perfectly autonomous" in their activities and responsibilities.[55] This independence allowed them to conduct lectures, publish materials, and focus on specific national issues without central oversight. While this structure encouraged local initiative, it also led to varying interpretations of the NHG's vision for Swiss national identity, a perennial source of internal conflict throughout the war.

While membership in the NHG was theoretically open to all Swiss male citizens, the organization exercised strict control over who could join. Annual membership dues cost 5 CHF, with a reduced rate of 2 CHF for university students. However, applicants underwent a vetting process by a selection committee formed annually at the general assembly and tasked with overseeing all chapters. To be accepted, prospective members required a two-thirds majority vote. According to NHG bylaws, this process ensured it could "exclude unworthy members or a [current] member who endanger[ed] the association's reputation from the group."[56] The NHG explicitly stated in 1914 that it did not aim to become a political party but sought to remain above politics.[57] It was willing to collaborate with "any party as long as it recognizes and preserves the independence and dignity of our state."[58] While the organization claimed to tolerate all political backgrounds on paper, this clause primarily served as justification for rejecting Social Democrats. Although a few members were involved in socialist or working-class circles, they were exceptions rather than the norm. The NHG largely functioned as an exclusive

[55] SNL, NHG A 1, [N.A.], *Pro Helvetica Dignitate et Securitate* (March 1912), 5-6.
[56] SNL, NHG A 2, *Statuten der Neuen Helvetischen Gesellschaft Gruppe Zürich* ([1914]).
[57] SNL, NHG A 10, Standing Committee, *Neue helvetische Gesellschaft: Bern*, *1 Feb. 1914* (Biel: Der Rosius-Verlag, 1914).
[58] SNL, NHG A 15, August Rüegg, *Was will die Neue Helvetischen Gesellschaft?* (1914).

instrument of the Swiss bourgeoisie, with its ranks largely dominated by intellectuals, business professionals and individuals with political or military connections.[59] The leadership embodied this demographic profile: Gonzague de Reynold was an intellectual; Gustav Thurnherr had strong military ties; and Gerhard Steck was a Bernese lawyer who headed the Lôtschberg Railway Advertising office. By establishing entry barriers, the NHG defined its vision of who was deemed suitable to participate in shaping the Swiss nation.

Before the start of the war, addressing foreign agitation was at the forefront of the NHG's agenda. During its initial recruitment efforts in 1912, the NHG distributed an action program pamphlet detailing its immediate objectives.[60] These included "surveillance of foreign colonies and legal repression of all irredentist, Pan-German, Pan-Gallic Propaganda." The NHG also planned to lobby government authorities for the "prohibition of military companies and foreign schools." To deter "foreign infiltration," the NHG advocated ending tax privileges for foreigners and foreign businesses operating in Switzerland. It also proposed new "measures to protect Swiss schoolchildren from the disadvantage of classrooms overwhelmed by immigrant children." In terms of foreign policy, the NHG opposed any attempts to form closer ties with other Central European states, particularly through the reestablishment of the nineteenth century Zollverein customs union with Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary. Instead, it called for a proactive approach to defining Swiss neutrality by reorganizing and expanding the federal government's diplomatic corps. This strategy promoted positive international relations without official treaties. The Zurich chapter incorporated these terms into its founding statutes, positioning them as a direct counterforce to Pan-German civil associations within the city.[61]

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[59] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge*, 107.
[60] SNL, NHG A 2, Pro Helvetica Dignitante et Securitate, *Programme D'Action Nationale* (1912).
[61] SNL, NHG A 2, *Statuten der Neuen Helvetischen Gesellschaft Gruppe Zürich* ([1914]).

In May 1914, the NHG management committee distributed a survey to its chapters across Switzerland, requesting research on the state of foreign populations within their respective cities or regions.[62] The chapters were tasked with collecting data on the number of foreigners, their predominant occupations, and their countries of origin. Additionally, the survey sought information about the organizational structure and activities of foreign communities in each area. Following this initial research phase, the NHG planned to assign specific topics and national issues for each chapter to focus on. Some groups would specialize in economic matters, while others would focus on measures for improving national education. However, these carefully planned inquiries were all disrupted when the war broke out in August 1914, forcing the NHG to prematurely shift its focus from research to direct action.

2.3.1: The NHG Press Service as a Counter for Foreign Agitation at the Start of the War

The NHG had little time to prepare in the first few months of its existence for an immediate, direct engagement with German agitation. While the organization had conceptual plans, it lacked practical measures to counter the onslaught of foreign propaganda that entered Switzerland after August 1, 1914. The NHG had not yet developed the infrastructure and propaganda necessary to disseminate its vision of Swiss civic nationalism or to unify the country through social influence. The organization was paralyzed until a representative assembly convened in Bern on October 18. During this meeting, members reached a consensus that "the external and internal dangers which threaten our country and its people, and concludes on the necessity of an effective and immediate action by our association."[63] They agreed that promoting "the common ideal of a united and strong homeland" among the Swiss public would require

[62] SNL, NHG A 1, [N.A.], *Fremdeneinwanderung Fragen* (May 1914).
[63] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 2 (December 1914), 1.

initiating their own propaganda efforts through press campaigns and public speeches. Still, no concrete plan was established for implementing these measures before the end of the assembly.

The NHG's initial efforts to foster unity in 1914 were hindered by the same divided sympathies plaguing the rest of Switzerland. Its decentralized structure placed the responsibility for anti-agitation propaganda on individual chapters, which often struggled to coordinate effectively. In October, the NHG management committee issued an appeal emphasizing Switzerland's "duty of impartiality," but this effort was ignored by the public.[64] NHG chapters' own sympathies for the belligerents compounded these challenges. For example, Thurnherr expressed strong anti-English sentiments, while western chapters, like Lausanne, leaned pro-French.[65] Additionally, military mobilization disproportionately impacted smaller chapters, further limiting their ability to act. Without an effective message to rally around in the war's early months, the NHG failed to establish itself as Swiss civil society's counterforce to German agitation.

The NHG only gained momentum following Spitteler's address in December, which reframed its pre-war ideas within a wartime context and demonstrated the potential for an effective propaganda campaign. The Zurich chapter played a pivotal role in organizing and disseminating the Spitteler address, showcasing the impact of well-coordinated efforts. In November 1914, NHG Zurich formed a press committee, coinciding with preparations by Thurnherr, Baur, and Grob for Spitteler's lecture.[66] Baur was instrumental in establishing this committee, leveraging his connections with German-speaking newspapers and publishing houses. The nine-member committee had two key functions: collecting and reviewing material,

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[64] SNL, NHG B 8, Secrétariat Central, "Appel des délégués et du Secrétariat Central," *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 2 (December 1914), 5; *Der Bund,* no. 511, 1 ed., October 29, 1914.

[65] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 3 (January 1915), 7-8.

[66] SNL, NHG B 8, Thurnherr and Jud, Gruppe Zürich, to Zentralsekretariat der NHG zu Handen der zentralen Press Komission*,* December 17, 1914.

and distributing approved content to Zurich cantonal newspapers. However, Baur's tenure was brief as he was appointed to the army's press staff, and Jakob Bührer, a writer from Zurich, took over leadership of the committee.[67] Thanks to its administrative organization and established press contacts, the committee ensured the rapid dissemination of Spitteler's address in written form immediately after his lecture. No similar effort existed within the French-speaking chapters of the NHG. Writers Paul Seippel and Ernst Bovet attempted to recreate an address in French-speaking Switzerland but failed to garner comparable public attention.[68] Although pro-Entente agitation emerged in these regions, western NHG chapters consistently displayed apathy towards such propaganda, a stance noticed by German-speaking Switzerland.

After observing the successful establishment of a press service by the Zurich chapter in November, the NHG management committee, particularly Steck and de Reynold, began developing plans for a centralized NHG press service.[69] After a month of outlining, they proposed a press service at the delegate assembly in Olten on December 20.[70] Inspired by Zurich's achievements, the plan was met with widespread enthusiasm across the NHG's chapters. Rather than launching its own publication, the proposed press service aimed to create a network for distributing materials to newspapers throughout Switzerland. Its responsibilities included providing articles written or chosen by the NHG, facilitating the exchange of articles between linguistic regions through translation services, and "correct[ing] tendentious and false reports" that could mislead public opinion.[71] This initiative aligned with several key objectives of the

[67] SNL, NHG B 44, Thurnherr to de Reynold, December 28, 1914.

[68] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 4/5 (February/March 1915); also, see Clavien, "Les Intellectuels suisse et la Grande Guerre," 107.

[69] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 2 (December 1914).

[70] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 3 (January 1915), 4-5.

[71] SNL, NHG A 6, [NHG], *Service de presse de la Nouvelle Société Helvetique* (December 20, 1914); NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 3 (January 1915), 4-5.

NHG: fostering unity across the linguistic groups, promoting a Swiss perspective rooted in shared civic values, and countering foreign agitation in the public sphere.

The NHG press service's structure was integral to its operational strategy. At its core was a central office located in Bern, operating alongside the management committee. The initial plan was to have three leaders representing the French, German, and Italian linguistic regions. However, most responsibilities fell to Pierre Kohler after the NHG struggled to generate interest in Italian-language articles and translations. Kohler was an ideal choice for leading the press service. As a professor of French in Bern, he had extensive connections across both German- and French-speaking Switzerland and was highly respected in intellectual and newspaper circles on both sides.[72] The central office primarily focused on nationwide coordination efforts, managing relationships with the federal government and overseeing the press service's financial budget. It also prepared monthly reports for the delegate assemblies. However, the actual production and publication of articles were delegated to individual NHG local chapters. Each chapter was tasked with establishing its own local working committee, which included at least one member designated as a press representative.[73] Local working committees were responsible for writing articles, translating them, and building relationships with newspapers in their communities. Press representatives managed the day-to-day interactions between NHG chapters and local presses.[74] Press service encouraged collaboration among chapters, enabling them to share articles for wider distribution, but it emphasized that the local committeees were independence and responsible for the decisions made in their operations. The central office instructed press representatives to avoid associating their contributions with the NHG: "if possible, let the name of the NHG stand aside

[72] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 112-113.
[73] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 3 (January 1915), 4-5.
[74] SNL, NHG A 6, [NHG], *Service de presse de la Nouvelle Société Helvetique* (December 20, 1914).

in all matters and act personally."[75] This approach mirrored tactics used by agitation presses, aiming to present NHG material as originating from independent, organic sources rather than a concerted effort by an association. This strategy also allowed the NHG's central office to maintain a degree of separation from the activities of local committees and press representatives, enabling it to deny responsibility for any controversial content.

The NHG press service prioritized combating foreign agitation at every operational level. Its material meant to counter nationalist propaganda from official or unofficial sources, but also to replace it with content aligned with Swiss civic values. Additionally, the press service instructed local working committees to monitor regional newspapers and report articles deemed "offensive to other language areas or […] contain such serious allegations that an investigation and, under certain circumstances, and answer appears necessary."[76] Upon identifying problematic articles, press representatives contacted newspapers to prevent publication or to issue public protests in order to alert citizens about foreign agitation. Local working committees sent copies of flagged articles to the central office in Bern, where they coordinated responses to the most egregious cases. Baur's position in the Army Press Office further enhanced efforts to suppress foreign agitation. The NHG sent copies of suspect publications to the Army Press Office for official investigation.[77] In return, the NHG press service was recognized as a press representative, giving it access to Federal Council and Assembly meetings and provided benefits typically reserved for major Swiss newspapers.[78] These privileges include receiving government bulletins and publications, free copies of the *Swiss Federal Gazette*, complimentary use of telephone and telegraph services, and a subsidy of 1,300 CHF. By granting the NHG these

[75] SNL, NHG A 6, M. Godet and W. Wehrli, [Untitled] (January 1915).
[76] SNL, NHG A 6, M. Godet and W. Wehrli, [Untitled] (January 1915).
[77] SNL, NHG B 44, Armeestab Pressbureau to NHG Pressbureau, December 17, 1914.
[78] SNL, NHG B 44, Schweiz. Bundeskanzlei to NHG Pressdienst-Centralbureau, [February 1915].

resources and permissions, the Swiss government implicitly endorsed its mission to combat foreign agitation. This arrangement enabled the government to uphold its formal neutrality while civil society undertook public efforts to counter foreign propaganda.

In 1915, the NHG press service cultivated several key relationships to advance its mission. The NHG successfully secured support from several major newspapers in 1915.[79] These included the *NZZ* and the *Journal de Genève,* both of which had pre-existing connections to the NHG through individual members.[80] Additionally, the NHG established new partnerships, notably with *Basler Nachrichten,* providing an important foothold in Basel, a major center of pro-German activity during the war.[81] The press service also collaborated with other civic associations, like the Swiss Press Association. This partnership served as a source of articles in 1915, offering a much-needed boost to help the NHG press service become fully operational.

The NHG press service achieved remarkable success in its first year of operation. By the end of May 1915, it had published 330 articles in Switzerland's three national languages.[82] These articles were distributed to local newspapers, leading to the publication of 1,950 articles within the first six months.[83] By the end of that year, the press service supplied material to 280 German-speaking and 90 French-speaking newspapers.[84] However, this initial momentum began to wane toward the end of 1916 due to economic difficulties across Switzerland. A paper shortage increased production costs for newspapers, reduced issue sizes, and diminished writers' motivation. The financial strain also led to the collapse of the collaboration between the NHG press service and the Swiss Press Association, while donations to fund its activities began to dry

[79] SNL, NHG A 2, Steck and Gauther, [Untitled] (October 1, 1915).
[80] *NZZ,* no. 363, 4 ed., March 27, 1915.
[81] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 8 (June 1915); NHG B 44, Fritz Steinmann to H.J. Lang, February 15, 1915.
[82] SNL, NHG A 2, Steck and Gauther, [Untitled] (October 1, 1915).
[83] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 9 (July 1915)
[84] SNL, NHG A 11, Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, *Protokoll der Delegiertenversammlung in Winterthur* (June 3-4, 1916).

up by mid-1916.[85] To address these challenges, the central office introduced a subscription fee for newspapers receiving NHG articles. Unfortunately, most local and community newspapers, already under economic strain, could not afford this additional expense. Consequently, the NHG failed to generate sufficient revenue to sustain the press service. The economic pressure also affected local working committees. Smaller NHG chapters often struggled to find volunteers willing to serve as press representatives, much less staff an entire subcommittee. As the war dragged on, article production, translation efforts, and other essential functions diminished significantly.[86] Only larger and better-funded chapters like Zurich managed to maintain their operations and fulfill the press service's demands. Ultimately, NHG material reached only cities with major newspapers. Despite publishing 4,200 articles in 1916, fewer than twelve percent of Swiss newspapers subscribed to its material by year-end.[87] The challenges facing the press service dominated discussions at NHG meetings from late 1916 through the end of the war. Several special meetings were convened solely to address its decline. During one such discussion at a delegate assembly in April 1917, Geneva representative William Martin summarized its struggles: "The press service has until now been the great hope and the great disappointment of our society."[88] Even still, the NHG press service continued operations until 1919, ultimately reporting a total output of 20,850 articles over the course of the war.[89]

The NHG press service emerged as solution "from below" to several challenges faced by the Swiss government in managing foreign agitation entering the country. It provided resources, particularly in its investigative capacity, for identifying and addressing agitation in the press.

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[85] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 9 (July 1916).
[86] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 23 (June 1917).
[87] SNL, NHG A 4, Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft Gruppe Bern, [Untitled] (December 1, 1916); NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 22 (April/May 1917), 3-4.
[88] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 22 (April/May 1917).
[89] de Tscharner-Hentsch, "Une Réponse de la Société Civile," 583-584.

Additionally, it gave the government time to refine and strengthen its censorship measures, which were initially ineffective. Throughout the fall of 1914, the Federal Council changed its censorship policies, but these efforts appeared inconsistent and disproportionately targeted pro-French sources. Once the NHG established its press service and began gathering data, the Federal Council responded by forming the Federal Press Control Commission (CFCP). This commission combatted official propaganda from belligerent states infiltrating Switzerland.[90] Chaired by five members elected by the Federal Council, the CFCP criminally investigated Swiss publications for prohibited material, including articles that criticized other countries, government or military leaders, or disclosed sensitive information. The combined efforts of the NHG press service and the CFCP created a dual layer of scrutiny that curtailed many of the channels through which German agitation had previously flowed.

2.3.2: The NHG's counter to German Illustrated Sunday Supplements

While obvious sources of German agitation were now under a spotlight by the government and NHG, subtler yet equally persuasive materials continued to enter Switzerland. One notable example was the weekly publications known as *Sonntagsblätter* or Sunday papers. Especially popular among residents of smaller towns and villages who were less interested in urban-centric reporting from major presses, before the war Sunday papers reached an estimated circulation of 300,000 copies weekly across Switzerland.[91] Due to this high demand, smaller publication offices often lacked the resources to create original content on a regular basis. Instead, they relied heavily on syndicated material available for widespread distribution. Even before the war, German printing houses dominated the market for syndicated "Illustrated Sunday

[90] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 124-146.
[91] de Tscharner-Hentsch, "Une Réponse de la Société Civile," 583-584.

Supplements."[92] Colloquially known as "Cheese Sheets" (*Käseblatter),* these supplements consisted of four- or eight-page pictorial sections. These papers targeted the general public with entertainment-focused content and images rather than dense news articles. The content varied from popular fiction to practical advice columns, with a strong emphasis on illustrations and photographs, assuming readers preferred images to written content.

The Swiss intelligence survey conducted before the end of the war identified illustrated supplements as one of the most influential propaganda tools circulated in Switzerland.[93] These materials were primarily disseminated by the Minerva publishing company based in Würzburg, Germany, which conveniently operated a subsidiary in Zurich.[94] This gave the publications the appearance of Swiss origin while leveraging heightened public interest in wartime topics. After August 1914, Germany used its control over these supplements to distribute 400,000 copies weekly, reaching an estimated readership of 2.5 million.[95] German propaganda was seamlessly integrated into the usual content, often appearing innocuous at first glance. For example, a cover might feature a serene image of the Swiss countryside, while inner pages displayed war photographs highlighting German victories on the Eastern Front or fictionalized tales of battlefield heroism. These supplements also served as a major tool for justifying Germany's violation of Belgium's neutrality. Editions published between 1914 and 1915 frequently included images portraying minimal destruction in Louvain or accusing Belgian civilians of engaging in combat against German forces.[96] Beyond overt political messaging, cultural propaganda was also prevalent. The supplements often featured Christmas carols, holiday stories, and folk poems

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[92] Jakob Messerli and Jon Mathieu, "Unterhaltungs- und Belehrungsblätter in der deutschen Schweiz, 1850-1900," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte,* no. 42 (1992), 173-192.

[93] SFA, E27#1000/721#13893, [N.A.], *Note dur les Ecrits de Propaganda Allemande* ([N.D.]).

[94] SNL, NHG A 3, Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, *An die Freunde schweizerischer Denkart* (August 1915).

[95] Ibid.

[96] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#793, P. de Groote to Hoffmann, December 8, 1914.

emphasizing shared cultural ties between Germany and Switzerland. These reminders of a common heritage sought to connect Swiss identity to its German roots.[97]

The NHG's Zurich chapter spearheaded the fight against German agitation in Sunday papers. While the federal government noticed the trend, it acknowledged the difficulty in proving that such publications violated Swiss neutrality, limiting its ability to intervene through censorship.[98] As a result, efforts to counter this form of propaganda had to emerge from civil society. Jakob Bührer identified the infiltration of German propaganda early in the war and warned both the NHG and the Society of Swiss Writers. He emphasized danger of German illustrations, stating that it lay in the "fact that the entire non-literary people of our country read these supplements with pleasure."[99] Under Bührer's leadership, NHG Zurich conducted a four-week investigation in October 1914, reviewing every Sunday paper distributed across German-speaking Switzerland.[100] By November, Bührer reported that all illustrated Sunday supplements originated from German sources. Initially, NHG Zurich and its newly formed press office worked independently to devise strategies for countering this form of German agitation. However, once the NHG press service became operational at the start of 1915, it quickly incorporated NHG Zurich's work into their efforts to address propaganda in Sunday papers.

Shortly after the establishment of the NHG press service, the Army Press Office sent them an example of Sunday supplements that were "thoroughly German in character and was undoubtedly created in Germany."[101] The Army Press Office argued that these entertainment sheets, procured by smaller newspapers, "have a directly harmful effect on Swiss readers."

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[97] For examples of pro-German Sunday illustrated papers, see SNL, NHG A 19, *Sonntags des Brienzer,* no. 51, 1915; *Gratisbeilage zur Gotthard-Post,* no. 41, 1915.

[98] SNL, NHG B 44, Armeestab Pressbureau to Pressbureau der NHG, 1915.

[99] Ulrich Niederer, *Geschichte des Schweizerischen Schriftsteller-Verbands: Kulturpolitik und Individuelle Förderung* (Tübingen: Franck, 1994), 64.

[100] SNL, NHG B 44, Gruppe Zurich to Presszentralbureau der Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, [November 1914].

[101] SNL, NHG B 44, Armeestab Pressbureau to Pressbureau der Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, 1915.

However, due to legal limitations, its only recourse was to "issue a warning after the issue has been made." Recognizing this limitation, the Army Press Office requested the NHG take proactive measures against these papers, which it deemed "detrimental to our national spirit." The NHG's campaign against German agitation in the Sunday papers grew into a titanic expedition. NHG Zurich recognized early on that censorship would not effectively address the problem. To eliminate German influence in Sunday papers, it realized that it needed to offer Swiss presses an appealing alternative. First, it weakened Germany's publishing foothold in Switzerland. With approval from the NHG management committee and delegate assembly, NHG Zurich initiated plans to acquire the Minerva publishing house in Zurich. Instead of asking for donations from members or raiding the NHG's limited coffers, the NHG Zurich sold its plan as an investment opportunity to "friends of the Swiss mentality" within its social network.[102] It persuaded allies in Swiss publishing houses and other likeminded civic associations, such as the Swiss Society of Public Utility and the *Heimatschutz*, to finance a takeover of Minerva from the Würzburg office. By mid-1915, NHG Zurich raised 160,000 CHF and successfully put a payment down on purchasing Minerva from its Würzburg-based parent company, effectively ending Germany's ability to produce Sunday Illustrated Supplements unchallenged within Swiss territory.[103] NHG Zurich did not retain administrative control of the business; managing such a large-scale operation would have been impractical for a volunteer civic association. Instead, it transferred day-to-day operation to a newly created management cooperative called *Genossenschaft Schweizerischer Sonntagsblätter* (GSSB). The cooperative's board included representatives from its investors, with one seat permanently reserved for an NHG

[102] SNL, NHG A 3, Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, *An die Freunde schweizerischer Denkart* (August 1915); Das Initiativ Komitee zur Herausgabe Illustrierter Schweizerischer Sonntagsblätter, *Prospekt* (August 1915).
[103] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 2 (October 1915).

representative.[104] Although NHG Zurich relinquished direct administrative control, its leadership maintained several key roles within GSSP during its first year of operation. Bührer continued as an executive co-editor, while Rudolf Grob, Thurnherr's aide during the Spitteler Address organization, served on the larger editorial commission.[105]

The GSSB's efforts brought about a tectonic shift in the Swiss press and broader cultural landscape. Unlike the NHG press service, the GSSB did not rely on the volunteer contributions for content creation. Instead, it created a professional network to produce high-quality materials that could be reliably syndicated across Switzerland. While the GSSB continued to accept material from NHG, this input was not essential for its operations. Instead, the GSSB secured stable funding through subscription sales to local newspapers and relied on financial backing from its investors in order to create original material. This business-like approach also provided a level of financial stability that the NHG press service struggled to achieve. Although the GSSB faced economic challenges between 1915 and 1918 leading to discussions about potential downsizing or restructuring, it was able to sustain its activities through its business model.[106]

The GSSB embraced the NHG's mission of fostering a shared civic identity to unite Switzerland across linguistic divides. To support this goal, the GSSB focused on publishing culturally significant content, particularly Swiss literature from both past and present.[107] Its efforts contributed to a separation of German-Swiss literary works from the broader German literary tradition. Prominent Swiss authors like Gottfried Keller and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer were celebrated, alongside respectful acknowledgement of German figures like Friedrich

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[104] SNL, NHG A 3, *Statuten der Genossenschaft Schweizerische Sönntagsblätter,* ([1915]).
[105] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 9 (July 1916).
[106] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 25 (January 1918).
[107] Gerhard Steck, *L'activité de la Nouvelle Société Helvetique : rapport présenté à l'Assemblée annuelle de la N.S.H., le 23 Septembre 1916* (Lausanne : Impr. La Concorde, 1917), 18; SNL, NHG A 6, [N.A.], *Thematas* ([N.D.]).

Schiller, whose works it considered reflective of the Swiss perspective and thus worthy of inclusion in Switzerland's literary pantheon. The GSSB also prioritized translating French literary works into German, creating a unique sense of a shared cultural connection between Switzerland's linguistic communities. Recognizing the importance of engaging its audience, the GSSB focused on "popular" content to resonate with readers of the Sunday papers.[108] In addition, it expanded its reach by crafting specialized supplements tailored to specific audiences, including Catholic, Protestant, and even socialist papers. Although public interest in the war persisted, the GSSB deliberately adjusted its coverage to include all belligerent nations while sanitizing previously biased or chauvinistic narratives and exemplifying Swiss neutrality and civic values. To boost public and military morale as the war dragged on, it shifted focus toward images of Swiss soldiers guarding the borders and fictionalized stories highlighting Swiss military service, replacing previous emphasis on German soldiers.[109]

The GSSB achieved rapid success in its campaign against German agitation. By the end of 1915, the cooperative was printing an impressive 313,000 copies weekly: 132,000 four-page sheets and 181,000 eight-page sheets.[110] These were distributed to 128 Sunday papers across the German-speaking cantons. Having proven the viability of a Swiss-produced alternative, the GSSB bolstered the NHG's lobbying efforts for stronger government action against foreign propaganda. This advocacy led to the federal government imposing a special tax on imported supplements in February 1916, categorizing them alongside imported political newspapers. Although the German Embassy lodged a formal protest, it was ultimately unsuccessful.[111] By

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[108] SNL, NHG A 2, Central Secretariat, *Projet établi par la Commission des Sonntagsblätter de la NSH* (December 5, 1915).

[109] Examples of NHG Sunday supplements in: SNL, NHG A 3.

[110] SNL, NHG A 3, Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, *An die Freunde schweizerischer Denkart* (August 1915); Das Initiativ Komitee zur Herausgabe Illustrierter Schweizerischer Sonntagsblätter, *Prospekt* (August 1915).

[111] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#788, Decoppet and Schatzmann, *Bundesratsbeschluss über die aus andern Staaten eingeführten Unterhaltungsbeilagen zu schweizerischen Zeitungen* (February 4, 1916); *Auszug aus dem*

1916, the GSSB celebrated its achievements, claiming that its influence had reached "even to the last hut in the Alps."[112] According to a survey by the Swiss Postal Department at the end of 1915, ninety out of 204 Sunday papers relied on material from the GSSB's publishing house.[113] By mid-1917, the GSSB had secured a monopoly on illustrated Sunday supplements in the German-speaking Switzerland.[114] At an NHG delegate meeting in 1917, de Reynold proudly announced that not a single Sunday supplement paper openly originated from Germany. Despite these victories, economic hardships during the war eventually impacted production. Rising paper prices disproportionately affected smaller town newspapers, forcing the GSSB to reduce its output to 100,000 weekly in 1917, and further to just 60,000 by the war's end in 1918 .[115] Nevertheless, by this time German propaganda had been effectively neutralized in Switzerland's Sunday papers. The widespread industry challenges caused by wartime shortages prevented German publishers from regaining their footing in this medium. In a 1918 report submitted to the German intelligence office, Gisbert von Romberg, Germany's ambassador in Bern, acknowledged defeat in the struggle over the Sunday papers.[116] He lamented that Germany's government lacked effective means to counteract the NHG's civil society-driven initiatives. The GSSB's takeover of illustrated Sunday supplements marked a dual victory for the NHG. First, it eliminated a vital channel of German agitation that had reinforced connections between German-Swiss citizens and Germany. Second, it enabled the dissemination of a distinctly Swiss national identity, centered on shared civic values, historical narratives, and distinct cultural works.

Protokoll der Stizung des schweizerischen Bundesrats (February 4, 1916); Kaiserlich Deutsch Gesandtschaft to Schweizerisches Politisches Department, March 25, 1916.

[112] SNL, NHG A 3, Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, *An die Freunde schweizerischer Denkart* (August 1915); NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen*, no. 9 (July 1916).

[113] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#788, Schweizerische Postdepartment to the Schweiz. Bundesrat, December 15, 1915.

[114] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 23 (June 1917).

[115] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 28 (January 1918).

[116] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 266-268.

While the NHG press service and the GSSB's Sunday papers were the most notable elements of its strategy against German agitation during the war, other initiatives also played significant roles. NHG Zurich leveraged its substantial membership, extensive social connections, and financial assets to expand its activities beyond the GSSB. One prominent figure in this effort was Konrad Falke, a renowned Swiss author with strong connections to Zurich's publishing circles. His pre-war relationship with the Rascher & Co. publishing house brought the NHG into collaboration with the company's owner, Max Rascher. Rascher grew his family's bookstore into a prestigious publishing company after founding Rascher Editions in 1908.[117] Before the war, he had already been promoting Swiss national literature, aligning his personal ideology with the NHG's civic nationalist values. Falke formed a friendship with Rascher following the successful publication of his 1909 work *Im Banne der Jungfrau*. At the start of the war, Rascher independently launched the brochure collection *Schriften für Schweizer Art und Kunst* to counter German agitation and promote both fiction and nonfiction works that celebrated an independent and neutral Swiss national identity.[118] After the publication of *Wir Schweizer, unsere Neutralität und der Krieg,* a collective work created under NHG Zurich's auspices, NHG Zurich formed a formal partnership with Rascher and took on stewardship of the brochure collection.[119] Under this partnership, NHG Zurich provided content for the brochure collection, including translations of works from French-speaking Switzerland. In turn, Rascher published literary propaganda aligned with the NHG's goals, content he personally supported. The Zurich chapter further amplified these efforts by hosting lectures featuring authors or themes from the brochure collection and promoting new works through monthly bulletins issued by the NHG's

[117] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 118.
[118] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 8 (June 1915).
[119] SNL, NHG A 4, Gruppe Zürich NHG, [Untitled] (October 30, 1914).

management committee.[120] The collection featured contemporary works like Konrad Falke's *The Democratic Ideal and Our National Education* (*Das demokratische Ideal und unsere nationale Erziehung*) as well as historical writings like Johann Caspar Bluntschli's *Swiss Nationality* (*Die Schweizerische Nationalität*). Perhaps most notably, Carl Spitteler's lecture was published as part of the collection.[121] Throughout the war, NHG Zurich sought to forge a society-wide collaboration with Rascher and his brochure collection. Despite its efforts, interest among French-speaking chapters remained limited.[122] Nevertheless, by October 1915, NHG Zurich reported "the *Schriften für Schweizer Art und Kunst* have already become an important Swiss collection and, without bearing the name of the [NHG], act as one of the most powerful means of propaganda for our ideas."[123]

In 1915, the NHG achieved significant success in combating German agitation within Switzerland, effectively severing the connection between the German-Swiss press and official or unofficial sources from the German empire. By targeting German propaganda materials in the media and advocating for improved censorship policies, the NHG dealt a significant blow to Germany's ability to influence Swiss public opinion. These efforts elevated the NHG from a fledgling intellectual society to a prominent role as guardians of Swiss national identity. Through its publication campaigns, the NHG redefined Swiss nationalism by emphasizing civic values and historical traditions over shared ethnic and cultural ties with the greater German nation. However, the Pan-German efforts did not vanish entirely. Their influence persisted, ensuring the struggle for Switzerland's nation identity was far from over.

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[120] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 8 (June 1915).
[121] SNL, SLA-CS-B-4-c-15, Rudolf Grob to Carl Spitteler, December 10, 1914.
[122] SNL, NHG B 45, Gruppe Zürich to P. Kohler, November 10, 1915.
[123] SNL, NHG A 4, Gruppe Zürich NHG, [Untitled] (October 30, 1914).

2.4.1: The "Stimmen im Sturm" as the NHG's Pro-German Rival

By mid-1915, German nationalist associations, active during the pre-war period and in 1914, were no longer inconspicuous avenues for pro-German agitation, largely due to the NHG's activities. Following Spitteler's call for Swiss unity, the term "Pan-Germanism" became synonymous with foreign infiltration and influence, perceived as a threat to Switzerland's neutrality. The NHG directed the attention of its allies in the press and the government toward German-language associations, particularly those connected to the VDA and Pan-German League. Among these was the *Deutschschweizerischer Sprachvereine* (DSS), which had previously emphasized a Swiss-only membership before the war. The NHG's scrutiny of the DSS's ideological background and transnational ties contributed to a decline in its activity. This decline lasted from its initial surge of popular mobilization at the start of the war until its members adapted to the changing national rhetoric and reorganized under the *Deutschschweizerischer Gesellschaft* (DSG) in mid-1916.

Despite the NHG's counter-agitation efforts, many leaders within the DSS refused to leave these actions unanswered. A primary concern for the DSS was the momentum generated by the NHG, particularly through Zurich's press services. Fritz Fick emerged as a prominent figure in the public debate surrounding the proliferation of German illustrated papers. In November 1914, Fick engaged in a heated exchange within the pages of the *NZZ* over the widespread distribution of Germany's weekly illustrated publication, *Kriegs-Kurier*. On November 19, an anonymous protester echoing many of the NHG's arguments criticized *Kriegs-Kurier* for its vivid war photographs, pro-German captions, and low price, describing it as an obvious propaganda tool intended to sway Swiss public opinion.[124] The protester called on government censors to prohibit further distribution of the paper. Fick countered these claims in a response

[124] *NZZ*, no. 1555, 5 ed., November 19, 1914.

published on November 24, asserting that "it is not important the paper attempts to influence public opinion. If it is truly a chronicle of German successes, this is due to the fact that German successes in the war so far have been worth noting."[125] However, on November 28, *NZZ* editors, many with ties to the NHG, issued its own statement urging readers to support domestic Swiss illustrated papers rather than those imported from Germany.[126]

Another Pan-German response to Spitteler's address came from Basel theologian and German linguistic nationalist, Professor Paul Wernle. Provoked by Spitteler's distinction between Swiss national identity and the cultural ties shared between German-Swiss citizens and Germany, Wernle authored a booklet titled *Thoughts of a German-Swiss (Gedanken eines Deutsch-Schweizers).* Wernle argued that "we always be free to turn our sympathies towards the country to which we are drawn by a feeling of deep spiritual affinity, without having to worry about our patriotism."[127] Wernle revisited the historical and intellectual connections between Germany and Switzerland dating back to the Enlightenment, presenting several arguments in support of German-Swiss sympathy for Germany as natural and justifiable. He defended Germany's militarism, including its violation of Belgian neutrality, while portraying France and French-Swiss allegiances as greater threats to Swiss neutrality. Wernle also attempted to counter Spitteler's narrative by invoking examples from Switzerland's literary heritage, citing figures such as Gottfried Keller and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer who expressed support for German unification from 1848 to 1871. However, Wernle's decision to publish his booklet through Rascher & Co. proved problematic. The publishing house's alliance with the NHG meant his work carried advertisements for Spitteler's address and other NHG works on both its front and back covers.

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[125] *NZZ*, no. 1570, 1 ed., November 24, 1914.
[126] *NZZ*, no. 1587, 2 ed., November 28, 1914.
[127] Paul Wernle, *Gedanken eines Deutsch-Schweizers* (Zürich: Verlag von Rascher & Cie, 1915), 5.

By early 1915, the DSS had come to regard the NHG as its primary rival in the battle for public opinion within Swiss civil society. From its perspective, de Reynold and Falke's promotion of a distinct Swiss national culture and identity posed an existential threat to *Deutschtum* in Switzerland.[128] In February 1915, Eduard Blocher and Hektor Ammann began discussing the shifting atmosphere in German-speaking Switzerland following Spitteler's address and what measures they could take to organize a response.[129] The turning point for many Pan-German leaders came in March, when violent demonstrations erupted against German professors teaching in Fribourg. These protests, which even prompted a response by the federal government, were seen by Pan-Germans as a direct consequence of the NHG's activities.[130] By this time, Pan-German leaders had convinced themselves that the NHG was a French-Swiss creation "with a pronounced anti-German tendency."[131] On March 18, Blocher arranged a private meeting with a select group of Pan-German Swiss leaders.[132] Attendees included DSS leader Edgar Schmid and Georg Baumberger, the editor of the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*. Although Fritz Fick was absent due to business obligations, those present decided to form a publication group to counter the NHG. A larger, follow-up meeting gathered on March 25 at Alfred Niedermann's office in the Kaspar Escherhaus in Zurich, which became their headquarters.[133] The group named themselves *Stimmen im Sturm* (Voices in the Storm), dedicating its efforts to counter the NHG and other anti-German agitation through its own essays.

The *Stimmen im Sturm* maintained an official, on-paper distinction from the DSS, but its membership rolls were nearly identical. This separation was superficial, as works produced by

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[128] *Jährliche Rundschau des Deutschschweizerischen Sprachvereins* 11 (1915), 20-21.
[129] AfZ, StAAG NL A-0244 Hektor Ammann 4, Blocher to Ammann, February 8, 1915.
[130] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#788, *Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des Schweizerischen Bundesrates* (March 19, 1915).
[131] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 0, *Protokoll Ausschussitzung* (March 18, 1915).
[132] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 0, *Protokoll Ausschussitzung* (March 18, 1915).
[133] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 0, *Protokoll der Ausschussitzung* (March 25, 1915).

Stimmen im Sturm were circulated among DSS members.[134] Like the DSS, the group also emphasized a "Swiss only" membership to deflect accusations of being foreign agitators. While it avoided direct ties to official German propaganda offices, its essays often ended up in the hands of German agents operating in Switzerland. These agents even facilitated French translations of *Stimmen im Sturm* materials, which were published through the covertly German-backed *L'independent helvétique* in Geneva.[135] Led by Blocher, *Stimmen im Sturm* was essentially a roster of prominent figures within the DSS and the Pan-German community. Its members included intellectual elites like writer Ernst Zahn, professors Paul Speiser and Paul Wernle, and Germann Schütz, who had ties to the German language associations' Ticino-based paper, *Tessiner Zeitung*. Other notable participants included Fritz Fick and the sons of high-ranking Swiss military officials: Anton Sprecher von Bernegg and Major Ulrich Wille Jr., the latter of whom was by now secretly transmitting military intelligence to the German General Staff.[136] The group maintained a deliberately small and close-knit structure, limiting membership to approximately thirty individuals based in Zurich and Basel. Despite its size, *Stimmen im Sturm* became an influential force in Pan-German agitation during the First World War and quickly developed into a rival to the NHG.

Following the example of the NHG, *Stimmen im Sturm* centered its activities on establishing a publishing cooperative. However, the group required a reliable publishing house to host its works. Although many members had previously worked with Rascher's publishing house, they deliberately avoided it due to dissatisfaction with how Wernle's recent work had

[134] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 0, *Protokoll der Sitzung der Stimmen im Sturm* (May 28, 1915).
[135] Clavien, "Les Intellectuels suisse et la Grande Guerre," 114.
[136] Lucriri, *Le Prix de la Neutralité,* 174.

been handled.[137] Instead, *Stimmen im Sturm* negotiated an arrangement with Arnold Bopp's Zurich-based publishing house, facilitated by Fick's personal connection with Bopp. Bopp's company already covertly collaborated with the German Embassy and Ambassador von Romberg, making him a natural ally in advancing pro-German agitation.[138] The group wrote essays targeting influential societal figures, including teachers, pastors, industrialists, and press leaders, rather than aiming for widespread circulation. *Stimmen im Sturm* also established clear themes for its publications: refuting Spitteler's address and the NHG's ideas, highlighting examples of anti-German hostility by French-Swiss groups, and justifying Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality.[139] An estimated 2,500 recipients received the first round of essays in May 1915.

The *Stimmen im Sturm* released several works on pro-German topics, reframing them as efforts to promote Swiss national unity and identity. Hans Baur authored *Fight Germany at Home,* a work whose title superficially suggested a critique of Germany but was actually a firsthand defense of conditions in German prisoner-of-war camps following his recent, personal visit. Max Koller contributed *The Foreign Question in Switzerland* (*Die Fremdenfrage in der Schweiz*)*,* which echoed many of the NHG's concerns over foreign infiltration in the country.[140] Blocher was the most prolific writer for *Stimmen im Sturm*, producing multiple publications in 1915. Among his notable works was *Belgian Neutrality and Swiss Neutrality* (*Belgische Neutralität und Schweizerische Neutralität*)*,* which revisited the Pan-German argument

[137] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 0, *Protokoll der Ausschussitzung* (March 18, 1915); *Protokoll der Ausschussitzung* (March 25, 1915).

[138] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 191-194.

[139] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 0, *Protokoll der Sitzung der Stimmen im Sturm* (April 22, 1915).

[140] Max Koller, *Die Fremdenfrage in der Schweiz* (Zürich: Verlag der Stimmen im Sturm, 1915); A list of the *Stimmen im Sturm's* 1915 publications can be found in the DSS's *Jährliche Rundschau des Deutschschweizerischen Sprachvereins* 11 (1915), 5-6.

defending Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality.[141] Blocher contented that, unlike Switzerland, Belgium lacked a historical right to internationally guaranteed neutrality, claiming that its pre-war political and imperial activities invalidated any such entitlement. Fick's *Neutrality in Shirt Sleeves* (*Neutralität in Hemdsärmeln*) directly challenged Spitteler's call for private neutrality as a means of fostering national unity.[142] He contended that such an approach was unrealistic, instead proposing a distinction between external and internal neutrality. According to Fick, while external neutrality was essential for Switzerland's state institutions to maintain peace, individual internal neutrality could not disregard personal sympathies rooted in shared linguistic, cultural, and social histories with the belligerent nations.

2.4.2: *Stimmen im Sturm*'s legal challenges to the NHG's writers

The controversies surrounding *Stimmen im Sturm's* publications attracted broader public attention than the works themselves. In March 1916, Emil Steiner, a University of Basel doctoral student, published a book titled *On the Nature and Origin of the "Stimmen im Sturm*," which exposed the society's Pan-German social connections and its agitation agenda.[143] Steiner presented a comprehensive examination of the association's writings, arguing that its subversive, anti-French rhetoric was a continuation of material spread by Pan-German nationalist groups. Steiner further alleged that *Stimmen im Sturm* operated as a covert extension of the Pan-German League and the VDA, citing significant overlap among leadership figures, particularly Fritz Fick his family's historical ties to Pan-Germanism. His evidence suggested that organizations affiliated with these individuals collaborated directly with Berlin and the Pan-German League to circulate German propaganda within Switzerland. Although Steiner could not definitively prove that *Stimmen im Sturm* received foreign support, he speculated that its material likely came from

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[141] Blocher, *Belgische Neutralität und Schweizerische Neutralität*.
[142] Fritz Fick, *Neutralität in Hemdsärmeln* (Zürich: Verlag der Stimmen im Sturm, 1915).
[143] Emil Steiner, *Wesen und Ursprung der* "*Stimmen im Sturm*" (Zürich: Orell Füsslli, 1916).

German sources, emphasizing connections to civic associations rather than direct links to the German state. The NHG seized upon Steiner's findings to discredit its civic rival, recommending all members purchase the work.[144] Leveraging its press network, particularly in French-speaking Switzerland, the NHG promoted positive reviews of Steiner's work while launching a sustained campaign to tarnish *Stimmen im Sturm*'s public image as a vehicle for foreign agitation.[145] In response, *Stimmen im Sturm* exercised its legal right to counter accusations made against it in the press. It reaffirmed its mission of promoting Swiss unity by "awaken[ing] love and understanding for the Swiss dialects," dismissing Steiner's claims of anti-French bias as an intellectual distortion.[146] This sparked a heated exchange in the press throughout early 1916. The NHG published a companion piece titled *Criticism of the "Stimmen im Sturm,"* that reiterated Steiner's arguments while emphasizing how *Stimmen im Sturm's* activities validated French-Swiss suspicions that German-Swiss harbored Pan-German sympathies.[147]

A significant confrontation between the NHG and *Stimmen im Sturm* erupted in December 1915 when *Stimmen im Sturm* member Edgar Schmid, writing under the pseudonym H. Meier, published *The Anti-German Movement in French-Speaking Switzerland (Die deutschfeindliche Bewegung in der französischen Schweiz)*.[148] The essay charged the NHG with fostering pro-French agitation, tracing its origins to Geneva and highlighting its early dominance by French-speaking cities. Schmid further criticized the wartime conduct of the NHG's French-speaking sections, particularly their silence regarding pro-French, anti-German-Swiss demonstrations like those in Fribourg earlier that year. The work triggered a fierce backlash from

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[144] NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 7 (April/May 1916).

[145] For example, see *Journal de Genève,* no. 69, 3 ed., March 10, 1916.

[146] For example, see: *Der Bund,* vol. 67, no. 127, 2 ed., March 15, 1916; *Berner Tagwacht*, vol. 24, no. 63, March 15, 1916; *Bieler Tagblatt,* no. 58, March 9, 1916.

[147] NHG A 2, [N.A.], *Kritik der* "*Stimmen im Sturm*" *und ihre Beziehungen zum deutsch-schweizerischen Sprachverein* (Zürich: Orell Füssli, 1916).

[148] H. Meier, *Die deutschfeindliche Bewegung in der französischen Schweiz* (Zürich: Verlag der Stimmen im Sturm, 1915).

both the French-Swiss press and the NHG. Both groups urged Hoffmann at the Political Department, along with their allies in the censorship offices, to investigate and ban the essay. However, the Press Control Commission declined to intervene, citing limitations imposed by the Federal Council's decree of July 27, 1915. The decree had granted them authority to censor materials challenging neutrality or containing international connections but explicitly excluded domestic publications that sparked internal debates without violating neutrality.[149] The NHG argued that it possessed conclusive knowledge that "*Stimmen im Sturm*'s essays were sent into Switzerland by the German authorities with other propaganda material," but historical records indicate that the NHG failed to provide concrete proof to substantiate these claims.[150] Marcel Godet, an NHG leader and head of the Swiss National Library, presented circumstantial evidence suggesting that Blocher's *Belgian Neutrality and Swiss Neutrality* was received suspiciously by the library simultaneously with other German propaganda brochures in similar shipping packages.[151] Despite these allegations, the Press Control Commission ultimately accepted counterevidence submitted by *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* (*NZN)* asserting *Stimmen im Sturm's* entirely Swiss origins.[152]

The NHG's encouragement of autonomous action among its members led to a further escalation in the controversy surrounding the H. Meier essay. Albert Barth-Martz, who represented the NHG's Basel chapter on its Management Committee from 1915 to 1916, used the essay as an opportunity to publicly challenge *Stimmen im Sturm.* On December 19, he published an article in *Basler Nachrichten,* igniting a nationwide debate between the two associations in

[149] SFA, E27#1000/721#13893, Commission féderale du contrôle de la presse to [Hoffmann], [undated]; Rothlisberger to Hoffmann, December 16, 1917.

[150] SFA, E27#1000/721#13893, Rothlisberger to Hoffmann, January 6, 1916.

[151] SFA, E27#1000/721#13893, Marcel Godet to Secétariat de la Section affaires étrangères, January 7, 1916.

[152] SFA, E27#1000/721#13893, Major de Mondach to Rothlisberger, January 10, 1916.

Swiss newspapers.[153] Rather than directly addressing the essay's claims that the NHG was pro-French and anti-German, Barth-Martz chose to discredit Meier by portraying him as a Pan-German strawman, despite being unaware of the author's true identity. He wrote: "If Mr. Meier is really Swiss, he should at least try to understand the whole attitude of French Switzerland, […] that some of our French comrades are genuinely concerned about the future of Switzerland and are afraid of the overwhelming power of Germany." In his critique, Barth-Martz took care to emphasize that he was not speaking in an official capacity on behalf of the NHG: "I am not at all interested in defending the NHG against Mr. Meier. It doesn't need it."

Other NHG members and their allies saw Barth-Martz's article as an opportunity to escalate their attacks on the Meier essay. J.P. Rusch, editor of the *Aargauer Volksblatt*, used his paper as a platform for a multi-issue campaign against *Stimmen im Sturm.* While Barth-Martz refrained from advocating for government intervention against Meier or *Stimmen im Sturm,* Rusch took a more aggressive stance, demanding legal action to shut down the group for foreign agitation: "We demand that every injury to the French-Swiss people, which has now been unprotected long enough against useless publications from German-speaking Switzerland, which should finally be prosecuted. […] Punish the arsonists."[154] While Barth-Martz expressed skepticism about Meier's Swiss citizenship, Rusch explicitly accused Meier of being a German agent and labeling *Stimmen im Sturm* as an unofficial arm of the "Reich German War Party."[155] He urged federal and cantonal governments to take decisive action against the association, arguing that its writings were creating "revolutionary conditions" within Switzerland. Rusch suggested the government raid *Stimmen im Sturm*'s offices and confiscate its writings. Then, the

[153] *Basler Nachrichten,* no. 643, December 19, 1915.
[154] *Aargauer Volksblatt,* no. 297, December 22, 1915.
[155] *Aargauer Volksblatt,* no. 298, December 23, 1915.

authors responsible should "forfeit the right to their personal freedom. […] the agitators should be thoroughly deprived of their craft and their dark chambers should be closed."

The *Stimmen im Sturm's* first defense came in the form of a direct response by Niedermann, published in the *Basler Nachrichten.*[156] While Niedermann refused to reveal Edgar Schmid's identity as the author behind the Meier pseudonym, he confirmed that Schmid "is a Swiss native and comes from a family that has lived in our country for centuries." Niedermann then criticizes Barth-Martz for failing to address the factual evidence presented in the Meier essay, asserting that all examples of anti-German activity by the French-Swiss were accurate and thoroughly documented. Niedermann challenged the NHG's stance, questioning why it had not condemned instances of anti-German behavior in French-speaking Switzerland with the same vigor it had directed at *Stimmen im Sturm*. He argued this selective criticism and its avoidance of targeting pro-French demonstrations suggested the NHG viewed such actions as representative of "real Swiss spirit." Niedermann refrained from advocating legal action in this back and forth with Barth-Martz or the NHG in *Basler Nachrichten.* Instead he extended an olive branch, suggesting that *Stimmen im Sturm* would consider issuing an apology to the NHG if it shifted its focus toward taking "a stand against French improprieties and doing truly impartial work on the language issue."

As the two associations continued to exchange articles in *Basler Nachrichten,* the French-Swiss press intensified its rhetoric, echoing claims from the *Aargauer Volksblatt* that *Stimmen im Sturm* was connected to German intelligence operations within Switzerland.[157] To support these allegations, two key points were repeatedly emphasized. First, the French-Swiss press began citing Godet's claim that *Stimmen im Sturm's* publications were being produced and distributed

[156] *Basler Nachrichten,* no. 661, December 30, 1915.
[157] *Gazette de Lausanne,* January 8, 1916.

by an unnamed official German agency.[158] Second, reports surfaced alleging that *Stimmen im Sturm's* office shared the Kaspar Escherhaus building in Zurich with the German consulate. Critics seized upon this revelation as supposed evidence of collaboration and coordination between foreign agitators.[159] Using these accusations as justification, several French-Swiss publications joined the *Aargauer Volksblatt* in calling on authorities to raid and shut down *Stimmen im Sturm's* office permanently.

On January 5, Barth-Martz shifted from privately criticizing *Stimmen im Sturm* to publishing a formal rebuttal in *Basler Nachrichten.* This article was officially endorsed by the NHG's management committee, including de Reynold, Steck, and Thurnherr.[160] The NHG's response directly addressed *Stimmen im Sturm's* accusation that the NHG was inherently anti-German and aligned with pro-French interests in Western Switzerland. The NHG provided a concise history of its founding, explaining that French nationalist demonstrations in Geneva before the war had served as one of the key motivations for the society's establishment. It also highlighted its wartime activities, including its opposition to a German language ban targeting hotel customers in Lausanne and its criticism of Dr. Ernst Sauerbruch for dismissing medical staff who publicly supported Spittler's address at his Zurich office (See Chapter 4). The NHG stated its intention to end the dispute: "This settles the matter for us. We will not respond to any further pushes from Mr. Niedermann, but we are prepared to prove what has been said here in court." The *Stimmen im Sturm* issued a final reply in the *Basler Nachrichten*, adopting a conciliatory tone that seemingly reversed its earlier confrontational stance toward the NHG:

> We conclude by saying that we as free Swiss people felt sorry for the consultation of the board of the NHG; But we are still convinced of the good intentions of these men as we can demand that they are of ours. Because of this one offense, we never want to withdraw

[158] *Revue,* [Lausanne], January 6, 1916.
[159] *Journal du Jura,* January 7, 1916.
[160] *Basler Nachrichten,* no. 5, January 5, 1916.

> our respect from them and, in the interest of the common fatherland, which is already suffering too much from the rift between German and Welsh [French-Swiss] to tolerate a split among the German-speaking Swiss themselves, we offer them our sincere respect and hand of peace.[161]

With this statement, *Stimmen im Sturm* seemed to accept a public ceasefire, portraying both by adopting the appearance that the two associations were working towards a common goal, Swiss unity, but from different angles.

Yet, this was misleading as the *Stimmen im Sturm* continued the dispute over the Meier essay on other fronts. It mobilized affiliate newspapers to defend the essay and counter claims made by independent sources targeting Meier. First and foremost, the *NZN* under Baumberger came to its aid with a wide reaching newspaper. Additionally, the *Stimmen im Sturm* took steps to refute accusations of foreign influence now that the NHG had formally attached its names to the accusations. It emphasized that all its authors were Swiss citizens and that the society was entirely Swiss: "By attempting to use its denunciation [of the Meier article] to falsely label a Swiss company as a German product and, on the other hand, to falsely accuse German authorities of smuggling publications under a false flag, the office of the 'NHG' is once again clearly revealing whose brainchild it is."[162] Additionally, the *Stimmen im Sturm* sent rebuttals directly to French-Swiss newspapers, which were legally obligated to publish its responses. In an assertive manner, it demonstrated Edgar Schmid's Swiss heritage, still concealed behind the Meier pseudonym, by tracing his family's lineage back to the sixteenth century when Lausanne's canton, Vaud, was part of the Kingdom of Savoy and fought against the Confederation during the Wars of the Reformation.[163] The group also addressed allegations regarding its office location, noting that the Kaspar Escherhaus contained 600 offices, including those of consulates from the

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[161] *Basler Nachrichten,* no. 25, January 25, 1916.
[162] *NZN*, no. 6, January 7, 1916.
[163] *Gazette de Lausanne,* January 11, 1916; *Revue,* [Lausanne], January 11, 1916.

United States and the British Empire. The combination of these rebuttals and implicit legal threats over false accusations prompted many French-speaking papers to drop the issue altogether. For example, the *Revue* remarked dismissively "they tell us that they are Swiss. Too bad! It would have been a relief for us to learn that they were not." Meanwhile, *Gazette de Lausanne* sought to distance itself from responsibility for spreading false claims, attributing them instead to *Aargauer Volksblatt*.

The *Stimmen im Sturm* also replied directly to the *Aargauer Volksblatt*, although Rusch was reluctant to give its rebuttal space in his publication.[164] Once again, its defense centered on reaffirming that both the association's and Meier's identities were purely Swiss, while denying any evidence of Pan-German connections in the Central Powers. Unlike the NHG Management Committee's measured response in the *Basler Nachrichten* or the eventual withdrawal of the French-Swiss press from the controversy, Rusch refused to accept the *Stimmen im Sturm's* defense, issue a correction, or abandon the dispute. Niedermann warned Rusch that persisting in casting doubt on the *Stimmen im Sturm's* Swiss origins would result in them suing him and the paper. Despite this warning, Rusch remained undeterred. Interpreting the NHG's earlier statement threatening legal action as an implicit offer of support, he defiantly challenged *Stimmen im Sturm* to "bring about a judicial resolution" to the matter.

In the spring of 1916, *Stimmen im Sturm* accepted Rusch's challenge and filed a defamation lawsuit against him and *Aargauer Tagblatt*.[165] The group sought 4,100 Swiss Francs in damages, citing harm to Edgar Schmid's character and false claims that the *Stimmen im Sturm* was connected to German intelligence operations in Switzerland.[166] Rusch's defense rested on two main arguments: first, that personal damage could not be attributed to a pseudonym; and

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[164] *Aargauer Volksblatt,* no. 10, January 13, 1916.
[165] SNL, NHG A 32, Fritz Fick to Ernst Höhn, February 2, 1916.
[166] *Tagblatt du Stadt Thun*, no. 129, June 3, 1916.

second, that *Stimmen im Sturm's* publications bore an initial resemblance to German propaganda. The case was first heard by the District Court of Baden, which ruled in favor of Rusch. The court concluded that "the criticisms of the *Aargauer Volksblatt* were perfectly justified, since the *Stimmen im Sturm* pursued unpatriotic goals by seeking to sow discord between German-Swiss and Welsches and that any uninformed reader would consider them German propaganda."[167] Unwilling to accept defeat, the *Stimmen im Sturm* appealed the ruling to the Aargau Cantonal Court. In March 1917, the cantonal court overturned the decision and ruled against Rusch, stating that he had "defend[ed] his French-speaking fellow citizens with a little too much vivacity and vehemence" and had falsely accused *Stimmen im Sturm* of being funded by German authorities.[168] The court ordered Rusch to pay 500 Swiss Francs in damages, significantly less than the original claim of 4,100, but also required him to cover court costs and pay five percent interest on the damages, retroactive to February 1916. Rusch appealed this ruling to the Federal Court. However, the Federal Court declined to hear the case, upholding the cantonal court's ruling and forcing Rusch to comply with its judgement.[169]

Defamation lawsuits became a routine tactic for the *Stimmen im Sturm*, almost rivaling its publication of agitation materials in significance. Another notable instance involved NHG Zurich leaders Paul Gygax and Jacob Bührer, who authored a piece in the *Rorschacher Zeitung* in December 1915, accusing the *Stimmen im Sturm* of being a foreign German entity with ties to the German government.[170] In response, the *Stimmen im Sturm* filed a lawsuit against the pair,

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[167] *La Tribune de Genève*, no. 293, 5 ed., December 8, 1916 *; Le Confédére*, no. 100, December 13, 1916 ; *La Suisse*, no. 343, December 8, 1916.

[168] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 15, Georges Zellwger to Edgar Schmid, March 26, 1917; *Journal du Jura,* no. 76, March 30, 1917.

[169] *Aargauer Tagblatt,* October 1, 1917; *NZZ*, no. 1825, 2 ed., October 1, 1917; *Journal du Jura,* no. 230, October 1, 1917.

[170] *Rorschacher Zeitung,* no. 294, December 21, 1915.

eventually reaching a settlement that required Gygax and Bührer to issue a public apology.[171] The most consequential of these legal cases arose from a dispute between Eduard Blocher and Gustav von Burg, an NHG member from Solothurn. Von Burg was the editor of a small hunting and fishing magazine called *Diana* and was particularly aggrieved by Germany's invasion of Belgium. Outraged by Blocher's publication *Belgian Neutrality and Swiss Neutrality*, von Burg used *Diana* to denounce the work in the fall of 1915:

> We have no business dealing with political publications in this sports magazine, our paper is neutral. However, we warn our readers against spending 50 Rappen [cents] on this miserable piece of work, which is nothing more than a diatribe against Belgium and unworthy of a decent Swiss citizen. […] Let the man read Spitteler's great speech and then be ashamed of himself.[172]

Blocher responded by threatening legal action, citing defamation related to accusations of German connections. Von Burg defiantly welcomed the challenge, replying: "Do you really believe that the means you've chosen of intimidating unpopular critics will work here as it does for you in Germany?" True to his word, Blocher initiated a defamation lawsuit against von Burg in December 1915.

Fritz Fick acted as Blocher's lawyer for the defamation case while von Burg enlisted NHG ally Adrien von Arx, who had recently published a poem lamenting the violation of Belgian neutrality in the publication *Wissen und Leben*.[173] Blocher and Fick demanded 2,001 Swiss Francs in damages from von Burg, a sum large enough to make him reconsider defending his political stance in court. During preliminary meetings between the two lawyers, von Arx proposed a settlement to Fick, whose terms included a public apology in which von Burg would state that "he had acted in a state of excitement and, therefore, regretted the expressions used,

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[171] AfZ, StAAG NL-0244 Hektor Ammann 6, Eduard Blocher to Paul Nikolaus Cossmann, May 18, 1916.
[172] Reprinted in a more accessible format in *Der Bund,* no. 163, April 8, 1917.
[173] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 9, F. Fick to E. Blocher, December 15, 1915; *Wissen und Leben* 15 (October 1, 1914 – September 15, 1915).

and that he would cover the [court] costs incurred to date." Fick countered with a new condition that von Burg also donates 1,000 Swiss Francs to a charitable cause. Von Arx objected to this demand, explaining that such a donation was unfeasible for von Burg due to his modest income from the *Diana* and his salary as a school teacher. Fick reduced the requested donation to 500, but they still refused to agree to any cash payout outside of court.[174]

The hearing commenced at the Olten District Court in January 1916, coinciding with the intensifying conflict between the NHG and *Stimmen im Sturm* in the *Basler Nachrichten.* To refute von Burg's allegations of German ties, Fick leveraged his social connections within the government and military to compile evidence supporting *Stimmen im Sturm*'s defense. Fick's efforts were bolstered by Major Ulrich Wille Jr., a member of both *Stimmen im Sturm* and DSS, as well as the son of Swiss General Ulrich Wille. General Wille contributed a written testimony based on privileged access to military intelligence, which he asserted would exonerate *Stimmen im Sturm.* However, he stipulated that his identity remain confidential and that his testimony be presented exclusively in the closed courtroom for the judge's review.[175] Fick countered von Burg's argument that prevailing Swiss public opinion supported his claims regarding *Stimmen im Sturm*'s alleged German affiliations by presenting General Wille's sealed testimony, stating:

> The judgement of Spitteler and the defendant on the Belgian question does not coincide with the judgement of the man who currently bears the highest responsibility in the Swiss confederation and, therefore, is probably better responsible for the assessment than a poet plus a district school teacher, as can be seen from the evidence contained in the enclosed sealed envelope.[176]

However, the confidentiality of General Wille's letter was compromised when a court clerk "accidently" opened it, learning its contents, including the identity of its author. Without the information first entering public knowledge, Gerhard Steck on the NHG's management

[174] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 9, F. Fick to E. Blocher, December 15, 1915.
[175] SNL, NHG A 32, Fritz Fick to Ernst Höhn, February 2, 1916.
[176] SNL, NHG A 32, Zentralsekretariat [Steck] to Major Ulrich Wille, January 28, 1916.

committee learned of this information. Steck contacted Major Wille Jr. directly, urging him to intervene to halt the lawsuit against von Burg.[177] In his correspondence, Steck highlighted the potential risks posed by the letter's disclosure, stating: "such evidence was dangerous, not for you, but for your father." Steck further stressed that "any effect to convince [the public] that the *Stimmen im Sturm* are not Pan-Germans would be futile" given the heightened attention surrounding the *Aargauer Volksblatt* case in the French-Swiss press. To resolve the matter discreetly, Steck proposed a settlement "according to which the case would be dropped by both sides. […] the two gentlemen [von Burg and von Arx] are also prepared not to further exploit the knowledge gained through this process of the existence of a letter from your father."

Major Wille Jr. contacted Fick, who in turn involved Ernst Höhn, an intermediary connected to the Zurich NHG, to communicate with Steck.[178] Fick was outraged by Steck's abuse of General Wille's confidential letter, describing it to Höhn as "a kind of blackmail attempt." He added: "I oppose this Mr. Steck, who does not know what I would do against him as a private citizen." Fick's denunciation that the NHG Management Committee had attempted to blackmail the head of the Swiss Army for political leverage sent shockwaves through the defense. Von Arx urged Steck to immediately retract his letter to Major Wille Jr., fearing that any evidence of court staff acting on behalf of the NHG would jeopardize their case entirely.[179] Acting on von Arx's advice, Steck issued a retraction, albeit unapologetically:

> I would easily take Dr. Fick to court for the attempt to express this [as blackmail], if this were possible without spreading the whole matter there, which I do not want to publicly discuss in the state's interests. As a decent person, I can demand that my actions be judged as arising from decent motives until proven otherwise. I wrote you these lines to explain to you why my hands are now tied to take further action on this matter. Since my

[177] SNL, NHG A 32, Zentralsekretariat [Steck] to Major Ulrich Wille, January 28, 1916.
[178] SNL, NHG A 32, Fritz Fick to Ernst Höhn, February 2, 1916.
[179] SNL, NHG A 32, A. von Arx to G. Steck, February 4, 1916.

> letter to you had already given me a reputation as a blackmailer, no one will be able to blame me if I refrain from intervening in this matter further.[180]

This behind-the-scenes conflict sheds light on why the NHG Management Committee scaled back its involvement in the *Basler Nachrichten* dispute during this period. It also explains its decision to abandon support for NHG members embroiled in legal battles against *Stimmen im Sturm*, such as those related to the *Aargauer Volksblatt* and *Roschacher Zeitung* cases. Left without support, von Burg and von Arx lost their case in May 1916. The Olten District Court ordered von Burg to pay 100 Swiss Francs and cover all court costs for both parties. They appealed the decision to the Solothurn Cantonal Court, which upheld the lower court's ruling in December 1916.[181] In a final effort, they appealed to the Federal Court, but federal judges refused to hear the case and upheld the previous decisions.[182]

The *Stimmen im Sturm* did pay a toll for its confrontations with the NHG. By fighting it out in the public spotlight, it sacrificed its ability to inconspicuously produce and disseminate pro-German agitation, effectively bringing its activities to an end by early 1916. After only a year in operation, Blocher and other leaders shifted their efforts away from *Stimmen im Sturm*, establishing the *Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft* (DSG) later that year as a new platform for their agitation. Despite this transition, their rivalry with the NHG continued in the public sphere. The DSG maintained focus on countering the NHG press service, but began prioritizing efforts to challenge NHG dominance in Sunday illustrated papers. It employed several tactics to this end. It resumed publicly accusing the NHG of biased attacks on German chauvinism while neglecting similar propaganda papers produced by France and pro-French nationalists. To amplify these accusations, it recruited German papers and allied civic associations like the VDA, leveraging

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[180] SNL, NHG A 32, Steck to Major Ulrich Wille, February 9, 1916.
[181] *Journal de Genève,* no. 351, 3 ed., December 20, 1916.
[182] *NZZ,* no. 567, 3 ed., March 31, 1917; *Der Bund,* no. 151, 2 ed., March 30, 1917; *La Tribune de Genève,* no. 76, 5 ed., March 31, 1917.

these transnational networks to highlight the NHG's Francophone favoritism.[183] It also tried to set up its own Sunday papers as a direct competitor, but its membership was too small to raise the enough funds to rival the NHG.[184]

2.5: Conclusion: The Colonels' Affair and the NHG's one-sided targeting of Pro-German Agitation, 1916

The legal confrontation between the NHG and the *Stimmen im Sturm* coincided with a political crisis that engulfed Switzerland in the spring of 1916. In December 1915, André Langie, a French-Swiss cryptographer, uncovered a conspiracy involving two Swiss colonels, Karl Egli and Friedrich Mortiz von Wattenwyl, who were secretly collaborating with the German military. Both colonels served under Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg in the Swiss General Staff and were covertly providing the Germans with sensitive information, including deciphered diplomatic cables from Entente countries.[185] Langie alerted the Federal Council, which instructed General Wille to investigate the colonels and take appropriate disciplinary action for their breach of Swiss neutrality. Seeking to avoid public scandal, General Wille chose to quietly reassign the colonels rather than impose formal penalties. This lenient response infuriated French-speaking politicians within the federal government, who ultimately leaked details of the affair to the press. The revelations sparked widespread outrage across Switzerland. In French-speaking regions, many perceived the colonels' actions as yet another example of alleged ties between the Swiss military and Germany. The resulting uproar over what became known as the "Colonels Affair" led to heated protests throughout French-speaking Switzerland. In Lausanne, tensions escalated as an angry crowd of protestors nearly stormed the city's German consulate. Members of the

[183] AfZ, StAAG NL-0244 Hektor Ammann 6, VDA to Ammann, July 20, 1916.
[184] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 1, R. Amsler-Widmer, *Vorstand der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft* (July 20, 1917); *Mitteilungen der Deutschenschweizerischen Gesellschaft,* no.13 (March [1918]).
[185] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkreig,* 764-775; Moeyes, "Neutral Tones," 72-74.

local NHG chapter intervened to calm the protestors, but neither this group nor other French-Swiss NHG chapters expressed disagreement with how citizens responded to the incident.[186] Ultimately, public pressure forced General Wille and the Swiss General Staff to convene a court-martial for the two colonels in February 1916.

The NHG management committee recognized the need to coordinate a response to the unfolding "Colonels Affair," but internal divisions posed a serious threat to the unity of its organization.[187] French-speaking NHG members aligned themselves with widespread public condemnation of the German-speaking Swiss, accusing them of maintaining pro-German sympathies and tolerating agitation. Efforts by German-speaking NHG members and major press outlets to mediate the situation proved futile, but the French-Swiss were on a war path that threatened to rip open the "gap" between the linguistic groups once more. In an effort to preserve unity, the NHG management committee convened an emergency delegation meeting in Bern on January 12.[188] The discussion quickly became heated. Thurnherr and Albert Barth-Martz advocated for calm and emphasized the importance of maintaining unity without resorting to blame. They argued that allowing the official court-martial process to run its course would ultimately address the issue. Thurnherr, as a Swiss officer, was further constrained by regulations prohibiting him from publicly commenting on active military trials. In contrast, French-Swiss members demanded a pointed denunciation of the colonels, creating an impasse that prevented unanimous agreement. The meeting officially ended with a reluctant compromise: a proclamation calling for national unity without directly condemning the colonels. Shortly after this resolution was reached, Thurnherr and Barth-Martz departed early due to work obligations.

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[186] SNL, NHG A 11, *Protokoll der Delegiertenversammlung der Neuen Helvetischen Gesellschaft* (February 5 and 6, 1916).

[187] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 6 (February/March 1916).

[188] SNL, NHG A 13, Thurnherr to Steck, March 21, 1916.

However, once they left, the French-speaking members, acting with de Reynold's and Steck's approval, revised the wording of the NHG's proclamation to align with their preferences. They also copied Thurnherr's and Barth-Martz's signatures from the original version onto the modified document and omitted Thurnherr's remarks from the meeting minutes.

Thurnherr's reaction to this betrayal was a mixture of disillusionment and anger.[189] On January 19, he notified Steck of his decision to resign from the Management Committee.[190] While citing his impending military call-up as the official reason for stepping down, Thurnherr's true motivation lay in his frustration with Steck and de Reynold's handling of recent events.[191] Steck was taken aback by Thurnherr's resignation and spent several weeks attempting to persuade him to reconsider.[192] The open conflict between the French- and German-speaking sections at the delegate meeting in Baden on February 6-7 became the tipping point for Thurnherr. He finally admitted to Steck, revealing that the betrayal by Steck and other members in their overzealous fight against German agitation had led to his resignation:

> At the delegates' meeting in Baden, I brought up this matter with you, which I find very hurtful. You told me that after we left Bern, the French did not agree with your extract from the minutes, which we, Barth and I, had accepted; They had given it a new look that fit the French. They also believed they had to document the unanimity of the management and put my name under it without asking me. In doing so, you had sacrificed me to the French after the management had openly declared in the *Basler Nachrichten* 10 days earlier that we were not pursuing French politics, but Swiss ones. […] You explain all these differences with the fact that the Zurich group had risen too quickly; for me, they lie in the fact that you choose to ignore the views of the people of Zurich.[193]

Thurnherr remained an active member of NHG Zurich for the remainder of the war. However, he withdrew entirely from leadership roles and ceased participating prominently in associational meetings or activities.

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[189] SNL, NHG A 13, Thurnherr to Steck, March 25, 1916.
[190] SNL, NHG A 13, Thurnherr to Steck, January 19, 1916.
[191] SNL, NHG A 13, Thurnherr to Steck, March 21, 1916.
[192] SNL, NHG A 13. Thurnherr to Steck, January 25, 1916.
[193] SNL, NHG A 13, Thurnherr to Steck, March 21, 1916.

The court-martial ultimately found Colonel Egli and Colonel von Wattenwyl not guilty of treason, as they had not disclosed Swiss military secrets.[194] However, both were relieved of their posts and sentenced to 20 days of imprisonment for actions deemed contrary to Swiss neutrality. After their forced release from military service, Colonel Egli ended up as an active member in the *DSS.*[195] He went on to work as a war journalist on the Western Front, supplying articles for the *Basler Nachrichten.*[196] Even after the trial concluded, divisions within the NHG persisted. Barth-Martz and NHG Basel wanted a new resolution "expressing our confidence in the Federal Council, the general and chief of staff and welcoming the satisfaction the solution provided by the chambers to the crisis." But French-speaking representatives rejected any discussion of issuing an apology for their earlier conduct: "De Reynolds insists that we avoid a discussion which would lead to mutual recrimination and which would be a step backwards."[197]

The New Helvetic Society's efforts to promote Swiss unity achieved notable successes, but they were not the definitive solution that post-war narratives often portrayed. Carl Spitteler's Address, along with NHG Zurich's promotion of it, played a key role in calming public tensions at the end of 1914. By articulating a vision of Swiss nationalism rooted in civic values and practices rather than shared ethno-linguistic ties, Spitteler's speech resonated across linguistic divides and provided a framework for national unity. The NHG's publications, especially its Sunday illustrated paper initiative, continued to spread this definition, directly undermining German agitation's pre-war channels of influence. Through strategic coordination between civil society and the government, the NHG succeeded in exposing German propaganda, making it more difficult for external sources to regain a foothold in Switzerland. The association also

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[194] Moeyes, "Neutral Tones," 72-74.

[195] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 5, Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft*, Mitgliederliste der Ortsgruppe Basel* (December 1916).

[196] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 221-222.

[197] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 7 (April/May 1916).

contributed to popularizing “Pan-German” as a term synonymous with foreign infiltration and a threat to Swiss neutrality and unity. This shift in public perception paralyzed pro-German agitation in 1915, following its initial success in 1914. By offering an alternative to the polarized ethnic nationalist narratives vying to divide Switzerland into French and German factions, the NHG emerged as a stabilizing force within the nation’s public discourse. Its efforts ensured that no single definition of nationalism, whether civic or ethnic, could dominate the national conversation. While the NHG did not fully mend the linguistic and cultural “gap” within Swiss civil society, it successfully built a vital bridge that helped maintain balance in Switzerland’s public sphere during the war.

However, German agitation did not disappear after 1914. Although several sources were greatly curtailed and pre-war transnational ties maintained by Pan-German nationalists came under scrutiny, the *Stimmen im Sturm* demonstrated the flexibility of civic associations in sustaining pro-German agitation. Its activities, operating “from below,” proved an effective response at a time when state-led efforts and even initiatives by the German international press failed. The confrontation with the NHG further demonstrated how resourceful Pan-German groups were in leveraging rhetoric and social connections. By blending Swiss civic virtues with elements of German nationalism, they crafted an ideological framework that posed a compelling challenge to the NHG’s vision for Swiss national identity.

Chapter 3: In Defense of "Our" Alps: The Swiss Alpine Club and the Austro-Italian Front

3.1.1: War in the Alps

"Only in the south did it seem so light and pure, the snow domes of the mountains rose clearly into the cloudless sky – that's where the 'faithful' ally, Tschingge, as they say in Switzerland, lived," mused the German-Swiss mountaineer Gustav Renker during a climb in eastern Switzerland's Glarner Alps in early November 1914, far from the trenches on the northeastern border.[1] Renker was serving as a soldier in the Swiss military, having volunteered during the mobilization in August 1914. He took military leave to visit his uncle's family in Glarus, Switzerland, and, as a seasoned mountaineer, could not resist the opportunity to climb some of the nearby mountains. The rumblings of war could be heard, even from this distance and altitude, but Renker still felt that the Alps were a refuge of peace: "I am under this almost cozy-sounding humming music of the Alsatian cannons on the Wiggis summit, the thought of Italy's breach of trust, as harmless and trusting as the blue sky looked over the south."

The Central Powers' trust in Italian neutrality evaporated as the war moved into its second year. Originally a member of the Triple Alliance with the German Empire and Austria-Hungary, Italy declined joining the Central Powers in August 1914 as Rome interpreted the war as offensive rather than defensive in nature. Instead, Italy held secret negotiations with the Entente at the start of 1915, concluding in the Treaty of London in April. Italian irredentism had sought the territories of Trento and Trieste held by Austria-Hungary since the start of Italy's political unification in the mid-nineteenth century. The Treaty of London promised these to Italy

[1] Gustav Renker, "Schweizer Herbsttage," *Österreichische Alpenzeitung,* no. 931 (July 5, 1916), 93. "Tschingge" is a derogatory name for Italians used by the German-speaking Alpine population in Switzerland and Austria.

in exchange for opening up a new front on the Austro-Italian border, stretching the Central Powers military forces even thinner.[2]

Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary on May 23, 1915. Italian troops had been organizing on the border for weeks, but somehow still caught the Austro-Hungarian military unprepared. This border region ranged from the Adriatic Sea to the high Ortler Alps, converging at the Swiss border on the Dreisprachenspitze.[3] With the Austrians' main forces occupied on the Eastern Front, they could only muster up a nominal force to watch the border, and what they did have countered the Italians in the lowlands. The Italians then moved into the central valleys of southern Tyrol to circumvent the Austrian lines. A new race between the Entente and the Central Powers ensued, with the Austrian and Italian militaries moving further north and into the high altitudes of the Alps, eventually reaching the Swiss border.

The Austro-Hungarian military's manpower could not meet the demand for this new three hundred and seventy kilometer front.[4] Another issue altogether was the strenuous terrain of this new battlefield. Other than the small section of plains near the Adriatic, most of the front was made up of the Dolomites, some of the most difficult terrain in the entire Alps mountain range. Staggering, frigid heights characterized the frontline, in stark contrast to the sodden trenches of the plain battles on the Western and Eastern fronts. Here, nature itself was as deadly an enemy as the military foe. Austria-Hungary prepared for a possible confrontation in mountainous terrain and trained one of the only specialized mountain warfare corps in Europe.[5] These troops were

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[2] Immanuel Voigt. *The Alpine Corps on the Dolomite Front, 1915: Myth and Reality* (Bozen: Athesia Verlag, 2015), 20-26.

[3] For a military study of the Alpine front from the Swiss point of view, see David Accola and Stephen Lüchinger. *Stilfserjoch-Umbrail 1914-1918: Kampf in Fels, Schnee und Eis nahe der Schweizergrenze* (Bern: Militärische Führungsschule, 2000).

[4] Further geographic dimensions of the front in Michael Wachtler, *The First World War in the Alps,* trans. Tom O'Toole (Bozen: Athesia Spectrum, 2006), 9.

[5] Hermann Czant, *Alpinismus: Massentouristik, Massens Kilauf, Wintersport, Militäralpinistik und die 9700 Kilometer Gebirgsfronten im Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1926), 78-79.

trained with the help of civilian mountaineers from Switzerland who included engineers Walter Delmar and Ernst Kaczander and academics Andor Heffly and Radislaw Radosevics. However, these experienced troops were already occupied on the Eastern Front, in Galicia, where the Austro-Hungarian leadership had thought their expertise could be best used holding the Russians at the Carpathian Mountains.[6] The Italian declaration of war sent the Austrian military authorities into a scramble. Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Chief of the General Staff, convened the Tyrol State Defense Command under the command of General Viktor Dankl to organize the defense of the border. They believed that the most effective defense at the time was to muster local mountain people into an impromptu militia called the *Standschützen,* reasoning that those who had lived in these mountains knew how to fight in them the best. Forming these units proved not difficult, as the Defense Command was overrun by enthusiastic volunteers and was able to deploy forty-four battalions numbering around 18,000 to 20,000 men to the immediate frontlines.[7] However, these men were any locals who could carry a rifle. Most were school boys between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who were underage when the call for active service went out at the start of the war in 1914. The best of them had only experienced scouting activity through participating in local Boy Scout-like or shooting associations. The other *Standschützen* were men over the age of forty who had also been excluded from the initial mobilization because of age. These men, along with some regular Tyrolean *Landsturm* battalions, made up the approximately 35,000 Austrian troops that bore the brunt of the initial Italian invasion.[8]

The *Standschützen* succeeded in holding off the Italians until reinforcements arrived. They were replaced by the Austro-Hungarian Fifth Army in the plains on the Isonzo Front and then redirected further north into the mountainous frontlines. The German army improved its

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[6] Czant, *Alpinismus,* 19.
[7] *Zeitschrift des Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenvereins (DÖAV)* 49 (1918), 179-180.
[8] Full summary of the *Standschützen* in Voigt, *The Alpine Corps,* 14-63.

situation by deploying the Bavarian Snow Shoe Battalion of its newly formed *Alpenkorps*, specifically trained for mountain warfare. But these few troops were too small in number to hold out long term against the Italians, who had its own specialized mountainous troops, the *Alpini*. Though they had initial success, the locals of the *Standschützen* lacked the necessary technical Alpine training necessary to survive long term on the desolate and unforgiving mountain peaks. To remedy the situation, the Tyrolean State Defense Command needed experts to support these militia regiments and issued a call to the state to recruit civilian alpinists. The German and Austro-Hungarian empires transformed this call into policy, designating mountaineering clubs and others related to Alpine pursuits as *Schützvereine,* civil defense societies.[9] From these, the military recruited volunteer consultants "suitable for instruction, leadership, and other Alpine employment" under the new designation "Alpinereferenten."[10]

The belligerent states' use of Alpine clubs further entangled the state and the public sphere and blurred the line between civic association and state-trained officers with military matters on the front. The Central Powers relied on civil society to fill the holes in its military establishment. They first looked to their own Alpine clubs for support, namely the *Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein* (DÖAV). The military command pored over everything published by the club on the Julian and Carnic Alps, secured skilled mountain experts from its members, and located others already serving elsewhere and transferred them to the new Alpine front.[11] However, they had mobilized the able-bodied of their own professional mountaineers at the start of the war, which had already suffered significant casualties before the Italians joined the Entente. Many were in the mountaineer battalions placed on the Eastern Front and their heavy

[9] Tait Keller, *Apostles of the Alps: Mountaineering and Nation Building in Germany and Austria, 1860-1939* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 96-101.

[10] Czant, *Alpinismus,* 19.

[11] *Zeitschrift des DÖAV* 49 (1918), 180.

casualties against the Russians included many of the most famous personalities among them. DÖAV writer, Julius Mayer, reported in the 1915 edition of the *Mitteilungen des DÖAV* that over 1,000 members had been killed by June.[12] By the time the military needed DÖAV mountaineers in the terrain its mountaineers knew best, all who were left to recruit were those too young or old for the initial mobilization. DÖAV member and Alpine consultant Leo Handl lamented their losses on the Eastern Front: "Many of our wonderful mountain troops are in the fight against the Tsarist Empire; they have been sacrificed for the fatherland on the plains and in the sand. Give us back the Kaiserjäger […] and the treacherous invaders will be swept away like a storm!"[13] The military command had to look elsewhere for Alpine consultants.

As a result, the Central Powers' military leaders tapped into the DÖAV's civic relationship with Swiss mountaineers in order recruit the Alpine consultants necessary to train and lead troops in difficult mountainous terrain. Through this pursuit, this chapter argues that the transnational social connections of the Alpine clubs established a "cultural nationalism" through which German-speaking mountaineers imagined themselves as part of a culturally-united community. This imagined community, like others, was built on shared norms and behaviors, but it also centrally focused on the mountainous environment. Mountaineers common experiences with the Alps and their emotional connection to it as a natural monument encouraged Swiss mountaineers to take up arms and defend the mountains from what they saw as foreign, Italian aggressors. In doing so, these mountaineers demonstrate an example of the multiple ways Swiss

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[12] Julius Mayr, "Unserem Verein und seinen Tapferen," *Mitteilungen des Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenvereins* 41 *(DÖAV)* (1915), 111; The Swiss Alpine Club's writer Heinrich Dübi paid tribute to these fallen brethren with close ties to the Swiss, who included Oskar Rosmann, Richard Weitzenböck, Hans Holzgruber, Karl Kirchhof, Hans Dülfer, and Jenö Serenyi. Heinrich Dübi, "Die offizielle Alpine Literatur der Kriegführenden in den Jahren 1914-1918," *Separatabdruck aus dem Jahrbuch des Schweizer Alpenclub (SAC)* 54 (1919), 280-281.

[13] *Zeitschrift des DÖAV* 47 (1916), 213.

and German identity overlapped as well as the great variegation in visions of a German national community.

3.1.2: Swiss mountaineers on the Austro-Italian Front

> 'I don't know what you are talking about, but if you do that, you'll have to get in a car and drive to Raibl!' I received this profound message at the Tarvisio train station around midday on 7 February, 1916. I was coming from Graz with my 'open order' here in the capacity of an 'Alpinereferent.' I showed my order to the station police and asked him for friendly information. In Graz, at my own request, I was enlisted in the army as an 'alpinist' – what should I do there and where should I go? I was given the above answer. So a car! I stood at the bend in the road and waited; next to it, there were two soldiers crouching in the grass and looking at me with some surprise. A civilian with a pickaxe, a rope and a backpack a few kilometers behind the front – neither of these people had ever experienced that before.[14]

Gustav Renker heeded the call for civilian mountaineers to volunteer and help defend the Alps from foreign, "Latin" invaders at the end of 1915. He had finished his military service in the Swiss army and now, of his own accord, volunteered to serve as an Alpine consultant for the Austro-Hungarian military. This was not out of any political sympathy for the German or Austro-Hungarian monarchies, because in his own words, "for a democratic Swiss and a republican that would be impossible." Instead, "this wondrous concept of the German nature, of the German Alpine people, has driven me here and has now given me my place among the Austrian field grays, their cause is my cause: Germaness."[15]

Gustav Renker was born on October 12, 1889 in Vienna, Austria, but his family was from Zurich, Switzerland.[16] His father, Heinrich, was a merchant who settled for business in Bodensdorf on Lake Ossiach in Carinthia. Renker developed a passion for mountain climbing as a youth in both the Julian Alps and the glacial ring surrounding Lake Zurich. His family retained their Swiss nationality rather than becoming Austrians and remained close to their extended

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[14] Gustav Renker, *Als Bergsteiger gegen Italien* (München: Verlag Walter Schmidkunz, 1918), 7.
[15] Ibid., 79-80.
[16] Karin Marti-Weissenbach, "Renker, Gustav," *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS),* https://hls.dhs.dss.ch/de/articles/012213/2009-07-21/ (Accessed on 10-12-2023).

family still living in their ancestral home of Glarus, Switzerland. Between climbs in the Alps of eastern Switzerland and Austria, the German-speaking, mountaineering social circles of the region drew in Renker, particularly the DÖAV and the *Schweizer Alpen-Club* (SAC). His romanticist meditations on the Alpine landscape permeated his formal studies as a student of music. He went to the University of Vienna and finished a doctorate in music history before working as a conductor and composer around the Austrian capital in the immediate years before the war.[17] Because he was a Swiss expatriate rather than an Austrian citizen, he was not called up for Austro-Hungarian military service in August 1914. Instead, he joined the thousands of Swiss abroad who returned to Switzerland for its own defensive mobilization: "All the many of our company who had come together from all parts of the world, from Algiers, New Guinea, Portugal, Russia, England, America […] The little country suddenly became like a gigantic magnet, they converged on all sides, and the old fathers in Bern smiled and thought: Dear Fatherland, rest easy!"[18] It was only after the Italian invasion threatened to conquer the German-speaking Alpine communities of Tyrol and Carinthia that Renker felt duty-bound to defend what he imagined as a part of his culturally national homeland.

Renker's transnational, sociocultural relationships as a German-speaking mountaineer were not unique, especially between Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The Alps are often treated as a definitive, natural border between the three countries. But for mountaineers, the Alps were a place for performing and socializing with one another across political boundaries. Swiss mountaineers shared with their German and Austrian counterparts the natural symbol of the Alps, a "common denominator" centered on their interactions with the Alpine landscape, on which a

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[17] For other biographical references on Gustav Renker, see: Lee Wallace Holt, *Mountains, Mountaineering and Modernity: A Cultural History of German and Austrian Mountaineering, 1900-1945* (University of Texas-Austin: PhD Dissertation, May 2008), 177; Wilfred Wilms, "From 'Bergsteiger' to 'Bergkrieger': Gustav Renker, Luis Tranker and the Rebirth of the German Nation in Rock and Ice," *Colloquia Germania* 42, no. 3 (2009), 230.

[18] Renker, "Schweizer Herbsstage," 101.

community was based.[19] When Austria-Hungary and Germany needed mountain terrain experts to lead their forces on the Austro-Italian Front, a ready-made social network already existed for them to agitate among for volunteers. However, the great losses of their own mountaineers from the DÖAV on the Eastern Front forced the Central Powers to look towards neutral Switzerland and the SAC to fill this wartime need. The imagined Alpine community shared by German-speaking Swiss mountaineers and their German and Austrian counterparts provided fertile soil for the Central Powers' agitation, which encouraged Swiss mountaineers like Renker to abandon neutrality and volunteer their expertise for the defense of this common mountain *Heimat* from foreign invasion.

3.1.3: Mountains as an Imagined Heimat

The Austro-Italian Front has largely been the "forgotten front" in historical research on the First World War in comparison to the Western or even the Eastern Front, and the role of mountaineering, civic associations even more so. Only recently with the centenary anniversary of the war has there been some excellent works on both of these subjects. Tait Keller's *Apostles of the Alps* is an excellent example of this new historiography. He underlines the importance of the DÖAV for Austro-Hungarian war efforts and argues that their cultural norms and behaviors combined with symbols of the German nation "to forge a bond to a distinct landscape and environment, where sharp political boundaries blurred and multifaceted identities could coexist."[20] The DÖAV established a transnational community of technical experts who imagined themselves as part of a distinct community defined by a shared cultural space and practices through their daring activities as mountaineers. This identity overlapped with the states' official nationalism and even the ethnic nationalism of the Pan-Germans, but was first and foremost

[19] Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor,* 186.
[20] Keller, *Apostles of the Alps,* 5-6.

ideologically charged by the Alpine landscape. Therefore, the DÖAV provided a ready-made solution for the Central Powers' dilemma surrounding mountainous warfare, one which used the rallying cry of foreign invasion of Alpine "playground" to mobilize neutral mountaineers.[21] However, little historiographic work has been done on the role of the SAC, the First World War, and Swiss mountaineer's mobilization in defense of their transnational Alpine community.

The general state of historiography on the SAC is extremely anemic. English langauge literature on the association is practically non-existent with only brief mentions appearing on the sidelines of works like Keller's on the DÖAV. Even among Swiss historians, the SAC has only a few German-language studies and even fewer in French. The reason for this is not for a scarcity of material or a lack of interest, by scholars or by the general public. It's nearly impossible not to find SAC logo t-shirts, right next to the kitsch cowbells and boxed chocolate, in the tourist souvenir shops around Switzerland. The problem lies in the structure of the SAC. The association chose to borrow a federal organization modeled from its country's cantonal system at its founding in 1863 with regional sections that maintained significant independence over their own governance and activities. Gianni Haver laments in his overview of the SAC's history from its creation until the First World War that this structure has resulted in the absence of a real central archive.[22] Instead, the sections are likely to hold material in their own club's library. This has forced historians, purely out of practicality, to narrow their focus. They have either concentrated on individual sections in the linguistic region of their expertise or sweeping overviews from the use of its wider circulated publications. However, recent archival

[21] "Playground" here is a reference to Leslie Stephen's *Playground of Europe,* which refers to the Alps as Europe's prime recreation area in the latter half of the nineteenth century. I use playground here as place where socio-cultural norms and behaviors are practiced by the mountaineers in the alpine clubs. Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1895).

[22] Gianni Haver, "Le Club Alpin Suisse (1863-1914)," in *L'Invention de l'Alpinisme: La Montagne et l'Affirmation de la Bourgeoisie Cultivée,* ed. Oliver Hoibian (Paris: Éditions Belin, 2008), 76.

centralization has paved the way for easier access to its material and for fresh studies of its history. The integration of the SAC Bibliothek with the Zentralbibliothek Zurich and the creation of the SAC archive at the Bürgerbibliothek in Bern have made research more accessible in the last decade than ever before.

Daniel Anker's theses were the first breakthrough in historical research on the SAC and still remain the foundation for all new studies. His were the first works to put the civic association in a larger socio-cultural context. They focus on the SAC from the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a "means to understand social-cultural transformations and debates in the multilingual state of Switzerland."[23] Through mountaineering as a physical activity and a social network, the SAC became mediators in shaping Swiss national symbols, norms, and practices in the public sphere. As the Alps became symbols of the nation, the SAC turned into their gatekeepers, holding their cultural interpretations in a way that rivaled the state's own official nationalist efforts. In turn, the SAC's history is vital for understanding the debate on Swiss national identity and the struggles national cohesion faced during the rise of ethnic nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Anker's work remains solely confined to the political boundaries of the Swiss nation state. It is only with more recent works, such as Tanja Wirz's *Gipfel-Stürmerinnen,* that the SAC is placed in a transnational context. Wirz's work situates the SAC's role in defining the Swiss nation as part of the larger growth of civic associational culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The educated middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*) dominated the SAC and the mountains became a stand-in for their class and masculine-dominated values, a primary reason for the exclusion of women from the SAC's social life. Wirz views the Alps as a liminal and contested space through which the SAC's

[23] Anker, "Die Kraft der väterlandischen Berge," 3-4; also, see Daniel Anker, *Oben Statt unten: Der Schweizer Alpen-Club und die Politik, die Gesellschaft und die Ideologie der Berge* (University of Bern: PhD Dissertation, 1986).

discourse and practices shaped socially constructed symbols of the Swiss nation. But it was not just the Swiss nation that these mountaineers were imagining. The social relationships and cultural practices of Swiss mountaineers did not stop at the Swiss political borders. They formed a transnational community with other German mountaineers centered on shared anxieties, landscape symbols, discourse, and rituals of physical performance in the high Alps.

The German-speaking Swiss, Germans, and Austrians may have shared a language and incorporated it as part of their version of an imagined Alpine nation, but their defining symbol was first and foremost the natural landscape. Within early nationalism studies, George Mosse's work *Nationalization of the Masses* remains crucial for understanding the dynamic between symbols and national identity. Mosse largely focuses on man-made monuments as symbols through which values of a particular community are made visible, encouraging further imagining of one's nation. However, others have noted how the natural landscape itself can be used a symbol. Simon Schama's work, *Landscape and Memory,* uses the natural landscape as a cultural concept, a physical space imbued with ideas.[24] Denis Cosgrove writes in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* that the landscape can also serve as an ideological concept in that it represents a way a group of people signify themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature.[25] Thus, the landscape does not merely exist in nature, but is imprinted on by individuals with values and ideas. Oliver Zimmer in his article, "In search of Natural Identity," refers to this process as the "nationalization of nature" through which landscape features become natural monuments of the nation.[26] He demonstrates this practice through how the Alps became a symbol for the Swiss nation in the nineteenth century. The Alps became a

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[24] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 61.

[25] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London, UK: Croom Helm, 1984), 15; also, see John Rennie Short, *Imagined Country: Environment, Culture and Society* (London, UK: Routledge, 1991), xvi.

[26] Zimmer, "In search of Natural Identity," 643-644.

primordial connection to the Swiss historical myths, memories, and national virtues, incorporating the mountains into the "fabric of national identity." However, this chapter's position is that a single interpretation of a Swiss national identity did not monopolize the Alps. Instead, the Alps served as a cultural "common denominator" that connected a larger regional identity of German-speaking mountaineers who shared a landscape that transcended state boundaries through their physical activities as well as in their imaginary norms and values.[27]

Alpine mountaineers shared many qualities and symbols with ethnic and civic nationalists, but they defined their nation by their common culture rather than ethnic origins or democratic values. However, cultural, ethnic, and civic nationalism are not mutually exclusive. The cosmopolitan community of Alpine mountaineers overlapped with other nationalistic ideologies and Swiss mountaineers imagined themselves as part of the Swiss nation as well as the regional Alpine community. This framework is similar to the plural view other German historians recently have taken in their analysis of national identity in the late nineteenth century. Abigail Green explores the coexistence of local, regional, and national cultures in nineteenth century Germany, demonstrating that a German citizen could imagine being both a Hanoverian and part of a larger German cultural nation at the same time.[28] Her article, "The Zollverein at the World Exhibitions," places this discussion in the context of German cultural identity with a G*roßdeutsch* nation: "Germans possessed not one 'national identity but multiple German identities reflecting different facets of their Germanness […] The relative importance of these different identities shifted according to context, political circumstances, and strength of the

[27] I use the term "common denominator" here in reference to Alon Confino's work on *Heimat* symbolism connecting local regional and national imagined communities in nineteenth century Germany. Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor,* 172-173; also, see Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 45.

[28] Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21, 98-99.

different institutions they represented."[29] Governmental bodies were not the only institutions through which individuals could collectively act or imagine themselves as part of this layered "Germanness." P.M. Haas writes that civic associations, like the Alpine clubs, acted as a type of "epistemic community," a social network whose members specialize in a particular area of expertise and "have a shared way of knowing, have shared patterns of reasoning, have a policy drawing on shared values, shared causal beliefs, and use shared discursive practices."[30] The Alpine clubs generated this type of organizational identity through their shared interaction with the mountain landscape, their common mountaineering expertise, and exchange of publications. Akira Iriye writes that these types of interstate socio-cultural relationships foster "an alternative community of nations and peoples on the basis of cultural interchanges."[31] He defines the identity that these cosmopolitan exchanges foster as "cultural internationalism," but they also could overlap with nationalist values and symbols, encouraging a more regional perspective.

It was an epistemic community of German-speaking mountaineers who provided a ready-made target for the Central Powers' agitation at the opening of the Austro-Italian Front in May 1915. Through the framework of German agitation towards the SAC, this chapter demonstrates how the shared cultural practices of German-Speaking mountaineers created an imagined community of Alpinists on the basis of a cultural nationalism. This cultural nationalism was centered on the aesthetics of the Alps as a natural monument, but it was overlayed with a common German language, which fostered the pre-war socialability between German, Austrian, and Swiss mountaineering clubs. In doing so, their transnational norms and practices fostered a

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[29] Abigail Green, "Representing Germany?: The Zollverein at the World Exhibitions, 1851-1862," *The Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 4 (December 2003), 861-863.

[30] Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1992), 3-5.

[31] Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order,* 2.

regional and cultural variation of the German nation and one that inspired even neutral Swiss to take up arms to defend against foreign invaders.

3.2.1: Origins of the Mountaineering Community

The high peaks filled people with superstitious dread before the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thawed public perception of the Alps and encouraged exploration. Dragons and witches dwelled in remote glacial pools and caves, and all but chamois hunters and quartz scavengers avoided the ridges. The humanists of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries climbed for their observations into the natural world and human spirit, but their excursions were limited to the low ranges and no widespread publications stirred the interest of the public.[32] The Enlightenment unshackled the mysteries of the natural world and ushered in an age of alpine curiosity. Swiss, French, German and other intellectuals climbed peaks for the first time to understand the natural world, not just observe it, and sought challenges to test the limitations of human nature in the process. Most importantly, they put these travels to pen and paper. They published their feats and discoveries, which circulated through the European salons. The upper-echelons of society began to look, discuss, and engage with them in an entirely new way. Additionally, with the help of works from intellectuals like Albrecht von Haller, Johann Jakob Beitlinger and Johann Jakob Bodmer, the symbolic aesthetics of the Alps became imbued with moral, civic attributes contributed to the Swiss people.[33] Nevertheless, the bulk of the public had yet to physically or mentally participate in these new awakenings.

The turning point for the relationship between the public and the Alps occurred during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. The esteemed historian of the SAC, Heinrich Dübi,

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[32] Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 429-430.

[33] Holger Böniger, "«Armee Teufel an Klippen und Felsen» oder «Felsenburg der Freiheit»? Der deutsche Blick auf die Schweiz und die Alpen im 18. Und frühen 19. Jahrhundert," in *Die Alpen! Les Alpes!: Zur europäischen Wahrnehmungsgeschichte seit der Renaissance,* eds. John Mathieu and Simon Boscani Leoni (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 175-190.

writes that Napoleon's crossing of the Alps truly changed the public's engagement with the mountains.[34] The French army destroyed the old order of the Swiss cantons and established the Helvetic Republic, a convergence point of the invented tradition of rugged Alpine democracy and political participation by the larger public. However, the symbolic crossing of the Alps had a longer-lasting impact on the mental image of the Swiss public than the short-lived state of the republic. By crossing the Alps with an invasion force made up of the French masses, and even Swiss volunteers, Napoleon proved that the Alps could not only be climbed, but conquered.

After the Congress of Vienna, a golden age of mountaineering began in the mid-nineteenth century. A wave of Swiss with scholarly interests in *Naturwissenschaft* and topography began climbing the Alps.[35] Through their documentation, the mountains began to emerge as a national symbol of the Swiss Confederacy following the Sonderbund civil war in 1848. Yet, the first social organization to form around Alpine climbing wasn't Swiss at all; the members weren't even native to the surrounding states that shared the landscape. In the mid-nineteenth century, an exploration fever gripped the British public. Tales of David Livingstone in Africa and the perils of the arctic explorers stirred in the British public a desire to not just read about these explorations, but get involved themselves. This movement coincided with the imperial scramble for colonies, but the average, upper-class Englishman did not want to risk his life or wallet to trek through the jungles of Central Africa. Instead, they could safely travel to Central Europe and conquer mountain peaks for the British Empire.[36] English mountaineers flooded the western Alps, racing to be the first to climb higher and higher peaks. In Switzerland,

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[34] Heinrich Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre des Schweizer Alpenclub* (Bern: Stämpfli & Cie, 1913), 2. Dübi's work on the history of the SAC for its 50th anniversary still holds weight among historians today as one of the most accurate and comprehensive studies of the club's history before the First World War. His collection of primary material from all the sections across Switzerland was a herculean accomplishment.

[35] Anker, "Die Kraft der väterlandischen Berge," 9-10.

[36] In their own words, see Stephen, *Playground of Europe,* 306; A. F. Mummery, *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1895); Edward Whymper, *Scrambles Amongst the Alps in the Years 1860-1869* (London: J. Murray, 1900).

chamois hunters and shepherds first guided these intrepid British tourists until a profession of guides emerged ready for hire.[37] These Swiss accompanied them on these pioneering feats, but rarely received credit for the conquest. The English planted their flags on the Swiss summits and published their travel accounts to ensure recognition as the true conquerors went to them.

The circulation of travel accounts and the emerging social network of English climbers converged with the founding of the Alpine Club in Birmingham in 1857.[38] The membership was highly selective, reserved for only upper class Englishmen and a few educated elites who could prove that they had earned the right to be there by their climbing merit.[39] Its members used the club as a place to brag about their accomplishments, forming an archive to document their successes. Its publications smacked of imperialist connotations. The widely popular book *Scrambles Amongst the Alps* by Alpine Club member Edward Whymper is a prime example. The very title is an allusion to the phrase "Scramble for Africa," insinuating carving out a colonial ownership of the Alps as parallel to that of Africa at the same time.[40] The Alpine Club also made sure the greater British public could access its publications, even though membership remained exclusive. It published the first edition of its Alpine Journal not long after its founding, making copies available for purchase by non-members. It was also not shy about rubbing it in the face of the Swiss that its members were beating them in their own national landscape and dominating their symbols.[41] The British golden age of alpinism came to an end in 1865 after the successful ascent of the Matterhorn, accomplished by the author Edward Whymper.

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[37] Paul P. Bernard, *Rush to the Alps: The Evolution of Vacationing in Switzerland* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1978), 36-38.

[38] Éliane Claire Engels, *Mountaineering in the Alps* (London, UK: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 112-113.

[39] Anker, "Die Kraft der Väterlandischen Berge," 10.

[40] Whymper, *Scrambles Amongst the Alps in the Years 1860-1869.* For more analysis on British imperial discourse and their mountaineering feats in the Swiss Alps, see Tanja Wirz, *Gipfelstürmerinnen: Eine Geschlechtergeschichte des Alpinismus in der Schweiz, 1840-1940* (Baden: Hier + Jetzt Verlag, 2007), 110-111.

[41] "An Englishman is, of course, the first of created beings." Stephen, *The Playground of Europe,* 201; Ronald William Clark, *The Victorian Mountaineers* (Boston: Branford, 1954), 61.

3.2.2: The Swiss Alpine Club until the First World War

Swiss mountaineers did not make much fuss while the English began climbing the French-speaking western Alps. The English paid well and once remote mountain towns quickly became popular tourist destinations. However, once the English started working their way into the heartland of the German-speaking half of the country, the Swiss educated middle-class developed a great anxiety about foreigners stealing their national right to discover and describe their own mountains.[42] The Swiss were not alone in this feeling. Germans and Austrians also started to see the English encroach on their natural monuments. The formation of the British Alpine Club and its outpouring publications championing English, imperial domination of the Alps was the final straw. The Austrians mobilized first, founding the Österreichischer Alpenverein in 1862. In quick succession the Schweizer Alpen-Club formed in 1863 and the Deutscher Alpenverein later in 1869. This common anxiety around foreign intrusion into their Alps became the first cornerstone of their close sociocultural ties leading into the First World War and denotes the transition from "individual" to "club" periods in Alpine mountaineering.[43]

In 1862, Bernese professor of chemistry and geology Theodor Simler sent out a circular to a known circle of mountaineers and other mountain enthusiasts in Switzerland that surveyed interest in forming an Alpine club with the following introduction:

> Dear Gentlemen! Glacier and high mountain tours have been becoming more and more common in recent years, and there seems to be a real competition in this regard, especially among our Swiss tourists. It is not unknown to you that the English Alpine Club, as a result of its organization, are in strong competition, and it could soon come to the point that if the public in Switzerland wants to be informed about the regions of eternal snow and ice, about the accessibility of the glaciers and rocky peaks, they will have to turn to the descriptions of the English Alpine Club. Such a situation seemed

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[42] This anxiety was recounted in the memories of SAC historian Ernst Buss on the 25th anniversary of the club with Ernst Buss, *Die ersten 25 Jahre des Schweizer Alpenclub* (Glarus: Commissionsverlag von Bäschlin's Buchhandlung, 1889), 8-9; for more on the competition to define alpine symbols, see Peter Grupp, *Faszination Berg: Die Geschichte des Alpinismus* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 224-227.

[43] Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre,* 2-3.

> stressful to us, even shameful. While there are such excellent forces that, through their cooperation, could undoubtedly achieve something better and directly fruitful for the fatherland than a named foreign club, their isolation unfortunately only offers fragments […] It would be desirable if people came together to form a larger company in order to attack the last hiding places of the ice region and the still unclimbed peaks in a planned manner and later through graceful instructive descriptions to pass on the collected experience to the audience.[44]

Simler received an enthusiastic response from his German-speaking recipients in central and eastern Switzerland. His rallying cry to "attack" the Alps out of fear of foreigners "describing" their nation hit just the right tone to echo their national concerns. The small few who answered from French-speaking western Switzerland were at best impartial and the worst argued against it.[45] Genevans in particular felt little need for a nationwide Alpine club when their local geography society could do the same.

On April 19, 1863, 350 of the leading German-speaking personalities of the Swiss Alpine world met at the train station in the town of Olten.[46] No one representing the French-speaking cantons decided to attend, despite being invited. All agreed that they needed a civic, public association with the upmost urgency. Dr. Simler floated drafts of possible statutes ahead of time, but waited until the assembly met to hammer out the final statutes and conduct a proper democratic vote on their acceptance. They composed the club's purpose as a mission to awaken "love for their homeland" through mountaineering.[47] They determined to symbolically reconquer their own country, through their own first ascents, mapmaking, infrastructure building, creating and implementing regulations on proper conduct in the mountains, and, most importantly,

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[44] Circular letter reprinted in Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre*, 23; Buss, *Die ersten 25 Jahre*, 9-10.
[45] Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre*, 18.
[46] Ibid., 31-37.
[47] Anker, *Oben Statt unten*, 22.

circulating their own publications. In this way, the SAC sought to recapture the power to define the physical and imaginary Alps.[48]

The connection between a Swiss nation and the SAC did not stop at its mission statement. The founding members structured the SAC with local sections that operated with similar autonomy to that of the cantons.[49] Some of these corresponded to towns or cities, but they based many off of a particular geographic zone of activity, even if they were large cities as a way to stake their claim to the landscape. This is why the main Zurich chapter took on the name Section Uto, after the Uto heights to the west of Lake Zurich. Each section had a president, vice president, and numerous secretaries depending on the chapter's needs and size. They governed their own activities and addressed most of the major questions that arose until the First World War at their own discretion. Association's overall coordination was divided between the elected Central Committee and the sort of "two-house" system of member assemblies, not unlike Switzerland's own governmental sysem. The Assembly of Representatives met at least once a year to settle questions and differences with sections given representation based on their number of members. The General Assembly could be attended by any and every member, but it did not meet on a yearly basis. It went through several reiterations and was only meeting every three years by the start of the war. Therefore, the real legislative power rested in the hands of the Assembly of Representatives.[50] The statutes left the day-to-day management to the elected body of the Central Committee and its club president. The president was elected to a three-year term and the section to which the president belonged became the Central Committee that made up his cabinet. Their responsibilities included coordinating policy discussion, scheduling the time,

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[48] BBB, GA SAC 140, *Statuten des Schweizer Alpen-Club* (1863); also reprinted in Dübi, *Die ersten füngzig Jahre,* 36.

[49] Wirz, *Gipfelstürmerinnen*, 128-129.

[50] Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre,* 36.

location and agendas of assemblies, club celebrations, and the SAC's main publications.[51] By setting the SAC up as a public institution modeled after the federal state, it is clear that the founders envisioned themselves as stewards of the nation in spirit and in actions.

At its very conception, the SAC was entangled with the Swiss state, particularly the military. Of the thirteen federal councilors at the head of the Swiss government in 1863, seven of them were founding members of the SAC and a third of the total 357 members were employed by the state.[52] The club tasked itself with mapping previously unclimbed mountain ranges and creating more detailed maps for other areas. Both the public and troops in the field found the previous surveys done by the state and military too unwieldy for practical use.[53] The SAC worked on numerous mapping projects, some sponsored by the state, others on its own accord. The SAC's quasi-governmental power also extended into legislation. Part of the SAC's mission to reclaim the Alps involved prescribing regulations on conduct in the mountains. Many of these regulations applied to SAC-built infrastructure, such as light railroads and huts constructed as places of respite in the high mountains. Others touched on who could be mountain guides, a profession of mountaineers who led climbs for tourists, scientific expeditions, and exploratory activities. The SAC felt that it was too anarchic to allow free rein in the mountains as it opened them up to the possibility of exploitation. As a result, the SAC awarded licenses to proper mountain guides and offered yearly training courses for new guides so that they might be taught the proper ways of interacting with the Alps.[54] The SAC, as one of the most influential civic associations in the country, was a powerful lobbying force as well. It petitioned all levels of government, from towns to cantons to the federal government, on legislation it felt was of benefit

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[51] Duties of Central Committee found in Sections 11-17 of the founding statutes in BBB, GA SAC 140, *Statuten des Schweizer Alpen-Club* (1863).

[52] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 1, (1864), 5.

[53] Buss, *Die ersten 25 Jahre,* 107-109.

[54] Buss, *Die ersten 25 Jahre,* 196-198; Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre,* 242-255.

to their mission.[55] For example, the establishment of the Swiss national park system succeeded through SAC pressure on the government. Seeing itself as guardians of the Swiss landscape, it often went head to head against the state's infrastructure building plans. When the Swiss government attempted to construct dams at the falls of the Rhine, the SAC even coordinated with DÖAV, who would have been affected downstream, in turning the public against the initiative and the state halted the plan altogether.[56] By the start of the war in 1914, the SAC had set itself up as a powerful public institution that challenged even the state's own governance over the landscape.[57]

Despite these initiatives it must be stressed that the SAC continuously held firm that it was an apolitical club. Its founding statutes made it clear that the SAC would not favor one political party or the other, nor would it bar members based on political opinion.[58] A traditional stance by all the Central Committees up to the First World War was a refusal to weigh in on political questions brought by individual sections. A section was left to define its own limit for what was and was not "political." As such, their autonomy provided ample ambiguity for different sympathies later on during the war.

The apathy of mountaineers in French-Speaking Switzerland allowed German-Swiss to dominate the club in its early years. Funding for infrastructure projects, such as the carving of hiking trails and the building of mountain huts, greatly favored the central and eastern portions of the country. The French-speaking Swiss realized their mistake and a quick succession of sections centered in the major cities of western Switzerland were established in the late 1860s and early

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[55] This lobbying reached a high point at the start of the war; BBB, GA SAC 43, Sektion St. Gallen, "Sitzung vom 14. Oktober 1914," in *Protokoll des Central-Comites für die Jahre 1914-1916.*

[56] Buss, *Die ersten 25 Jahre,* 237-238.

[57] Andrea Porrini, "À Nous Les Alpes, À Nous la Suisse!," in *Helvetia Club: 150 Ans Club Alpin Suisse CAS, 1863-2013,* ed. Daniel Anker (Bern: Swiss Alpine Museum, 2013), 50-53.

[58] Grupp, *Faszination Berg,* 284-285.

1870s.[59] Still, the German Swiss sections far outnumbered the French Swiss at the end of the century. The French Swiss attempted to remedy this imbalance of power by centralizing their membership numbers rather than dispersing across numerous, smaller clubs. Sections, such as Geneva, would pull from the neighboring, smaller communities around the city to inflate their numbers and increase their voice in the club assemblies. This allowed them to catch up to a certain degree, but the German sections still carried the most sway, especially in elections, and the overall weight of the club leaned towards their German neighbors in the east.

The majority of the German-speaking Swiss saw no reason to alienate the western portion of the country. If they were to be a true public, patriotic representation of the Swiss nation, then the French-Speaking Swiss needed to have equitable representation in the association. Because the German-Swiss outnumbered them in sections and total members, French sections found it nearly impossible to win the presidency and become the Central Committee. After the Geneva section was the first French-speaking section to win an election in 1876, an unwritten, but highly respected tradition emerged in the rotation of the Central Committee.[60] It was decided that every third Central Committee election could only be won by a French section to assure balance in the SAC's procedures. Even still, the German-speaking majority steered the direction of the club for the most part. In 1912, Dübi's survey of club membership mirrored that of the demographics of the country with French-speakers making up only around a quarter of the SAC's 13,200 members. Out of a total of 58 sections, only 7 were French-speaking, 1 was Italian, and 2 considered themselves bilingual.[61] Only when issues threatened to completely split the club did the German-speaking sections acquiesce.

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[59] Anker, "Die Kraft der väterlandischen Berge," 32-33.
[60] Ibid., 34-35.
[61] Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre,* 65-68.

For instance, not all of the linguistic divides were as easily or smoothly solved as the issue of the rotating Central Committee. The SAC published all of its central publications in German, a reflection of German Swiss numerical dominance. The SAC Central Committee released a *Jahrbuch* annually, and all members were required to purchase a copy as part of their dues to the club.[62] This forced French-speaking members to buy a publication in German without a French alternative. It included yearly reports by each of the sections, scientific articles and new mountaineering accomplishments, obituaries, club statistical accounts, and newly surveyed maps. Thus, French speaking-members also lost out on the circulation of information vital to the association's social life. The eastern sections petitioned for a French translation of the *Jahrbuch* to be put into print by the Central Committee. A compromise was reached, but one skewed in favor of the German speaking sections. It was decided that the Central Committee would not force the German-speaking sections to fund a separate translation in French. Instead, the French sections could purchase a copy of the *Jahrbuch* and translate it using their own funds. This was financially unfeasible for smaller French-speaking sections, as their members now had to pay for the *Jahrbuch* and a translation. Section Geneva's decided to create their own publication for SAC news, completely separate from the *Jahrbuch*, called *L'Echo des Alpes* (EdA).[63] The EdA had enormous appeal within the French-speaking sections, which started to renege on their obligation to buy the *Jahrbuch* and purchased the EdA instead. In response, some of the German sections in Zurich attempted to have their own German periodical, but there was little demand for it with the *Jahrbuch* already in German and it was promptly stopped in 1893.[64] In 1909, the Assembly of Representatives agreed to allow the French-speaking sections to purchase the EdA

[62] Requirements for members listed in sections 19-22 in BBB, GA SAC 140, *Statuten des Schweizer Alpen-Club* (1863-1914).

[63] Anker, "Die Kraft der väterlandischen Berge," 44-47.

[64] *Schweizer Alpen-Zeitung* 24, Dezember 1, 1893.

as a substitute to the *Jahrbuch*, lifting their obligations in order to keep the peace.[65] Nevertheless, a scar between the French and the German sections remained, becoming a sore point when club wide issues arose.

The Italian-speaking region of southwestern Switzerland remained aloof from the SAC all the way up to the outbreak of the war. No Italian-speakers attended the founding meeting and no sections developed in the first decades of the SAC. A lack of social connections with the region did not explain their absence. The SAC made several attempts to put together a section around Ticino.[66] Finally, it established one at the start of the twentieth century with a subsection in Bregaglia, but German transplants living in the region made up the majority of its members. Likewise, a lack of interest in mountaineering did not explain the shortage of Italian speaking members. Italian-speaking Swiss had decided that they had more in common with the Italian Alpine Club and simply went across the border to participate in their clubs. The SAC's struggle with proselytizing to the Italian-speaking Swiss mirrored the overall anxiety in Switzerland over the loyalty of the Italian population, a fear that would later influence German-speaking members' outlook at the outbreak of the Austro-Italian front.

The SAC membership differed greatly from the British Alpine Club's. Mountaineers founded the SAC, but professors, business owners, lawyers, and doctors also joined. The educated middle class dominated the rolls of the club until the First World War.[67] This matched the overall trend of associational life in Central Europe in the late nineteenth century, the rise of the middle class coinciding with an eruption of voluntary civic organizations. The founders made clear in its statutes that the club should be open to anyone with a passion for mountains, rather

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[65] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 45 (1909*),* 482.

[66] Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre,* 150, 184-186.

[67] Social-economic analysis of the SAC membership within general European trends is further explored in Anker, *Oben Statt unten,* 24-37; Grupp, *Faszination Berg,* 224-227.

than limited to specific elite.[68] They also wrote into the statutes that the club should be patriotic, but apolitical in nature. This was a hardline stance that the SAC would refer to countlessly later during the First World War. Its dream of open membership did not come without limitations in practice. The club mandated dues, and the expense meant the exclusion of the working class. Again, the individual sections held sole decision-making power on membership. Some implemented strict membership standards, sometimes performing extensive background investigations.

Even though the SAC's essential mission fused mountain exploration and patriotism, the original statutes did not ban foreigners. The German-speaking sections' common interaction in the eastern Alps, anxiety over the British, and spoken language encouraged a comradery between their members and the German and Austrian Alpine clubs. Swiss mountaineers often held joint membership in a SAC section and a DÖAV section. The reverse was also true and many sections had members who, like Gustav Renker, confused the definition of national belonging across political borders. These transnational relationships based on shared norms and practices were not only the prerogative of the German-speaking sections either. The French-speaking sections, having emerged from their relationship with British explorers, gladly accepted joint members from the English Alpine Club. The 1907 assembly formally debated the entry of foreign members into the SAC ranks.[69] In a unanimous decision, it decided to write in that it full-heartedly accepted foreign members in the club. Thus, the SAC fit squarely into the educated middle-classes cosmopolitan, yet exclusively male, networks of associations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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[68] Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre,* 33.

[69] Assembly recounted in Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre*, 50-56. While debating acceptance of foreign members, the 1907 assembly also officially ruled that women could not join the SAC. Full discussion on the exclusion of women from the SAC in Wirz, *Gipfel-Stürmerinnen*.

By 1914, the SAC inserted themselves into the debate on the national identity of the Swiss nation by ruling on who could or could not be members of the club. As guardians of the natural monument of the mountains, the SAC had become gatekeepers of who could participate in the idea of the nation through permission to interact with the physical Swiss landscape. Male, educated, and middle class were the dominant attributes of a proper mountaineer and, thus, a Swiss citizen. Foreigners also had room to participate in this debate of national identity, especially Germans and Austrians in eastern Switzerland. This is not to say that one singular definition of national identity emerged for the entirety of Switzerland out of the SAC. Instead, the SAC became a pivotal arena for the discourse of sociocultural norms and behaviors surrounding the symbols of the Swiss landscape. These debates and the association itself reflected the linguistic divides between German, French, and Italian speaking regions. members agreed that the Alps were sacred places of the nation, but their transnational sociocultural relations multiplied the perspectives of who could be included in their community.

3.2.3: SAC Relationship with the DÖAV before the War

The SAC enjoyed a close fellowship with the German and Austrian Alpine Clubs in their "playground" of the eastern Alps. The Austrian Alpine Club formed in 1862, one year before the SAC, and the German Alpine Association was founded much later in 1869. After the German wars of unification, where Austrians were left out of the new German state, Großdeutsch sentiment overwhelmed both the German and Austrian Alpine Clubs. A desire for national comradery between the two clubs resulted in their union in 1873 with the formation of the *Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein* (DÖAV). Here, they could ignore political boundaries and imagine themselves as a united nation by embracing the Alps as a common cultural geography. This mission must have resonated with the public as the DÖAV had over

100,000 members, 400 chapters and was the largest civic mountaineering organization in the world at the start of the First World War.[70]

The shared geography, interactions, and anxieties fostered an interstate relationship between the SAC and DÖAV that saw overlapping membership between the clubs. These bonds only tightened once the DÖAV united into a single association and they even became part of the governing and social structure of each other's clubs. At its founding meeting in 1864, the SAC decided that it had an imperative duty to reach out and forge partnerships with foreign Alpine clubs.[71] The SAC and DÖAV came to a formal agreement to send delegates to each other's assemblies every year at the SAC's 11th annual meeting in 1874.[72] General assemblies, assemblies of representatives, and even some of the German-speaking sections annual events were attended by at least one, if not an entire delegation of DÖAV members. In 1878, at the SAC's 14th annual meeting in Interlaken, the German government even sent an official envoy of its own alongside the DÖAV delegation.[73] In turn, the SAC sent its own delegates to DÖAV events in Austria-Hungary and Germany, especially when it started hosting international conferences of mountaineers by the end of the century. These ambassadorial exchanges meant that the SAC and DÖAV were privy to and participants in each other's internal proceedings.

The SAC and DÖAV also kept in close contact through the circulation of publications. The SAC and DÖAV agreed to exchange copies of all their publications and make them accessible to all sections at the same meeting in 1874 that made the delegate exchange agreement.[74] The SAC had its own central library in Zurich, but the decentralization of the club's structure encouraged each section to have its own library for the publications to be sent. By the

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[70] Keller, *Apostles of the Alps,* 26-27.
[71] Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre,* 71.
[72] Ibid., 84-85.
[73] Ibid., 88-89.
[74] Ibid., 84-85.

start of the war, even the smallest sections had its own libraries for members to borrow from and the largest could also have their own museums and Alpine herbariums.[75] SAC members were encouraged to visit these libraries or purchase German and Austrian mountaineering publications in order to stay current with the news, discoveries, and triumphs within their shared Alpine world. This transnational network of publication circulation, readily accessable to SAC members, was a vital cultural glue to their shared, imagined community with the Germans and Austrians.

The SAC and DÖAV also imagined their community through their joint work in the high mountains. Their activities went beyond just working together to climb mountains in the eastern Alps. Since the physical mountain ranges did not meet the neat borders of Switzerland, Austria-Hungary and Germany found on political maps, the two clubs needed to work together in infrastructure building projects. Sometimes a mountain might be in Swiss territory, but the only accessible route to its summit was through Austrian Tyrol. In these situations, the SAC and DÖAV discussed building huts and trails on each other's territory. In 1908, the DÖAV's Stuttgart Section approached the SAC on improving accessibility to the Val Cluozza. The valley was just on the other side of the Austrian-Swiss border between the Ortler Mountains and Zernez, Switzerland. Despite being in Swiss territory, the valley was nearly impossible to reach from the north. The mountaineers had a much easier time accessing it by coming north from across the Austrian border. The long trek across the border and into a rather remote area prompted the DÖAV to approach the SAC about allowing them to build a hut there as a rest station. Their joint discussion concluded that it was improper for the DÖAV to own and operate a hut on Swiss

[75] Ibid., 169-215.

territory, but their coordination ultimately led to construction of a hut in that area, which was eventually placed in the curatorship of the Swiss National Park System.[76]

The SAC could not call themselves the public embodiment of the Swiss nation without also dipping into the spirit of humanitarianism. It provided relief work and funds when natural disasters struck in the Alps, not discriminating between when an avalanche destroyed a town on Swiss political territory or Austrian. The SAC provided immediate aid in donations and volunteers when historic flooding ravaged Tyrol and Carinthia in 1882 and again in 1885 after a series of deadly avalanches struck southern Tyrol.[77] The SAC saw no political partitions when it came to helping Alpine villages, unless there was a language difference.

The SAC and DÖAV commonly marked linguistic territory in the Alps. Mountaineers, guides and scientists from the SAC and DÖAV regularly worked together on research of glaciers, geology and other fields of scientific study, but also ethnographic studies. University professors and amateur historian-mountaineers wrote articles on regional histories dating back to the Middle Ages: which ancient tribe settles where, and what valley sided with Napoleon, and so forth. The shared landscape made cooperation between the SAC and DÖAV necessary for any comprehensive study of the German-speaking people in the eastern Alps. For example, Germans and the SAC worked together in 1879 on a survey of yodeling traditions in the Alpine villages of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.[78] They also marked their precisely measured maps with the languages of the remote mountain towns and village people in the Alps. They focused particularly on mapping German and Italian speakers and staking national claims in the borders between Switzerland, Austria, and Italy. In this research, they often worked with other civic associations. The DÖAV and the SAC worked hand in hand with the ethnic nationalists of the

[76] BBB, GA SAC 2113, *Hütten: Bau durch ausl. Vereine Doe.A.V. Projekt in Val Cluozza.*
[77] Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre*, 97, 101.
[78] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 14 (1878/1879), 552-554.

Deutschschweizerischer Sprachverein (DSV) and the *Deutscher Schulverein in der Schweiz* (DSS). German-Swiss members made note when Italians encroached on German-speaking valleys, publicized it, and then warmly welcomed the DSS's efforts to set up German-language schools in the Alpine villages. For example, SAC member Arnold Bähler praised the work being done to preserve the German populations from Italian encroachment in the Community of Bosco in the Ticino region in an ethnographic piece he wrote for the 1899 *Jahrbuch*.[79] It is unsurprising then that the SAC included the leading families of the German School Association and the Pan-German League in Zurich among its membership. The Fick and the Wislicenus families were all active members of the SAC and DÖAV. When an avalanche accident in Tödi killed Hugo Wislicenus, the brother of Johannes Wislicenus, the SAC built a monument in the town of his death in his memory and also set up a foundation fund for its future maintenance.[80] The DSV leader Gerold Meyer von Knonau was a member of Section Uto, served on the SAC Central Committeefrom 1885 to 1887, and penned 28 articles on the military-political history of the Alps for the *Jahrbuch*.[81] Thus, the SAC and its members proved through their activities and entangled memberships that their patriotic Swiss mission and German nationalism overlapped and coexisted within the same imagined landscape.

The SAC's German-speaking sections and the DÖAV relationship provided a transnational community centered on shared socio-cultural norms and behaviors. Though the SAC was founded on and continued to pursue a Swiss nationalist agenda, there was no reason that the natural monument of the Alps could not be a centerpiece for a larger, Germanic mountain people. A Swiss nation could exist alongside and within a German cultural sphere. It should be

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[79] A. Bähler, "Das Pommat und die deutsche Sprachgemeinde Bosco im Tessin," *Separatabdruck aus dem Jahrbuch des SAC* 35 (1899), 244.

[80] Buss, *Die ersten 25 Jahre,* 237-238.

[81] Paul Sieber, "Gerold Meyer von Knonau, 1843-1931," *Les Alpes* (1963), 127; Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 75-76.

emphasized that this was different than the hardline ethnic nationalist associations like the Pan-German League and the German School Association. There may have been overlap between the ethnic nationalists and the Alpine clubs, especially in their anxiety of linguistic territory, but the German mountaineers imagined their community first and foremost centered on the cultural landscape of the mountains. The SAC and DÖAV publications, even in their ethnographic work, commonly separated the Germans of the mountain and those of the plains. Though they recognized a shared language, they referred to them as decadent and corrupted in comparison to their rugged Alpine brothers. The rough terrain and lifestyles of the mountain people rejuvenated their bodies and their spirit; they were the true bearers of the nation. Therefore, before the First World War, a German community existed based on a cultural ideology of alpinism rather than the ethnic nationalism of the eastern Alps. It was this transnational community and the network of societies before the war offered the Central Powers a tempting route to solve their wartime needs on the Austro-Italian Front.

3.3.1: The SAC at the start of the First World War

As the guns of August 1914 began to roar, the SAC dismantled its exhibitions at the Swiss National Fair held that summer in Bern. The festival showcased societies and institutions, their works and achievements, and operated as a world's fair in miniature for the Swiss nation.[82] An international audience attended and a host of foreign statesmen visited the SAC's exhibit. The King of Belgium, on the eve of his country's invasion, wrote a highly circulated article in Swiss newspapers praising his experience viewing the SAC's demonstration. Their exhibit included scale models of mountains, huts and other infrastructure built by the club, examples of their publications, and mountaineering equipment. The SAC's exhibits received the fair's highest award as an ideal and esteemed representation of the country. When the Swiss military mobilized

[82] Nussbaum, *Schweizerischen Landesaustellung,* 4-21.

in August, the members of the SAC had the opportunity to display their ownership of Switzerland's natural monuments.

The SAC had extremely high rates of military volunteers in the first few months of the war. As a characteristic example, Section Olten, a medium sized chapter in the heart of eastern Switzerland, had over half of its members serving in the military by the end of the year. A club-wide initiative pooled together supplies and equipment, particularly blankets, for the Swiss military.[83] The Swiss General Staff turned down these supplies, stating that it simply had enough to manage. Nevertheless, the SAC kept these extra materials on hand for the military's disposal. The SAC also agreed that club infrastructure could and should be made readily available to the troops.[84] The military used club huts in the border regions as barracks and viewing posts, while maps and hiking trails became vital resources.[85] The SAC also provided lectures to Swiss troops on topics related to mountaineering for both education and entertainment.[86] Patriotic fervor within the SAC eventually reached a point that several of the sections asked the federal government to allow them to form ad hoc militias out of their sections.[87] The government, without denying the possible legality of militias, argued that volunteer militias were simply unneeded at the moment. Some of the sections continued to pester the government and the military on the topic into 1915, but they largely tabled these plans.[88] By the start of the Italian offensive in 1915, the SAC had clearly been infused with a passionate martial ethos and national

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[83] BBB, GA SAC 43, Sektion St. Gallen, "Sitzung vom 14 Oktober 1914," *Protokoll des Central-Comites für die Jahre 1914-1916.*

[84] BBB, GA SAC 43, Sektion St. Gallen, "Sitzung vom 19 Mai 1915," in *Protokoll des Central-Comites für die Jahre 1914-1916.*

[85] BBB, GA SAC 43, Sektion St. Gallen, "Sitzung vom 12 August 1915," in *Protokoll des Central-Comites für die Jahre 1914-1916.*

[86] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 50 (1914/1915), 361; BBB, GA SAC 43, Sektion St. Gallen, "Sitzung vom 20 Januar 1915," in *Protokoll des Central-Comites für die Jahre 1914-1916.*

[87] BBB, GA SAC 43, Sektion St. Gallen, "Sitzung vom 25 November 1914; Sitzung vom 20 Januar 1915; Sitzung vom 19 Mai 1915," in *Protokoll des Central-Comites für die Jahre 1914-1916.*

[88] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 50 (1914/1915), 361-362; see Anker, *Oben Statt unten*, 132-133; Andrea Hungerbühler, *"Könige der Alpen": Zur Kultur des Bergführerberufs* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 49-50.

zeal to defend the homeland. Like Gustav Renker, a large percentage of Swiss alpinists had received military training during the 1914 mobilization, making the SAC members ideal recruits for German and Austro-Hungarian military needs in the summer of 1915.[89]

The politics of the SAC at the start of the war favored the Central Powers' agitation. The St. Gallen Section on Switzerland's northeastern border with Germany held the SAC Central Committee in 1914 and 1915. It was characteristic of a German-speaking section with sociocultural ties to the DÖAV. It interacted in the mountains with German and Austrian mountaineers, shared publications, and had members who were on the rolls of both clubs. It supported military service while being hands-off with actions of the rest of the club. It simply dismissed any questions in internal club discourse surrounding foreign sympathies, citing the SAC's apolitical clause. The St. Gallen Section saw no reason to discipline club members' politics as long as it didn't jeopardize the Swiss nation or counter their support of mobilization. This meant that the central authority would not block foreign agitation.

The SAC also suffered from the same linguistic turmoil at the start of the war as the rest of Switzerland. The section's sympathies aligned with the eastern and western divisions of the country. Foreign members of the club did not help the situation as several were arousing agitation within the country, such as the Pan-German members in Zurich's Section Uto. The outbreak of the war had caught the SAC in a heated argument between the French and German-speaking sections. In the years immediately before the war, a quarrel erupted over the implementation of mandatory accident insurance for club members.[90] The French-speaking sections wanted the decision to be left to individual sections rather than a club-wide mandate. The German-speaking sections wanted the insurance, and most significantly for it to be with an

[89] Value of military trained alpinereferenten over those without experience in Czant, *Alpinismus,* 98-104.

[90] See this argument carried across the SAC Central Committee's meeting minutes in BBB, GA SAC 43, Sektion St. Gallen, *Protokoll des Central-Comités für die Jahre 1914 bis 1916*.

insurance company most likely housed in Zurich. The two sides fought in the assemblies for years without a clear majority. When the war started, this battle of insurance simply became yet another illustration of the linguistic divide echoing throughout the country. The topic may have been insurance, but the arguments used contained accusations of wavering loyalty to the Swiss nation and support of one side of belligerents over the other. Thus, the Central Powers found a divided SAC, with agitated, sympathetic members who already eyed their own countrymen with unease and anger.

3.3.2: Means of German Agitation towards the SAC

Germans directed their agitation efforts towards the SAC from two different angles: one from inside the association and one from outside. The initial wave of agitation came from SAC members themselves and started even before the Austro-Italian Front in May 1915. The close sociocultural ties centered on an ideology of alpinism and the existence of a significant number of Germans and Austrians in section rolls was already a catalyst for recruitment without the belligerent governments' or DÖAV intervention. Evidence of this agitation is most easily seen in the internal meeting notes of German-speaking sections and in the major club-wide publications. This self-mobilized agitation focused on the heroism of the club members already serving in the belligerent militaries and held their behavior up as ideals of the association. Section Olten praised one of its chairmen, R. Markl, for joining up and serving in the German military at the start of the Italian invasion in 1915 and saw no conflict between his loyalties to Switzerland and Germany.[91] Like Renker, a sense of German alpinism encouraged many mountaineers, and fighting for Germany or Austria-Hungary was, in a way, fighting to defend their German-Swiss mountains from foreign encroachment.

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[91] Schweizer Alpen-Club Sektion Olten, *30 Jahre Sektion Olten S.A.C., 1909-1939* (Olten: Buchdr. Dietschi, 1940), 42.

This type of agitation filled the SAC *Jahrbücher* of 1914 and 1915. At the end of each *Jahrbuch*, the Central Committee included short, yearly reports submitted by each individual section. Beginning in the first year of the war, the German-speaking sections listed their members serving in foreign militaries in their yearly reports. These included short write-ups of news on how and where they were serving in the armies of the Central Powers. Section Bodan (Thurgau) listed 9 members out of its 137 serving in the German military in 1915.[92] Oberhasli Section (Bern) listed 59 resignations from club activity out of its 257 due to military service, one of which was a Daniel Willi who fell victim to an avalanche while serving on the Austro-Italian Front on November 17, 1915.[93] Obituaries for SAC members killed on the fronts swelled with heroic pride. In one instance, Oberland section praised its member Hans Haselhorst for being decorated as a Knight of the Iron Cross for his gallantry on the Western Front before being killed near Ypres on November 29, 1914.[94] Another obituary from Gotthard Section (Uri) memorialized member Paul Kloß, warehouse manager from Zurich, who had also been killed in action while serving the Central Powers.[95] The internal agitation largely succeeded in recruiting Germans and Austrians living in Switzerland and Swiss with dual-nationality connections like Gustav Renker. Domestic Swiss, though they heralded their club mates' service were occupied with Switzerland's own mobilization in the first year of the war.

The last wave of this agitation, with the opening of the Austro-Italian Front, came to a close at the start of 1916. Its conclusion was largely because of its success. Those most susceptible to it had already left Switzerland and joined the Central Powers. Sections, like Olten,

[92] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 50 (1914/1915), 385.
[93] Ibid, 404.
[94] Ibid, 405.
[95] Ibid, 391.

continued to make mention of their members in foreign service, but without the feverish pride they once had. Their 1916 annual report regretfully reflected that:

> The year under review was once again not a year of jubilee; the world conflagration continues to rage incessantly and the madness continues to reach new areas of rabid blindness, so the life of the club as a whole, like the achievements and work of the individual sections, was very much influenced by the bad events of the time and the activities of the Olten Section also suffered under these conditions; It doesn't have an uplifting effect on the spirit when cannons can be heard far away from the border.[96]

Reports of military service in the *Jahrbuch* came to a complete halt altogether. Many of the leading personalities of the SAC felt uneasy with the publication of these rolls to begin with, including their editor, the historian Heinrich Dübi. However, economic necessity rather than self-censorship drove their omission. The rationing of paper as part of the overall shortage of goods in Switzerland forced the SAC to cut back on their publications. Many members began to suffer financially as a result of the limitations on international trade and travel placed on Switzerland due to its precarious geographic position. Some spoke of halting the *Jahrbuch* altogether or at least amending the rule mandating its purchase to maintain enrollment. Dübi eliminated the section reports and his book review segments to save paper and reduce the cost rather than halt the *Jahrbuch* altogether. The SAC published the last *Jahrbuch* featuring these lengthy section reports in 1916, and even then, it lacked the fervor of the 1914/1915 editions. Of the very few who continued to list members serving in action, such as Section Einsiedeln (Schwyz) and Section Pilatus (Lucerne), their reports were solemn: "After a happy return home, we would like to welcome you back into our midst."[97] Thus, the means of this internal agitation simply lost its fuel and burnt out, rather than intentionally being snuffed out.

After 1915, external sources of agitation replaced the early internal pressures used in SAC publications. The Germany and Austria-Hungary now desperately needed mountaineers

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[96] Schweizer Alpen-Club Sektion Olten, *30 Jahre Sektion Olten,* 42-43.
[97] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 51 (1916), 290-309.

from neutral countries to support their defense on the Austro-Italian Front. However, direct contact with Alpine associations like the SAC could not realistically occur. Such an outreach would have been a blatant violation of Swiss neutrality. They needed a way to encourage Swiss to cross the border and join voluntarily. The transnational relationship between the SAC and DÖAV provided a ready-made highway for this agitation. The DÖAV already served as a public institutional appendage to the German and Austro-Hungarian militaries since its designation as a *Schützverein* in May 1915. In addition, the DÖAV enthusiastically supported the war and needed little convincing to promote agitational propaganda.[98] Its publications already told their own mountaineers where to go to volunteer and where to donate Alpine equipment, clothing, and maps.[99] The difficulty lay in accessing mountaineers in neutral countries now that the war had made the interstate transmission of people and propaganda more difficult. The DÖAV still had members in the SAC who were too old to serve in the belligerent militaries and chose to stay in Switzerland. However, these were too few and far between to be an influential pressure group to recruit able-bodied alpinists. In addition, internal SAC publications had now dried up as source for propaganda.

What had not stopped was the cross-border circulation of major Alpine club publications. Despite Switzerland, Germany, and Austria-Hungary's varying degrees of censorship in place by the end of 1915, the SAC and DÖAV still exchanged journals and yearbooks. All the DÖAV needed to do was publish material in its own works with the knowledge that it would make their way to the SAC sections. Agitational pieces could then serve two purposes at the same time: they could be used as propaganda for domestic as well as international war support. The DÖAV's

[98] After Italy's declaration of war, Dübi noticed a significant lurch towards militarism in the DÖAV's publications because of this "new enemy." Dübi, "Die offizielle Alpine Literatur der Kriegführenden," 280-281; also, see Hungerbühler, "Könige der Alpen," 62-63.

[99] *Mitteilungen des DÖAV* 42 (1916), 115.

Zeitschrift and *Mittelungen* both continued to circulate.[100] Additionally, the Austrian sections' periodical, the *Österreichischen Alpenzeitung,* continued to be published even after their union with the German Alpine club. SAC sections eagerly sought out this periodical as the Alpine club world often hailed it as the best publication available.[101] The transnational affairs of the clubs continued to interest the SAC readership, perhaps even more so as the periodicals contained news and information on the Alpine front on their own borders. Therefore, the German and Austro-Hungarian militaries effectively distributed propaganda throughout Switzerland and into the hands of an interested audience. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians debated whether these publications should be permitted to circulate. Sensitive information about military positions and operations at the front would be released to an international public. However, they decided that the need for agitation was greater than military secrets.[102] The military censors required just one compromise of the DÖAV, that it omit maps from the publications.

These agitational pieces had to be written in a particular style to be effective. The international community of Alpine clubs and mountaineer-writers developed a distinct writing style during the nineteenth century. Their writings fused romantic travel accounts and scientific observations, emerging from a need to provide proof and legitimacy in their accomplishments. The English alpinists had used the style to gate keep their claims for being the first to conquer summits in the mid-century. It didn't matter if Swiss locals had climbed the mountain first or if they were the guides, the English were the ones to write about it and so they earned the credit. Every subsequent Alpine club journal adopted and adapted this style of writing in their publications. Even the most scientific of recordings needed the flavoring of the travel account to

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[100] Conformation of circulation found in *Jahrebericht des Akademischen Alpen-Club Zürich* (1916), 5.
[101] Dübi, "Die offizielle Alpine Literatur der Kriegführenden," 286.
[102] *Mitteilungen des DÖAV* 40 (1914), 230*; Mitteilungen des DÖAV* 43 (1917), 155.

pass the bar. The DÖAV's agitational pieces subject were already tailor-made for this style of writing.

Ideally, the DÖAV would have a Swiss mountaineer already on the frontlines act as their mouthpiece for agitational material. It found the perfect man in Gustav Renker, a German-Swiss mountaineer whose cultural nationalism advocated for the staunch defense of "their" mountains against Latin invaders. He was also educated, a good writer, and he knew how to fit the alpinist writing style perfectly. Over the course of the war, Renker published five major pieces for the DÖAV's *Zeitschrift* and *Mittelungen*. These articles romantically detailed his every day adventures on the front while also mixing in the persuasive, nationalist sentiments that underlined his spiritual mission as a German-speaking Swiss alpinist serving the Central Powers. He championed the mutual identity shared across the German Alps. From the Jura to the Julian Alps, he boisterously hailed the German Alpine community and the war as a common defense of their Heimat, rather than in service of a foreign monarch. He also published shorter essays in the *Österreichische Alpenzeitung*, particularly "*Schweizer Herbsstage*." He directed his piece at a Swiss mountaineering audience with its background of a picturesque Swiss Alpine, autumn landscape in the background of his Swiss military service in the fall of 1914. He praised his fellow Swiss volunteers, blending his current military service with theirs, and even used local Schweizer-deutsch spellings in his recollected dialogues.[103] The DÖAV's agitational efforts towards the SAC from 1915 until the end of the war reflected this style. It highlighted the shared imagined community between the German-speaking mountaineers with the Alpine landscape as their shared national monuments.

[103] Dübi summarized Renker's wartime works and held high praise for his articles in Dübi, "Die offizielle Alpine Literatur der Kriegführenden," 286.

Outside of associational publications, other forms of German agitation targeted the Swiss mountain community. The German illustrated Sunday supplements that proliferated the Swiss-German countryside also included materially specifically targeting the Swiss mountaineers, especially their fears of foreign invasion by Italians. For example, the *Sonntagsblatt des Brienzer* carried a serial story titled *"Hier Hachspitz … : Ein Dolomitenstück aus dem Kreig"* that followed Austrian and German mountaineers on the Dolomites and confused the boundary between war reporting and fictional entertainment. In one issue, the story follows the heroics of a mountaineer scout named Anton as he climbed a near impossible route in order to successfully guide Austrian artillery into firing at and defeating their Italian Alpini rivals.[104]

The German agitation from within and from outside the SAC experienced varying degrees of success. The initial declaration of war by Italy in 1915 intersected with the greatest number of SAC members volunteering to serve in the armies of the Central Powers, either as soldiers or as Alpine consultants. An exact number or roster of men was not kept by the SAC, its individual sections, or the Central Powers. Some made notes of those in foreign service, like Section Olten, and some did not. However, a number can be roughly estimated by the change in the number of SAC members in each section throughout the war. By the start of 1916, the membership of the SAC dropped from 14,000 men to 13,200. Members being out of the country and not paying their dues or receiving their copy of the *Jahrbuch* caused this decline. The St. Gallen Central Committee in its discussion with other sections chalked these missing members up as those who had left to serve in the belligerent militaries.[105] However, it must be emphasized that SAC members did not exclusively leave to serve the Central Powers. Particularly from the

[104] SNL, NHG A 19, *Sonntagsblatt des Brienzer,* no. 1 (1916).
[105] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 50 (1914/1915), 355.

French-speaking sections of western Switzerland, SAC members also left to serve in the French, British, and Italian militaries.

German agitation successfully recruited at least a few hundred Swiss mountaineers, but volunteers dwindled after the first rush of volunteers. There is little to no evidence that new Swiss mountaineers volunteered after 1916. The SAC membership actually grew by several thousand men by the end of the war. Many SAC members stayed in Switzerland with sympathies towards Germany and Austria-Hungary, but they did not leave the country to fight on the battlefield. Those who did leave during the rush of volunteers in 1915 were primarily those with individual, close connections in Germany and Austria-Hungary. They were men like Renker who had interacted with the transnational landscape and had social ties in each country. Many had already worked with the DÖAV, Germany or Austro-Hungarian governments, like the Swiss mountaineers who had supervised the training of the Austrian mountain warfare regiments before the war. Others were Germans and Austrians living in Switzerland who left when war broke out to do their duty for their country of origin. Swiss mountaineers and their German and Austrian counterparts shared a transnational culture, but its community truly existed on the individual level. The individual mountaineer decided for what to fight or which country to serve, rather than an imagined community prescribed by the SAC determining his ideological allegiances.

3.3.3: Competing Forms of Agitation in the SAC

The SAC's decentralized structure allowed for too many differing and overlapping sociocultural relationships for German agitation to have any large-scale success. The DÖAV had close ties with individuals in German-speaking sections, but so did French and Italian-speaking members of the SAC with those in the Entente states. As a result, other belligerents also agitated the SAC for their wartime goals and benefits. The Italians successfully recruited Swiss

mountaineers through pre-war connections to their own *Alpini* troops. Though most Italian-Swiss had ignored the SAC in favor of the Italian Alpine Club, of those who did join, several decided to join the Italian forces in 1915. N. Rodio, an engineer living in Zurich, belonged to both Section Uto and Section Bernina's subsection Bregaglia in the Italian speaking south. In 1916, he joined the Italian military while several of his Zurich club mates went the other direction to the Austrian side of the front.[106]

The German-speaking sections still viewed English mountaineers as competing rivals and foreign trespassers in the twentieth century. On the other hand, the French-speaking sections had cordial relationships with them. The English made close friends with western Swiss mountaineers when they started climbing in the nineteenth century and SAC sections like Geneva allowed them into their membership; 270 of its 1,251 members were of British origin.[107] There was even an Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club social group that started gathering in England under the Geneva section's tutelage in 1909. The SAC refused to recognize a foreign section before the First World War, but the British members circumvented this by declaring themselves as simply an informal gathering of English mountaineers who "are cut off by our geographical distance from the headquarters of our sections […] to encourage British mountaineers to support the SAC in all its activities."[108] When the war started, these English members maintained their connection to the SAC. They sustained frequent contact with both the Geneva section and the Central Committee. In 1915, the British members began sending literature to their Swiss counterparts with the goal of "spreading true information in Switzerland about the war." At their June meeting, they reported that "a large amount of literature in French

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[106] *Jahresbericht des Akademischen Alpen-Club Zürich* 21 (1916), 26.

[107] BBB, GA SAC 43, Sektion St. Gallen, "Sitzung vom 19 Mai 1915," in *Protokoll des Central-Comites für die Jahre 1914-1916.*

[108] Statutes of the Association of the British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, reprinted in Dübi, *Die ersten fünfzig Jahre*, 50-56.

and German has been sent to various persons in Switzerland by our Association and Individual members, and a great deal has been done."[109] Also in 1915, the British members began raising funds to support Swiss guides and families who had lost their livelihoods due to the decrease in tourism. The limitations on trade and international travel imposed on Switzerland because of the war jeopardized the livelihood of many of the SAC mountain guides who relied on the tourist industry for income. The British members convinced the SAC to start a Swiss Guide's Relief Fund with the Central Committee responsible for distributing the money. The British members contributed significantly, providing the money for half of the fund alone throughout the war. They figured that 40 Swiss Francs could support a guide, plus an additional 60 Swiss Francs that could be provided depending on the size of his family. By the end of the year, British donations supported 172 guides and their funds amounted to thousands of Swiss Francs a year on up to the end of the war.[110] In the 1914/1915 *Jahrbuch*, alongside the German-speaking sections' highlights of their members serving in the armies of the Central Powers, Romance-speaking sections like Monte Rosa praised the English members for their donations.[111] The Swiss Guide's Relief Fund definitely kept some mountain guides from being lured into other work and who might have been tempted by the sort of mercenary pay offered to Alpine consultants by the German and Austro-Hungarian militaries.

The SAC's aid work during the war best demonstrates their ability to balance sympathies. The SAC worked as a whole with the International Red Cross and the Swiss Red Cross by providing opportunities in the Alps for belligerent troops interned in Switzerland, either as prisoners of war or recovering from wounds. On an associational level, it felt that it was part of

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[109] BBB, GA SAC 291, Association of the British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, *Annual Summer Meeting* (June 23, 1915).

[110] BBB, GA SAC 291, Dr. Janggen to Swiss Guide's Relief Fund, June 21, 1915.

[111] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 50 (1914/1915), 400.

its patriotic duty as good Swiss humanitarians to provide aid in this manner. It guided hikes and allowed internees to use SAC club huts on their excursions. It conducted lectures on mountaineering, the Alpine landscape and other topics for the internees' entertainment.[112] Some sections also invited internees to speak before their own meetings, such as in November 1916 when Section Diablerets (Vaud) sponsored a "French internee, Sergeant Gordon, who spent ten years before the war in French Guinea" and "spoke to us about the country where he exercises a true priesthood carrying the good name of France far and wide."[113] However, pre-war sociocultural relationships determined with which interned belligerents sections chose to interact. Sections in eastern Switzerland largely worked with internees from the Central Powers while western sections worked with those from the Entente. Internees from unwelcomed nationalities were also accused of "abusing" club infrastructure, with German-speaking sections complaining about French and Belgian POWs using their huts.[114]

The Central Powers' final hope for a major success with its agitation targeting the SAC ended in 1916. The same mood of Swiss national unity that featured in the activity of the New Helvetic Society also spread throughout the SAC. An article in the club's magazine *Alpina* at the end of the 1915 declared that "it is the moment, for all Swiss, young or old, French or German […] to forget at the foot of these dear mountains the little rivalries of steeple, race, or language."[115] The Assembly of Representatives met in Geneva in 1916 and, before the meeting, the Geneva Section sent out in the *Alpina* a call to all members to attend "to prove that the ties that bind us together resist all prejudice and that the members of the SAC join in hands in

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[112] BBB, GA SAC 43, St. Gallen Sektion, "Sitzung 23 & 27 Juni 1916," in *Protokoll des Central-Comites für die Jahre 1914-1916.*

[113] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 51 (1916), 294.

[114] For all complaints made during the war, see BBB, GA SAC 2154.

[115] *Alpina* 23, no. 2 (February 15, 1915), 29.

common love for the Alps and the Fatherland from east to west and from north to south."[116] St. Gallen's term as head of the Central Committee concluded at the end of the year and, in a stroke of sheer coincidence, tradition designated that only a French-speaking section could win the election. The Assembly elected Section Geneva as the Central Committee to serve out as the head of the SAC until the end of the war: "The assembly unanimously elects Geneva as the next [Central Committee] for the next term of office and with long lively applause, Ingr. Alex Bernoud as Central President. Bernoud thanked them for the honor shown to him and his section and greatly appreciates the demonstration of loyalty shown by the delegates by placing central leadership in the hands of a Romance section during the difficult period."[117] The SAC also chose to end the debate on mandatory insurance, another olive branch towards mending the linguistic divide between the German and French-speaking sections. The fact that most of the radically, pro-German alpinists had already left for the frontlines helped the SAC in calming its waters. Those who remained could not exert any great influence due to their small numbers. Despite the DÖAV's propaganda ability to reach SAC members, the fuel of its flames had already been consumed.[118]

3.4: Neutral Alpinists in the Service of the Central Powers

The Swiss mountaineers who volunteered for service in the German and Austro-Hungarian armies mainly worked as Alpine consultants on the Austro-Italian Front. Keller notes that the Central Powers' agitation in mountaineering associations in belligerent and neutral countries succeeded in recruiting around 1,400 Alpine consultants.[119] They operated more as consultants than as commanding officers, though there were similarities in their duties. They had

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[116] *Alpina* 24, no. 8 (August 15, 1916), 140.
[117] *Jahrbuch des SAC* 51 (1916), 272.
[118] Renewed spirit of cooperation with Central Committee and Sections reported in *Jahrbuch des SAC* 51 (1916), 281.
[119] Keller, *Apostles of the Alps,* 102.

three main roles: to serve as mountaineer guides for troops on the frontlines, to give advice on the construction of military infrastructure and logistics, and to train troops in specialized mountaineering camps established far behind the lines.[120] They usually did not hold a rank, working as a type of civilian contractor rather than an enlisted soldier. The Central Powers may have wished to recruit more through their sociocultural connections in the civil societies of neutral countries, but those that they did proved highly successful in halting the Italians in the eastern Alps.

Gustav Renker served in all three of the jobs designated for Alpine consultants before the end of the war. When he was first deployed at the end of 1915 and start of 1916 in the Julian Alps, he guided small squads of men on the front line in forward positions.[121] With groups as small as three or four, Gustav positioned himself and these men in high cliffs to scout against the Italian lines. Snow, ice, and wind sometimes isolated them for weeks or months with only a thin wire telephone line strung along with them to communicate back to their headquarters.[122] When weather allowed, they moved into ever higher and higher positions, usually under Italian sniper and artillery fire. Renker often wrote romantically about the German mountain soldiers in these positions as idealized guardians of the nation and used them as illustrative, heroic examples for his propaganda pieces.

In the summer time, the warmer weather meant that the militaries no longer needed Alpine consultants on the front lines. They were then redistributed to the other two roles as technical and training consultants. Renker gave his "expert opinion on all Alpine matters at our altitudes. Path construction, hut construction and cable car systems are under supervision as far

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[120] Czant, *Alpinismus,* 102-104.
[121] *Zeitschrift des DÖAV* 47 (1916), 220.
[122] Alpine engineer Leo Handl also has a detailed account in *Zeitschrift des DÖAV* 47 (1916), 212-215.

as avalanche safety, rock fall and the condition of the rocks are concerned."[123] Renker notes that military officers often learned the hard way when they did not heed alpinist advice. In several of his pieces, Renker recounted when he or another alpinists' guidance was not listened to, the result being an avalanche later in the war killing dozens if not hundreds of soldiers:

> The military's barracks primarily had to take into account the enemy's visibility and the danger of avalanches […] With regard to the second point, serious mistakes were often made, from the fact that officers, who mostly had no idea about the dangers of the mountains, determined the place to build such huts. I experienced it myself that a first lieutenant, when setting up his company's barracks, wanted to build a hut absolutely in a ditch from which every person with experience expected an avalanche in the spring […] In March 1916, a huge avalanche occurred at this point and actually filled the entire trench.[124]

Renker also advised on the construction of paths, such as a new one up the Kastreinspitze in October 1915, a mountain whose north face defied attempts by civilian mountaineers before the war, but now needed to be conquered out of military necessity.[125]

In May 1916, the German military sent Renker to the Alpine hinterlands on the border between Germany and Austria to train troops "in the secrets of the noble art of mountaineering."[126] The Central Powers established specialized training schools operated by veterans of the pre-war mountain warfare regiments and the Alpine consultants. One of the most successful instruction centers was established at the DÖAV's Regensburger hut and led by Alpinerefernt Hermann Amanshauser.[127] These schools trained soldiers in the physical and technical demands for fighting in mountainous terrain. Mountain combat demanded a whole different set of equipment compared to the trench warfare on the plains. This included proper use

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[123] Renker, *Als Bergsteiger gegen Italien,* 9.
[124] *Zeitschrift des DÖAV* 47(1916), 226-227.
[125] *Zeitschrift des DÖAV* 48 (1917), 181.
[126] Renker, *Als Bergsteiger gegen Italien*, 77.
[127] *Zeitschrift des DÖAV* 49 (1918), 149-177.

of snowshoes, crampons, ice picks, ropes, and even food preparation at freezing temperatures.[128] Renker notes how consultants were also called in to train on medical needs, such as frostbite, but also a new phenomenon called "cavern sickness," which affected men who had stayed long term in underground dug outs at high altitudes with fevers and other symptoms.[129] Renker served in the rear for several months before once again being posted at the frontlines in the latter half of 1916, continuing this back and forth until the end of the war.

Mountaineers from other neutral countries also served as Alpine consultants. One of the more famous consultants was the Swedish explorer Sven Heden, who served in one of the highest consultant positions out of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff. He had returned to Europe from a Himalayan expedition and was on a lecture tour through the DÖAV sections when the war started in August 1914. He returned to Sweden and advocated for an end to Swedish neutrality and a new Swedish-German alliance that would have ultimately brought them into the war as part of the Central Powers. When his campaign failed, he answered the call to help his Germanic brethren protect their Alpine landscape from foreign conquest. He was often reported to have surveyed the Austro-Italian Front and mountaineers treated him as sort of a celebrity among their ranks.[130]

The major Austro-Hungarian counter-offensive in the late spring of 1916 demonstrated the effectiveness of this "private mountaineering."[131] The regular army advanced in Izonso and on the plains while the mountaineering squads attacked in the high Alps stretching from the Ortler Mountains on the Swiss border to the Julian in the south. These small squads, trained and commanded by the Alpine consultants, made great success in pushing the Italians back to less

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[128] For a good technical overview of the expertise in equipment and knowledge of mountaineers of the time, see H. Baumgartner, *Die Gefahren des Bergsteigens* (Zürich: Druck von Fr. Schulthess, 1886), 10-12.

[129] *Zeitschrift des DÖAV* 47 (1916), 220.

[130] Wachtler, *The First World War in the Alps,* 120.

[131] Czant, *Alpinismus,* 143-144.

favorable positions and then holding their attention while the rest of the military advanced in the south. The offensive had the potential to be a serious blow to the Italian army, but the Russian Brusilov Offensive in June halted their advances on the Italian Front.[132] The regular army redeployed to the east and, once again, it was up to the locally trained Standschutzen, supported by the Alpine consultants to hold the front line. Austria-Hungary never could coordinate another offensive of that scale on the Italian Front. They retreated to favorable positions, dug into the mountain landscape and held their positions for the remainder of the war. The Germans held their positions against multiple Italian offensives all the way up to the end of the war in the winter of 1918. Renker "was praised for his service in the army and for his exemplary brave behavior in the face of enemy fire."[133] Before the end of the war, Renker's notoriety had earned him the nickname "the Swiss" among the troops on the frontline, a reputation he later used to launch his post-war publications.

3.5: Conclusion

After World War I, Gustav Renker moved to Switzerland and became the editor for the *Berner Tagblatt* during the interwar years.[134] Renker published a book at the end of 1918 titled *Als Bergsteiger gegen Italien* drawing from his experiences on the front lines to advance ideologically charged arguments for the rugged superiority of the German Alpine people. He blamed the cities and the plains for causing the failure and decay of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires during the war. For him, the mountain warfare of the Italian Front proved that only the German mountain people could rejuvenate the German nation. They had never lost their ground and had stood watch in horrible conditions that weaker Germans on the Western Front,

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[132] Czant, *Alpinismus,* 152-191.

[133] *Österreichische Alpenzeitung* 38 (1916), 97.

[134] Marti-Weissenbach, "Renker, Gustav," *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS);* The *Berner Tagblatt* was so pro-German during the war that it was nicknamed the "*Berliner Tagblatt*," see Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 217-219.

who had fallen into decay living in cities on the plain, could not have endured. *Als Bergsteiger gegen Italien* played a role in the post-war literature as an Italian Front parallel to Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel*. It also launched Renker's career as a writer, going on to publish 60 other books, short stories, and songs until his death in Langnau im Emmental, Switzerland in 1967. His writings during and after the war symbolized German cultural nationalism based on the Alpine Heimat and he served as a major instigator of post-war, nationalist backlash in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.[135]

The German agitation targeting the Swiss Alpine Club in 1915 and 1916 demonstrates how some German-speaking mountaineers, sharing the same space, norms and behaviors, believed in a transnational, Alpine community. They shared the same, common denominator in the natural monument of the Alps and connected socially through their shared language. The SAC and DÖAV associations fostered this community through organized activities, shared publications, and open membership to foreigners. They were nationalists, but ones who were defined by cultural relationships rather than ethnic ones. Their antagonistic attitude towards Germans from the cities and the northern plains while championing their German mountain people as true guardians of the nation demonstrated this distinction. When Italy invaded in 1915, they enthusiastically volunteered to serve in the civilian consultant positions for the Central Powers even if they were Swiss citizens.

Nevertheless, German agitation lost its energy after the initial wave of Swiss recruits. Not all the mountaineers of the SAC were German cultural nationalists. The SAC fostered a plurality of interpretations of the Swiss national identity. Some happened to include this image of Switzerland into the larger framework of the German Alps while others did not. The European and cosmopolitan nature of the club meant some favored fellow British, French, or Italian

[135] For more on his role in post-war German literature, see Wilms, "From 'Bergsteiger' to 'Bergkrieger.'"

mountaineers instead. The decentralization of the club allowed for a multiplicity of sociocultural relationships to exist at the same time while also protecting the club from being steered one way or another. This is why German agitation could not get a foothold to dominate the entire club during the war. The power in the SAC resided in the individual sections, not the Central Committee. The SAC's traditional stance as an apolitical club enabled those who wanted to answer the call to arms by the DÖAV to do so without dragging the entire club into the arms of one belligerent or the other. Therefore, the SAC's structure acted as Switzerland in miniature and it maintained its neutrality in the first years of the war.[136] Its decentralized structure acted as a safety pressure valve by allowing members to leave and, therefore, removing the fuel for further agitation to catch fire.

[136] Similar observation found in Hans Hanke, "Schweizer Berge — Schweizer Alpenclub: zum hundertjährigen bestehen des SAC," *Der Bergsteiger* 30, no. 11 (August 1963): 738-741.

Chapter 4: International Humanitarianism for the German, National Cause: The ICRC and the German War Effort

4.1: Introduction: The German Homefront in 1915, POWs, and Humanitarian Relief

As the war moved into 1915, Germany realized it faced a war of attrition rather than the quick victory promised by its war plan. Though the Germans halted the Italian offensive through the Alps in the summer, their own offensives on the other fronts also slowed. Rather than a continuing flow of German recruits as during the first months of mobilization, including thousands coming from Switzerland, the German military was focused on recovering the injured so they could return to the battlefield as soon as possible. In addition to German warfront woes, the British blockade of the North Sea inflicted economic warfare on the home front. By the winter of 1914-1915, it was evident that the Germans were unprepared for a lengthy war, as was true of all combatants. A shortage of everyday necessities—especially food—alarmed German civilians and political decision makers. Now, the German War Ministry faced a new set of wartime needs, divided between maintaining multiple military fronts and their home front.

An additional burden was added by a large captive population of enemy civilians within Germany territory. The sudden onset of war left thousands of Entente civilians stranded in Germany. Most of these, particularly military age men, were sent to prisoner-of-war style camps. Germany's military successes also resulted in governing occupied territory that was inhabited by millions of foreign, enemy nationals. The rapid advance against the French and Belgian militaries in 1914 captured nearly a million prisoners of war, a large percentage of whom were wounded or sick. Germany's signature on The Hague and Geneva Conventions, crafted in the decades before the war, meant that they had obligated themselves to treat these prisoners according to internationally agreed upon laws and principles, including the provision of medical

treatment, food, and proper living quarters. These added masses placed a significant strain on Germany's already taxed home front resources.

Many historians have debated Germany's preparedness to handle these prisoners, as part of the developing historiographical interest in experiences of the First World War behind the front lines. Germany started the war with dozens of well-organized and adequately stocked camps for enemy POWs and detained civilians, but these quickly became overcrowded. By the start of 1915, an ad hoc system was in place using empty military barracks, domestic prisons, and even castles, all furnished with a patchwork of supplies and staff. It was obvious that it could not sustain a prolonged POW system following international law without outside assistance. And when its own populations' rations were in dire need, how could it prioritize POWs?

No international court or political body of states had the authority to inflict legal repercussions on the German War Ministry if it failed to uphold these conventions. Within the sphere of global civil society, though, states recognized the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as the highest authority concerning violations of humanitarian law. Founded in Geneva in 1863, the ICRC rapidly achieved and monopolized a global legitimacy for formulating, propagating, and defending humanitarian norms. It held no "hard power" over states. Yet, the ICRC wielded respect as an arbiter of international public opinion. An international network of medical knowledge, individual experts, and material flowed through the ICRC. Each state had its own Red Cross chapter, which acted as a nationally oriented conduit for the ICRC's international humanitarianism. The ICRC steered their values and provided a normative framework for their actions, but the national chapters were independent in their everyday operation. Fortunately for the German war effort in 1915, the German Empire cultivated a tight-knit relationship with the German Red Cross and the ICRC before the war. As

an original supporter in 1864, the Prussians embraced the Red Cross's offer to provide aid during the German wars of unification. They supported the Red Cross monetarily, provided political support for its expansion to other countries, and hosted many of its major international conferences on humanitarian issues. In turn, the German Red Cross supplemented the state's obligation to care for wounded soldiers.[1] By the start of the First World War, the German Empire and the German Red Cross held a favorate nation status across the ICRC's network. Germany's sociocultural legitimacy with the ICRC as champions of international humanitarianism provided a means through which German agitation could take advantage of much needed resources for both its own POWs and those housed in German territory as it settled into a prolonged war of attrition.

The upsurge in historiographical concern with home front experiences in recent decades coincides with new perspectives on the military medical history of the First World War. In particular, this has generated a host of new, innovative perspectives on the treatment and experiences of prisoners of war. Mark Harrison's work, *The Medical War*, encapsulates the recent advances in the field by demonstrating the role played by civil society in the practice of British military medicine during the war. Because the state was unable to meet all the medical demands alone, the British, like the Germans, were forced to rely on voluntary, humanitarian activity, which allowed for a direct, public participation in the war.[2] Harrison's view on civic involvement in the war through humanitarian activity coincides with Uta Hinz's recent works on POWs in Germany that show the relationship between humanitarian and military medical

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[1] Ke-chin Hsia, "Who Provided Care for Wounded and Disabled Soldiers?: Conceptualizing State-Civil Society Relationship in First World War Austria," in *Other Fronts, Other Wars?: First World War Studies on the Eve of the Centennial,* eds. Joachim Bürgschwentner, Matthias Egger, and Gunda Barth-Scalmani (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 307-308.

[2] Mark Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-10; also, see Fiona Reid, *Medicine in First World War Europe: Soldiers, Medics, Pacifists* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 8.

activity was a component of the "totalizing" process of the war on the home front.[3] Civic associations were an important conduit for this activity as they provided the socio-cultural network for relief work to be gathered and coordinated on a scale need by the state. The most important of these were Red Cross societies, which earned social acceptance as respected national authorities on humanitarian activity in most European states by the start of the war.

However, the Red Cross societies all also belonged to a larger, international association centered on the ICRC in Geneva, creating a complicated layering of national, wartime humanitarian activity. Heather Jones' work, *Violence against Prisoners of War*, illustrates how this dynamic of an international socio-cultural network and national war efforts directly influenced the experiences of POWs across Europe during the war. The ICRC provided a route for international norms to influence the values and behavior of the national Red Cross societies. Because the states needed Red Cross cooperation, they were forced to negotiate national goals within a collective international framework. Jones states that, as a result, the international norms transmitted by non-governmental organizations like the ICRC set limits to the violence states committed against POWs.[4] Isabel Hull's work, *A Scrap of Paper*, takes the concept of this negotiated relationship a step further by contextualizing it within a larger framework of the contested norms of international law. Interstate negotiations over the rightful application of the Geneva and Hague Conventions proved that international norms provided a basis for diplomatic exchange and an often too elastic set of rules for wartime conduct. In consequence, the principle of reciprocity emerged as the guidepost for the application of international law whereby states

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[3] Uta Hinz, "Humanität im Krieg?: Internationales Rotes Kreuz und Kriegsgefangenenhilfe im Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkriegs,* ed. Jochen Oltmer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006), 216-217; Uta Hinz, *Gefangen im Großen Krieg: Kriegsgefangenschaft in Deutschland, 1914-1921* (Essen: Klartext, 2006).

[4] Heather Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France, and Germany, 1914-1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

did not simply decide their actions in a national vacuum, but in relationship to the conduct of their enemies.[5] In Hulls' analysis, the dynamic of "negative reciprocity" dictated the application of international law during the First World War. States justified the violation of international law in comparison to abuses carried out by opposing states, resulting in a spiraling devolution throughout the war. As a supplement to Hull, this chapter demonstrates that there were also examples of "positive reciprocity," where humanitarian actions by one state pressured others to also adopt them by pressuring them with international public opinion.

The ICRC's position as the symbolic center of humanitarianism forced it into the epicenter of these negotiations between international norms and national activity. Without an international governmental infrastructure in place during the war, states relied on the global network of the ICRC to discuss and control both legal practices and material aid. Recent institutional histories of the ICRC from historians like François Bugnion showcase how this dynamic endowed the civic association with a state-like diplomatic role.[6] Therefore, this chapter follows Akira Iriye's maxim that "the line between the state apparatus and a nonstate organization was never clear-cut."[7] By focusing on the transnational perspective of German agitation towards the ICRC, I argue that wartime humanitarian activity confused the boundary between civil society and the state. Further, the totalizing effect of the war established cooperation between national and international norms and identities. In consequence, Germany could tap into the ICRC's transnational, socio-cultural network in order to accomplish wartime goals and needs.

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[5] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper.*

[6] François Bugnion, *Confronting the Hell of the Trenches: The International Committee of the Red Cross and the First World War, 1914-1922* (Geneva: International Committeee of the Red Cross, 2018), 6, 29.

[7] Iriye, *Global Community,* 13-14.

4.2.1: History of the International Red Cross: Dunant's Dream

The International Red Cross's ascension to global authority over humanitarian activity borders on creation myth. An upper-middle class Genevan, Henri Dunant, conjured the "dream" of the society in 1859 after witnessing the bloody aftermath of the Battle of Solferino as a humanitarian volunteer during the Second Italian War for Independence against the Austrian Empire.[8] The state of military medical services in the mid-nineteenth century was abysmal, even by the medical standards of the time. Military logistic systems did not account for hospitals and medical supplies, or for crucial services like doctors, nurses, and stretcher-bearers. There was a near complete disregard for sanitary standards in what little care wounded soldiers did receive. Instead, wounded soldiers waited for the possible care of ragtag volunteers and relief societies which combed the field in the aftermath of battle.

A superficial reading of the mythological origins of the International Red Cross would be that Dunant volunteered out of a philanthropic ethos to provide food, clothing, and medicine to the wounded left stranded on the battlefield. After his experience at Solferino, he proselytized for an international relief organization and a universally agreed upon standard of treatment for wounded soldiers through his book, *Un souvenir de Solférino* (*A Memory of Solferino*).[9] The book captured the imagination of the European public sphere overnight upon publication in 1862. Relief societies spontaneously emerged overnight, with Geneva functioning as the international nucleus, both headquartering the ICRC and hosting the Geneva Convention of 1864. However, a deeper look reveals that, in fact, an already well-established social infrastructure and culture of humanitarian activity carried Dunant's ideals forward.

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[8] Overview of Dunant's role in the creation of the ICRC in Caroline Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1999).

[9] Henry Dunant and the International Committee of the Red Cross, *A Memory of Solferino,* English Version (Geneva: International Commmittee of the Red Cross, 1986).

Civil societies in the mid-nineteenth century prolifically produced humanitarian societies. Originally rooted in religious motivations, humanitarian societies pursued a moral improvement of society through material progress. Dunant's potent dream simply marked the transition of uncoordinated, religious-based charity groups into a sophisticated, international conglomerate based on a now commonly-held belief in civilizational progress that now demanded a "humane" way for conducting war. Decades before the ICRC established its headquarters, charity societies already gravitated towards Geneva's liberal atmosphere and established civic association culture. Dunant was a member the Genevan chapter of the Young Men's Christian Union, whose activities and values already included much of what he advocated, but lacked the international, legal authority that he desired.[10] While agitating other preexisting associations, Dunant delivered one of the earliest copies of his book directly to the chairman of the Geneva Society for Public Welfare, Gustave Moynier. Moynier exemplified Geneva's familial oligarchical influences over the city's politics and society.[11] After reading the book, he recruited the Genevan doctors Louis Appia and Théodore Maunoir to Dunant's ideas. They also persuaded the acclaimed army general Guilaume-Henri Dufour to join them in the venture, the same Dufour who lent his name towards legitimizing the Swiss Alpine Club's first scientific topographic map of Switzerland. These men formed the first "Committee of Five" of the new International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, which would be renamed to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1876.[12] Dunant put into words the humanitarian norms already in the undercurrents of European society in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was Moynier who brought the social organization needed for a new international, humanitarian network.

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[10] Beryl Epstein and Sam Epstein, *The Story of the International Red Cross* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), 22.

[11] Dromi, *Above the Fray,* 15-16.

[12] Martha Finnemore, "The Rules of War and Wars of Rules," 153-155.

After the Committee of Five's first meetings in 1863, they agreed to encourage the development of national branches of the relief society in other countries. They focused on persuading like-minded, and publically influential, humanitarians from across Europe to attend a congress in Geneva as delegates representing their particular states.[13] Dunant went on a whirlwind book tour across Europe to drum up support, targeting aristocrats and existing charity societies. He received the warmest welcome in the German states, where his book had spread like wildfire through the courts before his arrival. Humanitarian work and associational life were established socio-cultural avenues for women of the German courts and middle class to participate in the public sphere. In Prussia, Dunant found a nascent society under the direct patronage of Queen Augusta, an active humanitarian working with religious charities such as the Order of St. John. Dunant's book greatly moved Queen Augusta and she lent the Prussian crown's full support to the Genevan committee.[14]

Additionally, the Prussian military also endorsed the project in the hopes that a future volunteer aid society could bolster its own military effectiveness. The Prussian army was undergoing a progressive reform of its military medical system at the time of Dunant's visit. The international attention given to the many medical failures during the Crimean War encouraged a wave of reforms through the Prussian Military.[15] Wilhelm I assembled a convention in 1860 to organize a completely new field hospital system and logistical planning of medical supplies. In 1863, the Prussian War Ministry under Albrecht von Roon crafted a new set of "Regulations on the Nursing Service in the Field," which established a modern organization of divisions and

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[13] Dunant and the International Committee of the Red Cross, *A Memory of Solferino,* 115-117; John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996)*,* 69-70.

[14] Dieter Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz: Eine Geschichte, 1864-1990* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002)*,* 28-37.

[15] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 32-36.

corps under the command of a chief military physician, making it the most advanced military medical service in the world. With the military and crown's support, 84 local chapters connected to a Berlin central committee were established by the end of 1864.[16] As a result of winning the support of the Prussian royal court, middle-class educated public, and the Prussian military, Dunant found Prussia to be a perfect host for a voluntary aid society based on his humanitarian ideas.

The Committee of Five arranged a conference in Geneva at the end of 1863 to officially establish this network of aid societies.[17] Dunant persuaded sixteen states to send a total of thirty-six delegates. Of the countries represented, the vast majority came from German states, with Prussia sending three delegates.[18] The conference delegates wrote a draft charter that served as the basis for the future development of Red Cross societies, but only consisted a of few, basic principles. Each signatory state would establish a voluntary society that existed to assist its state's military medical service, on and off the battlefield, during wartime. While they were largely independent of one another, the central committee in Geneva tied the societies together. The Geneva committee designed the societies to be permanent; in times of peace, societies were expected to provide for the education and training of medical staff, stockpile medical supplies, and pursue innovations in medical knowledge and technology.[19] As the first measure among its international regulations, the charter "neutralized" medical personnel by dictating rightful conduct towards them during time of war, which forbidded firing upon them in the line of duty. To signify their protected status, the congress adopted the image of a red cross and a white field—the inverse of the Swiss national flag—which became synonymous with Swiss national

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[16] Hutschinson, *Champions of Charity, 111-112.*
[17] Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society,* 75-76.
[18] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 29.
[19] Dromi, *Above the Fray,* 47-48.

identity by 1914. It also stipulated that societies must receive and care for all wounded and sick soldiers, regardless of nationality. At the congress's conclusion, the delegates returned to their states and lobbied for their governments' signatures on the draft.[20] The German states unanimously agreed to adopt the practices laid out by the draft and supported the creation of a new relief society. However, other European states were less enthusiastic about the prospect of being bound to an international agreement that dictated how they conducted war. France and Britain signed it, but both disagreed with allowing non-military volunteers to be integrated within the military or be near the frontline.[21] After this European-wide campaign, the delegates reconvened in Geneva and signed off on the ICRC's first international treaty, "The Amelioration of the Condition of the wounded and sick in the Armed Force in the Field," in 1864.

4.2.2: History of the ICRC: The German Wars of Unification and International Legitimacy

On February 1, 1864, Prussia declared war on Denmark, sparking the first of a series of wars in the 1860s and early 1870s that resulted in the unification of Germany. Five days later, a group of nobility, middle-class physicians, and state administrative officials founded the Prussian Red Cross (originally named the Central Committee of the Prussian Association for the care of Wounded and Sick Warriors in the Field).[22] While the relief society had strong social backing, it had little time to prepare for its wartime mission, lacking volunteers, trained medical staff, and supplies. Without a voluntary staff, its activity involved two roles for aiding wounded on the battlefield. First, as the recognized authority over humanitarian efforts, it coordinated all the other relief societies' volunteers and supplies, directing them where and when the Prussian military needed them. Second, it successfully solicited resources from non-belligerent sources of

[20] Gustave Moynier, "2me Circulaire," September 15, 1864," in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952,* ed. CICR (Genève: CICR, 1864-1952).

[21] Reid, *Medicine in First World War Europe,* 151; Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity,* 31-43.

[22] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 37-38.

aid.[23] The ICRC sent aid and volunteers to the Prussian military through the Prussian Red Cross, including chairman Louis Appia, who appeared on the battlefield as the first person donning the iconic Red Cross armband.[24]

By the end of the Prusso-Danish War in October 1864, the Prussian Aid Cross had already proved its capabilities on the international stage as well as to the Prussian state. It proved that a voluntary aid society could play a vital auxiliary role, supplementing the army's own personnel and supplies while alleviating some of its logistical and material burdens. It earned the Prussian military's complete approval, particularly through coordination of the previously chaotic and ad hoc activity of the numerous other societies. In recognition of its utility, the Prussian crown declared Berlin as the central authority over all public charity in the country.[25] The Prussian Red Cross rapidly developed alongside Prussia's own military medicine modernization efforts throughout the wars of unification. The Prussian War Ministry forced all military medical staff to be members of the Red Cross. It also distributed copies of its journal, *Kriegerheil,* throughout its new military medical department. In turn, the Prussian Aid Society allowed the government the right to appoint three commissions to its central committee in order to better synchronize with the needs of the military administration. The Prussian government also created a new inspector general position to oversee voluntary-run hospitals, trains, and other medical facilities ran by the aid society.[26] Historian John Hutchinson states that, by the war with Austria in 1866, the Prussian Aid Society already held a quasi-official status that confused the boundary between humanitarian society and state-run medical service. As such, Dunant's original dream of a voluntary aid society for war wounded had been transmuted into a medical

[23] Ibid., 38-40.
[24] Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity,* 152-161.
[25] Ibid., 176-178.
[26] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 39-48.

auxiliary branch of the Prussian War Ministry. Therefore, as Hutchinson aptly summarizes, "the Red Cross set out to civilize war through organized charity, but they would soon discover that organized war on the Prussian model was much more likely to militarize charity."[27]

The intertwined roles of Prussian Red Cross and the Prussian War Ministry proved effective in the Austro-Prussian War in 1866 and again with the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871.[28] The Austrian Empire had not sent delegates or approved the Genevan Convention of 1864. As a consequence, the Austrian Empire had no centrally-coordinated, voluntary outside of the motley of religious charity organizations. The stark difference this produced on the battlefield, particularly after the decisive Battle of Königgrätz, drew international attention. While the Austrians had no real means of treating their own wounded soldiers or those of its German allies left on the battlefield, the Prussian Red Cross took care of everyone. This act earned Prussia respect from the other German states and the humanitarian community.

Upon this international stage, the Red Cross associations of the separate German states officially recognized the Prussian Red Cross and the Berlin committee as the leading authority over all German Red Cross societies, and an overarching German Red Cross Association was formed following the Franco-Prussian War.[29] With a structure unique across the globe, the German Red Cross societies that existed before unification, such as the Württemberg or Bavarian societies, retained a level of independence in their activities and organization within their home provinces. They even continued to report with their own sections in the ICRC's news *Bulletin* during World War I. But in times of war, they all recognized the Prussian Red Cross as the conductor of their overall operations. In this way, the German Red Cross mimicked the federal

[27] Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity,* 176-178.
[28] Dromi, *Above the Fray,* 64-65.
[29] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 53.

political unity that characterized the German Empire.[30] Thus, the German Red Cross, founded on the principles of humanitarian internationalism, now also symbolized German nationalism.

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 truly brought the work of the ICRC and the national Red Cross societies to worldwide public attention and participation. The death toll, the scale of civilian turmoil, and number of prisoners of war provided the Red Cross with the opportunities to demonstrate its ideals of humanitarianism for the first time on an international scale. France signed the original Geneva Convention of 1864 and created a Red Cross, but its society only existed on paper at the start of the war. After seeing the effectiveness of German military and Red Cross cooperation, French public support for the Red Cross surged after the first few months of the war.[31] The war also persuaded holdout states not involved in the fighting to finally commit to the Red Cross project. Britain, in particular, had staunchly criticized the ICRC's proposals in 1863-1864. However, the war finally convinced them to form a Red Cross society in 1870.[32] It also brought the ICRC committee in Geneva its first direct work with prisoners of war, when 87,000 desperate French soldiers crossed into neutral Switzerland to surrender in 1871 and required internment there until the war's end. [33]

The wars of German unification ended with international acceptance of the ICRC's work and humanitarian principles. The wars proved, through the cooperation of the Prussian military, Prussian Red Cross, and the ICRC, that the mass-mobilized wars of the nineteenth century needed a proper medical service to be conducted successfully. In turn, the voluntary service of the Red Cross alleviated some of the material and manpower burdens of the state while creating a channel through which the greater public could be direct participants in the war effort. It

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[30] Dromi, *Above the Fray,* 50-51.
[31] Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society,* 83; Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity,* 144-145.
[32] Reid, *Medicine in First World War in Europe,* 152-153.
[33] Daniel Palmieri, ed., *Minutes from Meetings of the International Prisoner-of-War Agency* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 2014), 5; Dromi, *Above the Fray,* 64-65.

cemented itself as the global authority on proper wartime conduct and international law. At the same time, international humanitarian activity in the national Red Cross societies absorbed the semiotic, nationalist systems and became a popular means through which the public symbolically interacted with the nation.[34] In other words, what the ICRC vocalized in ideas and social structure, the German military spread on a cultural level, "by the sword." Thus, the ICRC owed a great debt to the German military, state, and German Red Cross for its international authority before the start of the First World War.

4.2.3: German Agitation regarding the ICRC before 1914

The years before the First World War were characterized by a further militarization of the German Red Cross. The "War Medical Order of 1873," its update in 1907, and the "Wartime Medical Regulation of 1878" turned the German Red Cross into an organization nearly indistinguishable from an official, military medical service.[35] A government-appointed official called the Imperial Commissioner of the Red Cross was established and held a chair on the German commander-in-chief's headquarters staff. In 1897, the German Red Cross was officially designated as the army's medical reserve and by 1910 it participated in the annual fall mock maneuvers with the German army.[36] Militarization also led to an injection of German military culture, with its medical staff and volunteers mandated to wear military style uniforms, speak in military language, and perform shared rituals of training and practice, resulting in a shared ethos of military efficiency. It was clear that by 1914 the German Red Cross was a civilian auxiliary force rather than a neutral, civic body which the original Red Cross founders had imagined. The

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[34] Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York: Columbia Universtiy Press, 1980), 14.

[35] William Brian McAllister, "Fighting the Good Fight: German Military Medicine, 1860-1914," (University of Virginia: Master's Thesis, 1990), 22-23, 60-64; for how these regulations operated during the First World War, see Ludwig Kimmle, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz im Weltkrieg* (Berlin-Lichterfelde: Heinrich Grund Verlag, 1919), 21-22.

[36] Kimmle, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz im Weltkrieg,* 75; Harrison, *The Medical War,* 6, 19, 51-52.

ICRC did not discourage the obvious militarization of the German Red Cross, but instead supported it. In a 1911 circular, the ICRC went as far as to encourage other national Red Cross societies to study the German model and to improve relations with their states as "the primary aim of voluntary assistance being to support, as far as possible, the official health service."[37]

Additionally, German agitation targeting the ICRC became a practiced route for the German War Ministry to achieve goals and needs long before the start of the war. The German imperial crown presented the ICRC with a large donation of money in 1890 after the death of Empress Augusta.[38] The ICRC used this donation to set up the Augusta Fund, an award given out annually to national Red Cross societies for projects that furthered humanitarian efforts. It was the first monetary mechanism that the ICRC was in charge of, giving it a new fiscal power to choose projects worthy of funding. The German War Ministry's pre-war planning necessitated preparation of medical technology and knowledge and the ICRC's international network allowed them to tap into these developments in other states. For example, in 1906, the German Red Cross asked that the ICRC request information from all national Red Cross societies on their country's means of transporting of wounded in order to improve their own capabilities.[39] They even preempted arguments that this request would knowingly expose other military's secrets by insisting that, on the contrary this disclosure's progressive, humanitarian value far outweighed the loss of secrecy:

> It is nonetheless true that, in many cases, these preparations will be identical to the devices and objects of material from the corresponding armies, and that, at the same time, military health institutions will thus find them themselves exposed. We did not believe that the revelation of the latter can raise objections. Because if it is very natural to keep secret

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[37] ICRC, "Relations officielles entre la Croix-Rouge et l'armee, 137me," November 24, 1911, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[38] E. Odier and G. Moynier, "76me Circulaire," January 27, 1890, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[39] ICRC, "Album des Moyens de Transport (Proposition du Comité Allemand), 115me Circulaire," June 7, 1906, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

> everything that serves to protect oneself against the enemy, and to render him powerless, a similar procedure would in no way be justified for measures intended to relieve and care for the wounded. We therefore believe in the possibility of making widely known all the military arrangements made for transport.[40]

In 1910-1911, the ICRC sponsored and encouraged other national Red Cross societies to participate in a series of military medical conferences hosted in Germany. In Berlin, the German Red Cross and German Psychiatric Society jointly featured international solutions for treating psychological problems among soldiers who were dismissed from duty through an ICRC sponsored conference.[41] Another conference, the Dresden International Hygiene Exposition in 1911, convened Red Cross societies around the world to exhibit plans for hygiene during war time through detailed tables, graphs, and technical models of equipment.[42] Thus, the German Red Cross was clearly the ICRC's favorite child by 1914.

The last joint effort made between the German Red Cross and the ICRC came during the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913. In May 1912, the Red Cross societies held a conference in Washington D.C. that concluded with the ICRC's authorization to establish prisoner of war agencies and facilitate neutral relief activity during war time.[43] The ICRC quickly implemented this new-found authority when war broke out in the Balkans in October 1912. The ICRC sent Dr. C. de Marvel to Belgrade to work alongside the Swiss government's consul general there, Christian Voegli.[44] They established a relief headquarters to coordinate aid for POWS, wounded,

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[40] Ibid.

[41] ICRC, "Congrés pour le traitement des aliénés à Berlin en octobre 1910, 129me Circulaire," March 20, 1910, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[42] ICRC, "Exposition international d'Hygiène à Dresden en 1911, 128me Circulaire," March 3, 1910, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[43] André Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1984), 20-22; Jean-Luc Blondel and Claire Bonnélie, "L'Action du CICR pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale: Les Archives de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre," in *La Suisse et la Guerre de 1914-1918: Actes du colloque tenu du 10 au 12 Septembre 2014 au Château de Penthes,* ed. Christophe Vuilleumire (Genève: Éditions Slatkine, 2015), 53-54.

[44] ICRC, "Creation d'une Agence international à Belgrade: 144me Circulaire," November 16, 1912, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952*; ICRC, "Agence international de Belgrade: 145me Circulaire," December 7, 1912, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952*;

and civilians. All neutral aid flowed through their office, including material donated by the German Red Cross. Not content with just sending clothes, medical supplies and other goods, Germany mobilized twelve groups of their own Red Cross medical staff to the Balkans to participate directly. The German War Ministry studied these operations closely, relying on this practice to adjust their own mobilization efforts while giving their medical staff practical experience before the start of their own war in 1914.[45] The Belgrade headquarter's success garnered the ICRC a renewed international mandate to aid POWs and war wounded, allow setting a precedent in 1914 for its diplomatic role between states and its direct oversight as a neutral observer.[46]

4.3.1: The Red Cross at the Start of War

The national Red Cross societies mobilized in August 1914 with the same nationalistic fervor as the rest of their populations. The shared symbol of the Red Cross, norms of international law, and humanitarian activities fostered before in the decades before the war now became just another means of violent competition in wartime. The German Red Cross demonstrated the results of its steady militarization when it mobilized with the army on August 2, 1914.[47] The German Red Cross's manpower, materials, and logistics system was titanic compared to what had been mobilized during the Franco-Prussian War. By 1914, the German Red Cross had over one million members and 6,297 clubs throughout Germany. Among these members, the German War Ministry called up 24,000 doctors, and another 100,000 women and 200,000 men worked as nurses, stretcher-bearers, sanitation and disinfection staff, laundry

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CICR, *Rapport général 1912-1920 du Comité international de la Croix Rouge sur son activité de 1912 à 1920* (Genève: Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, 1921), 8-10.

[45] Deutsche Rote Kreuz, *Bericht des Deutschen Roten Kreuzes über seine Tätigkeit seit 1912: Ueberreicht der X. Internationalen Konferenz der Gesellschaften vom Roten Kreuz.* Berlin: Norddeutsche Buchdruckerei und Verlangsanstalt A. G., [1921]), 16-17.

[46] Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima,* 24-29.

[47] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 126-127; for Germany's military medical preparation compared to other belligerents, see Reid, *Medicine in the First World War Europe,* 40.

cleaners, and more.[48] The social connection between the German Red Cross's leadership and the German War Ministry grew more apparent when the Central Committee in Berlin selected retired General Curt von Pfuel to lead its headquarters in Berlin.[49] As the German war plan rapidly moved troops to the frontlines on railways, the Red Cross ran their own trains between there and the home front. In total, the German Red Cross operated 85 hospital trains made up of 38 cars at the start of the war, each capable of rapidly transferring and treating over 200 seriously wounded soldiers.[50] These trains also brought medical supplies and staff to the front, with dedicated pharmacies and staff cars. At the front, the Red Cross deployed voluntary medical staff, but also laundry and kitchen services for the military. For immediate medical treatment, the German Red Cross stabilized and transferred wounded soldiers using ambulances to one of their 401 hospital stations behind the trenches. The German Red Cross would then transfer the wounded via trains back to the interior for long-term treatment.[51] Over the course of the war, the German Red Cross operated 3,355 hospitals and convalescent homes throughout Germany with a capacity to care for 196,875 soldiers at once, a third of Germany's hospital capabilities for wounded during the war.[52] German propaganda prominently featured Red Cross work, through which the German War Ministry acquired monetary and material donations from the non-mobilized German public. By the end of the war, the German Red Cross received some 13.5 million marks in donations from German citizens and companies.[53] However, even with these massive amounts of material

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[48] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 124.

[49] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181, (January 1915), 9-10.

[50] Kimmle, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 25-29.

[51] Further analysis of the German Red Cross work in the 'Communicative' zone behind the immediate frontlines in McAllister, "Fighting the Good Fight," 75-79.

[52] For a full assessment of the German Red Cross activity during the war, see Kimmle, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 33-34.

[53] For how the German Red Cross used Red Cross symbolism for national fundraising, see Jean H. Quataert, "Women's Wartime Services in Germany: Patriotic Communities in Germany, 1912-1918," in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918,* eds. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 465-466.

and manpower, the German Red Cross and the German War Ministry were not prepared for the war of attrition that set in after the war's first year. In consequence, they needed to tap into alternative means to alleviate their wartime needs and the ICRC provided a ready-made international network from which to draw resources.

In comparison to the German Red Cross's readiness, the ICRC in Geneva was ill prepared for the war and its wartime, coordinating role. Just nine members of the central committee and a few volunteers comprised the ICRC's workforce. An apartment owned by Gustave Moynier served as their office. They had only one typewriter to keep up their international network of correspondence, and 4,000 francs in the ICRC's bank account.[54] On August 15, 1914, the ICRC's president, Gustave Ador, proclaimed that "the International Committee will seek to fulfill, as far as possible, the role of intermediary for the request and dispatch of between Red Cross Societies."[55] However, by the end of the month, the ICRC already received thousands of letters requesting assistance, in a multitude of languages, completely overwhelming its office.

While the ICRC may have been lacking in logistical infrastructure, it did have capable leadership in its president, Gustave Ador. After serving as president for forty-six years, Moynier appointed Ador as the ICRC's new president at the time of his death in 1910. Born in 1845 to a well-known French-Swiss banking family, Ador received a law degree from the University of Geneva and began working as the ICRC's secretary in 1870 while he started a career in local politics.[56] He was first elected to the Genevan cantonal parliament in 1874 as a member of the

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[54] Jean-François Pitteloud, ed., *Procès-Verbaux des Séance du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, 17 février 1863 – août 1914* (Geneva: ICRC and the Henry Dunant Society, 1949), 731-732 ;739.

[55] Gustav Ador, "Devoirs internationaux des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge dans la guerre européene actuelle, 158me," August 15, 1914, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[56] ICRC, "Présidence du Comité international, 131me Circulaire," September 5, 1910, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

Liberal Party and occupied a seat in parliament almost continuously until 1915. He served several stints in the Genevan canton's executive offices, most notably as head of finances from 1879 to 1880 and again in 1885 to 1897.[57] While serving Geneva, he earned a Swiss-wide reputation as an organizer of people and finances. He used this reputation to win a seat on the Swiss National Council in 1889, serving a year as its president in 1901, and still held a seat when war broke out in 1914. Beyond of Swiss social and political connections, Ador was also a Lieutenant Colonel in the army's reserves and his reputation as a financial expert from a neutral country led the Ottoman Empire to seek his help in settling its debt crisis at the turn of the century. When war broke out, the ICRC relied on Ador's respectable reputation in Geneva, Switzerland, and abroad.

Ador quickly made effective use of the socio-political capital in the first months of the war. Seeing the ICRC at a standstill from a lack of space, equipment, and personnel, the Genevan municipal authorities gave Ador permission to move the ICRC's office to the Rath Museum, a large, public art museum in the heart of the city.[58] Ador successfully publicized the ICRC's plight to the Swiss public and the national societies. Thousands of Swiss Francs poured into the ICRC's coffers, including grant money directly from the Swiss government who saw the ICRC's activity as a positive way to participate in the war while maintaining neutrality. Ador's newfound funding procured equipment for their work and secured additional personnel. When the ICRC fully moved into the Rath Museum in October 1914, they were at 120 employees. By 1915, it reached

[57] Durand, "Gustave Ador, Fondateur et Patron de l'Agence des Prisonniers de Guerre," 63-65.

[58] CICR, *Organisation et Fonctionnement de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre à Genève, 1914 et 1915* (Genève: Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, 1915), 3.

1200 employees with a supplementary 1,000 volunteers.[59] Seemingly overnight, the ICRC transformed itself from a close-knit, familial council to a large-scale, bureaucracy.

The ICRC's rapid expansion and public support enabled it to fulfill its international mission with regard to POWs. Following the mandate granted by the Washington Conference of 1912 and the precedent set during the Balkan Wars, Ador announced the creation of the International Prisoners' Relief and Information Agency (AIPG) on August 21, 1914.[60] The national societies unanimously approved of its creation and the work of the AIPG. The German Red Cross was one of its most outspoken supporters, mostly likely since they saw it as an opportunity for German agitation and influenc. The Berlin committee immediately tried to appoint a German representative to the Geneva office on October 5, but Ador refused on the grounds of retaining neutrality.[61] The ICRC intended for the AIPG to be a sub-office, but the overwhelming scale of the war meant this agency monopolized the ICRC's time and attention for the duration of the war.

Leaving the actual treatment of wounded soldiers to the national Red Cross societies, the ICRC and the AIPG facilitated the flow of communication between belligerent countries by transporting physical material, people, and information through its location in neutral Switzerland. The AIPG's primary work involved exchanging letters that ranged from investigation inquiries concerning missing soldiers to families asking about the condition of

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[59] Palmieri, ed. *Minutes from Meetings of the International Prisoner of War Agency,* 5; Daniel Palmieri, "An institution standing the test of time?: A review of 150 years of the history of the International Committee of the Red Cross," *International Review of the Red Cross* 94, no.888 (Winter 2012), 1277-1279.

[60] Ador's invocation of the 1912 Washington Conference in: *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 45, no. 180, (October 1914), 243-247; Gustav Ador, "Constitution des Commission et d'un Bureau Central en faveur de l'assistance des prisonniers de guerre, 159me Circulaire," August 15, 1914 in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[61] A CICR, C G1 A 02-01, Abteilung für Gefangenenfürsorge to ICRC, October 5, 1914; Gustav Ador to Comité Central des Associations Allemands de la Croix-Rouge, October 17, 1914.

imprisoned loved ones.[62] The ICRC central committee originally imagined the AIPG as a channel for the national societies to communicate with one another directly, simply passing along messages between the belligerents. But the German Red Cross convinced them that as a neutral intermediary, the AIPG would be more suitable for answering inquiries regarding POWs and safeguarding against the chance that national animosities could cloud the exchange of information.[63] As a result, 6,000 to 10,000 letters arrived daily to the AIPG by the end of October 1914.[64]

The front desk at the Rath Museum also received 100 to 150 in-person visits a day in the first months of the war.[65] Most of these visitors sought information on POWs, but the AIPG also received visits from political and social leaders across Europe. German ambassador von Romberg frequently visited throughout the war and the German War Ministry often sent officials to Switzerland to tour the work of the offices or negotiate with them directly.[66] In consequence, the ICRC's offices became a convergence point for political negotiations between the belligerents over the course of the war.[67] Therefore, the ICRC office became a recognized, diplomatic ground through which interstate communication flowed.

4.3.2: First German Approaches to the ICRC: Creation of the National Prisoner of Relief Agencies

The ICRC's AIPG served as the central hub of POW relief work, but it required on-the-ground work by national Red Cross societies for the international network to function properly.

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[62] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 45, no. 180 (October 1914) 255-261; CICR, *Organisation et Fonctionnement de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre à Genève, 1914 et 1915,* 2.

[63] A CICR, C G1 A 02-2.01, Central Comite der Deutschen Vereine vom Roten Kreuz to ICRC, 3 October 1914.

[64] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 45, no. 180 (October 1914) 255-261.

[65] Ibid.

[66] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 182 (April 1915); 155-156; Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima,* 67-68.

[67] CICR, *Organisation et Fonctionnement de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre à Genève, 1914 et 1915,* 2-3.

Article 14 of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 stipulated that information offices for prisoner of war affairs should be established immediately at the onset of hostilities to facilitate communication between other belligerents and neutral states.[68] Article 14 also required these POW information offices to compile information on internees in their country and to send lists of those captured to their home countries. On August 15, Ador sent out an international reminder via the ICRC's circulars of this obligation under international law.[69] A few days later, he requested that the national societies start periodically sending the AIPG lists of POWs captured by their militaries along with their camp information and health status.[70] The AIPG then passed these POW lists along to the appropriate national societies, which would then send them to their respective war ministries. From these, the prisoner agency created files for each individual prisoner, which eventually numbered 8 million files before the end of the war.[71]

Germany rapidly responded on August 20 with it announcement of the creation of a German POW information office.[72] The German War Ministry and Red Cross appointed General Emil Friedrich as the head of the German POW information office, particularly because of his extensive experience with prisoner internment during the campaigns against the Herero in German Southwest Africa in 1904.[73] They also proclaimed to the ICRC their adherence to humanitarianism and duty to international law:

> The German Government is prepared, on the condition of reciprocity, to communicate the lists of prisoners of war of the enemies land and naval forces prepared by the information

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[68] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 45, no. 180 (October 1914), 247-249; Deutsche Rote Kreuz, *Bericht des Deutschen Roten Kreuzes,* 38.

[69] Gustav Ador, "Constitution des Commissions et d'un Bureau central en faveur de l'assistance des prisonniers de guerre, 159me Circulaire, " August 15, 1914 in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[70] Gustav Ador, "Organisation de l'assistance internationale en faveur des prisonniers, 160me Circulaire," August 27, 1914, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[71] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* [49], no. 193 (January 1918), 6-10, 33-52, 82-85.

[72] Kimmle, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz im Weltkrieg,* 47-50.

[73] *Nouvelles de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre* 3*,* no. 36 and 37 (September 14, 1918), 321.

> office to the governments of the enemy powers through diplomatic channels; the lists would also contain information on any wounds and illnesses suffered by prisoners of war and would be drawn up at regular intervals of about one week if possible.[74]

As promised, Germany was the first belligerent to send a list to the ICRC, when it was hand-delivered to the office in Geneva by a chairman of the Freiburg-in-Breisgau Red Cross chapter, Dr. Carl Partsch, on September 7.[75]

Since the ICRC received German POW lists, they expressed surprise when the French public accused Germany of failing to send lists and set up a POW information agency towards the end of September. Ador publicly defended Germany's efforts, presenting evidence that they had, in fact, distributed such lists to the ICRC in Geneva. Ador also recruited the Swiss minister in Berlin, Alfred von Claparède, to report his personal visit to the German POW office and its efficient operation.[76] The ICRC attributed these delays to higher number of prisoners the Germans captured as they advanced westward and the communication chaos throughout Europe at the start of the war. Their investigation revealed that Germany had sent lists to France, but not through the ICRC's channels. The United States' embassy in Berlin acted as the representative of Germany's affairs with the Entente states and, thus, standard procedure routed the lists through their office.[77] The United States embassy received the German POW lists, but neglected to send them along to France for nearly a month.[78] This failure justified the ICRC taking control over much of the international communication regarding humanitarian relief and POW affairs for the remainder of the war, with pre-war civic association networks performing with greater efficiency than official, diplomatic channels.

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[74] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#714, *Reply to the Memoranda of the Embassy of the United States of America dated 4th and 28th, 1914 – F.O. no. 466, no. 469, no. 60* (September 11, 1914).

[75] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 45*,* no. 180 (October 1914), 251-252.

[76] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#714, Alfred v. Claperède to Swiss Political Department, September 23, 1914.

[77] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#714, *Reply to the Memoranda of the Embassy of the United States of America dated 4th and 28th, 1914 – F.O. no. 466, no. 469, no. 60* (September 11, 1914).

[78] SFA, E2001#1000/45#714, Ador to department politique, September 21, 1914.

As part of the investigation into the failure of POW information exchanges, Ador travelled to Bordeaux from September 26 to October 4.[79] Due to the German advance on Paris, the French Red Cross moved its headquarters of operations to Bordeaux, along with some of the military's general staff. When he arrived, he discovered that the French Red Cross had failed to create and send lists of captured German soldiers.[80] The only information they had at their disposal was gleaned by private individuals working in hospitals and rag-tag POW receiving stations. By this point, Germany had responded with proof that they had not received proper lists from a French POW agency and threatened to stop sending lists on the basis of the principle of reciprocity. It took days of negotiation before Ador finalized a pledge from the French authorities to start making more of an effort to send POW lists.[81]

4.3.3: Arthur Eugster and the ICRC's POW Parcel System

Since the start of the war, the ICRC advocated for a means of monitoring POW camp conditions in the belligerent countries, using delegates appointed from neutral countries. In October 1914, the French denied the ICRC's proposal for neutral observers to visit their camps housing German POWs. Instead, they argued that representatives of the French Red Cross sufficed and attempted to forestall further discussion by delivering a report of visits conducted by its delegate, Baron d'Anthouard, at the end of October and start of November to the ICRC.[82] The ICRC correctly predicted that this arrangement would not be acceptable to the Germans. The ICRC's president, Gustave Ador, personally conducted another tour in both Germany and France in the last weeks of the year to negotiate a mutually satisfactory agreement.[83] The German War

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[79] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181 (January 1915), 58-94; Ador's diplomatic tour covered further by Bugnion, *Confronting the Hell of the Trenches,* 42.

[80] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#714, Ador to Politique Department, September 19, 1914.

[81] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 45, no. 180 (October 1914), 251-252.

[82] A CICR, C G1 A 15-02, [ICRC] to Comité Allemand, October 31, 1914.

[83] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181 (Januar 1915), 58-64.

Ministry agreed to allow neutral delegates to observe their POW and civilian camps and argued that all belligerents should follow suit.[84] Furthermore, they agreed permanently to add neutral delegates to the central committee overseeing their Prisoner of War Agency's office within the Ministry of War in Berlin.[85] Not wanting to be cast as bad humanitarians in comparison to the Germans, the French acquiesced to ICRC oversight.

Arthur Eugster volunteered to serve as the ICRC's representative in Berlin at the start of 1915, and the German Empire couldn't have asked for a better Swiss candidate to inspect their POW camps.[86] Born in 1863, Eugster hailed from the small town of Speicher, Switzerland and held degrees in theology from universities in both Switzerland and Berlin. Since 1902, he served as the representative of the Canton of Appenzell Ausserrhoden on the Swiss National Council and held a leadership position in the classically liberal Free Democratic Party of Switzerland.[87] He did not have ties to the Pan-German associations, which gave his neutrality added credibility, but Appenzell Ausserrhoden lay squarely in the heart of pro-German Swiss territory. In Berlin, the POW agency established a committee chaired by members of the German War Ministry, Red Cross, and neutral delegates. The agency included representatives from other neutral states, such as S.E.M. Polo de Barnabé, the Spanish Ambassador. Eugster was appointed in January 1915 and also received a chair on the committee's directorate, granting him a powerful position in Germany's POW bureaucracy.[88]

He arrived in Berlin in January 1915 with a list of French complaints concerning conditions of German camps to investigate. Germany's successes on the Western Front had

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[84] CICR, *Documents publiés a l'Occasion de la Guerre de 1914-1915: Rapports de MM. Ed Naville, V. Van Berchem, Dr. C de Marval, and A. Eugster,* first series (Genève: Libraire Georg & Cie, March 1915), 3.

[85] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181 (January 1915), 58-59.

[86] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#714, Eugster to Political Department, December 26, 1914.

[87] Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima,* 38-39; Thomas Fuchs, "Eugster, Arthur," in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (HLS), https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/004143/2004-11-08/ (Accessed June 2, 2024).

[88] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181 (January 1915), 64, 81-82.

resulted in a massive collection of POWs.[89] French POWs were estimated to be around 220,000 by the turn of the year. This influx of a large captive population in the German interior taxed its already pressed home front resources. French newspapers spread rumors of horrible living conditions, terrible food or lack thereof, and physical abuse throughout the German POW system. "When it is asserted that in many German camps the prisoners live in filth, covered with vermin, the interests of truth and justice oblige us to energetically refute such assertions," wrote Eugster in his report to the ICRC in May 1915. In Germany's defense, he wrote, "it's the opposite that is true. Everywhere, under the direction of distinguish[ed] hygienists, all useful measures are taken to maintain the health of prisoners. If the sanitary state of the camps is really good, it is thanks to the hygiene measures taken by the Germans."[90]

Eugster compiled a list of camps that the French had decried as examples of German abuses. For example, at Camp Gustrow in Mecklenberg, the French argued that the Germans forbade the prisoners from sending or receiving letters, a violation of international law. The French lodged a formal complaint to the ICRC in Geneva over this violation, which stemmed from one specific soldier. Eugster found "the prisoner in question" and interviewed him. This prisoner "had only arrived a few weeks ago and on the very day [Eugster] was there [February 26], he received four letters at once." Eugster argued that the transfer of the prisoner to the camp, official processing, and the slowness of the state of interstate traffic had delayed the mail being delivered: "The camp commander assures me that no letter has been withheld." To further

[89] Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War,* 40-41.

[90] CICR, *Documents publiés a l'Occasion de la Guerre de 1914-1915: Rapports de MM. Dr. C. de Marvel and A. Eugster sur leurs visites aux camps de prisonniers en France et en Allegmagne,* second series (Genève: Librairie Georg & Cie, May 1915), 36-37.

address French complaints, Eugster praised the overall condition of the camp: "This camp, brand new, cost 2,600,000 marks. Whoever untertakes such expenses shows good will."[91]

In addition to poor living conditions, the French also argued that the Germans overworked French prisoners. The use of POWs on work details did not violate international law as long as the work did not directly contribute to the war effort, such as arms manufacturing or fortification construction. Nevertheless, the French often complained that the Germans forced POWs to work in draining Germany's northeastern marshes, constituting an inhumane and unhealthy practice. Eugster defended Germany's use of prisoner of labor throughout his reports in 1915. Using Camp Gustrow as an example, he wrote:

> Around 5,000 prisoners are employed at improving the soil and clearing swamps. The workers receive a small allowance per day. In winter they worked in the sugar factory. […] The fact that the number of sick people does not exceed 4% (including the injured) proves that they are not overloaded with work.[92]

Other than imprisoned soldiers, Germany's advance through Belgium and Northern France had resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilian prisoners by the start of 1915. The German War Ministry gathered women, children, the elderly, and others deemed unable to bear arms, and processed them for repatriation through neutral countries in large, civilian camps.[93] One of the largest was the Rastatt camp in Württemberg which served as a transit point for civilians to be returned through Switzerland. The hectic movement of people combined with civilians being crowded together, from all classes, and unused to military restrictions gave rise to a flood of complaints that made their way into French propaganda. Eugster added the Rastatt camp as a priority in his visits in an effort to determine the veracity of French accusations and reassure the international community of German efforts towards humanitarian treatment of

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[91] Ibid., 56-57.
[92] Ibid.
[93] CICR, *Renseignements Complémentaires sur l'Activitè de l'Agence international des Prisonniers de Guerre à Genève en 1915 et 1916* (Genève: CICR, March 1916), 42-43.

civilians. Eugster relied heavily on interviews with the internees themselves: "I inquired from a large number of people, belonging to all classes of society, about the treatment and the food and no one confirmed the complaints, which had reached me from different quarters." He also highlighted interviews with people of respected positions—a French pharmacist, interned cooks who helped feed others, and volunteers of charity organizations who offered aid to the camp—to lend legitimacy to his defense.[94] Eugster's reports at the start of 1915 helped accelerate the exchange of these civilians between France and Germany.[95] By August 1915, millions had been repatriated either through Switzerland or Holland, with those remaining in camps in Germany being men between the ages of 17 and 60. Thus, German agitation in the first full year of the war succeeded. By May 1915, Eugster reported that an estimated 200,000 civilians had been evacuated through the Rastatt camp alone.[96]

Eugster commonly used interviews with prisoners, particularly when visiting officer camps, to counter Entente accusations of poor conditions. POW officers, especially those of high rank, were often separated into their own camps and provided additional benefits, such as extra leisure liberties. While visiting the POW officer camp in Blankenburg, Germany on May 14, 1915, Eugster interviewed some of its internationally recognized internees: "We greeted in this camp generals Ville, of the French army, Leman, of the Belgian army, and Colonel Gordon, English, who spontaneously insisted on the fact that the officers here were really treated like officers,' and they were pleased to recognize that the German officers, responsible for their guard, were doing their best to improve and soften the rigors of captivity."[97] When the French claimed Eugster conducted these interviews under German supervision or prearrangement, he

[94] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* second series (May 1915)*,* 72-73.
[95] Ibid., 40-41, 86-87.
[96] Ibid., 72-73.
[97] Ibid., 29.

responded, "that [he] was allowed to go everywhere, with the exception of course of the places where typhus was then rife, and everywhere either the [German] Ministry of War or the camp commanders only repeated to me: 'What else do you want to see? You have the right to see everything, we have nothing to hide."[98] By adding these interviews, Eugster crafted his reports in a way that forced French and other Entente critics to contradict their own officers' words while adding authority to his own observations.

These reports were viewed beyond the ICRC's filing cabinets. Upon submission to Geneva, the ICRC compiled the accounts from camp visits by their delegates in Germany, France, and eventually other belligerents, into a formal publication within a given season of activity. They sent these to the belligerent countries' governments, but also offered free copies to families who had relatives in the camps visited. Bookstores with ICRC-vetted partnerships throughout Europe made reports available for public purchase, generating much needed revenue for the ICRC's Geneva office.[99] Additionally, the ICRC condensed the reports into more readable summaries printed in their *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge,* a quarterly journal serving as the ICRC's central means of communicating and coordinating news and policy between the Red Cross's national chapters.[100] As a result, Eugster's defense of German POW camp conditions flowed through the entirety of the ICRC's international network as well as accessed international public opinion using the ICRC's recognized legitimacy and authority.

Eugster's position as an ICRC observer did not stop French denunciations claiming that his report reflected a German bias. Compared to the matter-of-fact account of Dr. C. De Marval, the Swiss observer in Paris who conducted inspections at the same time, Eugster's praise of

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[98] Ibid., 75.

[99] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 183 (Juillet 1915), 336.

[100] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 182 (April 1915), 184-201; also, see Annette Becker, "From the Bulletin International des Sociétès de la Croix Rouge to the International Review of the Red Cross : The Great War as a Revelator," *International Review of the Red Cross* 100 (2018), 105-106.

German camp conditions, which bordered on the theatrical, indeed evidenced his pro-German sympathies.[101] Eugster combated these allegations by infusing his activities as the ICRC's representative with the neutral legitimacy offered by his Swiss national identity. He argued that, by challenging his reporting, France contested the very basis of Swiss neutrality:

> If a high-ranking Frenchman was able to say of my mission: 'The neutral, spectator of a war like this, cannot consider things from the same angle as the belligerent who is in the fray,' he said a very fair and true thing. A Neutral who judged matters of war from the point of view of a belligerent would no longer be a neutral. This is the reason why the position of your delegate is so difficult. The only thing that matters is to do one's duty as best as one can and one must do it, to seek the truth and to pay homage to it, without expecting recognition and without worrying about ingratitude. However, let the neutral person be allowed to formulate this humble prayer, let us have confidence in him, without I believe, to claim this confidence. The White cross on red background, the old Swiss symbol, under whose aegis I am proud to place myself, is the first title to this right; the second is the red cross on a white background, under which, by serving other people in love, we also honor our own country.[102]

The ICRC defended Eugster's report as truthful and unbiased throughout 1915. Ador, in his anticipation of the POW reports for the *Bulletin's* January 1915 copy, praised Eugster's qualifications for reporting as "marked with the most complete accuracy and impartiality" and providing "valuable information for the assistance to be sent and will contribute to reassuring, without doubt and with certainty, the families about the fate of their loved ones."[103] Ador wrote again for the April *Bulletin* that Eugster's observation of German camps demonstrated "great improvements have occurred in this respect, and it no longer seems debatable, despite the individual complaints and the tendentious rumors which the newspapers peddle, far too easily, that except perhaps a reserve for food (easily explainable by the economic situation), French prisoners are materially and morally well treated currently in Germany."[104] Of course, it would undermine the ICRC's mission if they had to denounce the first Swiss delegate appointed to

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[101] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* first series (March 1915), 29-31.
[102] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* second series (May 1915), 32-33.
[103] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181 (January 1915), 65.
[104] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 182 (April 1915), 165.

Germany, but their stamp of legitimacy on Eugster's report granted an official legitimacy that Germany used to prove their credentials as humanitarians.

Germany employed these reports as compelling propaganda. The reports provided the German War Ministry with a seal of approval for their treatment of POWs, but also as a propaganda tool through which they could agitate for their own wartime needs. Particularly, Eugster reported on the deteriorating situation of German food rations allocated to POWs and interned civilians in 1915. Hague Convention of 1907's Article 7 states that prisoners are to be fed the same as the detaining country's own soldiers. He acknowledged the cuts in prisoner rations, but did not chastise German officials. Instead, he blamed the British blockade, which he hinted could be interpreted as a violation of international law: "Today, there are approximately 750 to 800,000 prisoners in Germany. Counting 300 grams per man, that makes a daily consumption of 240,000 kilos of bread. This is not a trifle, at a time when the importation of cereals is impossible."[105] As German food stocks dwindled, Eugster argued that a country couldn't be asked to feed its prisoners better than its own civilians: "The bread ordinance, put into force in Prussia, reduced the ration for the inhabitants, which was initially 250 grams per head per day, to only 200 grams. The consequence was the lowering of the daily ration of prisoners, from 500 to 300 grams. […] The alleged reason is that, since Germany's enemies are preventing the importation of grain and forcing Germany to restrict its consumption of bread, the prisoners cannot be given a ration two and a half times larger than that we give to German residents."[106] Eugster took defending German prisoner rations a step further by personally sending data on the food supplied to camps to a Swiss nutritionist for analysis. Calorically, only the Rattstatt camp was below the recommended 2,800 calories per day and that the German

[105] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* second series (May 1915), 38-40.
[106] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* second series (May 1915), 39-40.

substitution of bread for meat was more than fair. Eugster published the nutritionist's conclusion as an addendum to his spring 1915 reports in order to reach an international audience.[107]

Despite simply being an observer, Eugster argued on behalf of Germany for a solution for the food shortage in German camps in his spring 1915 reports:

> According to Article 7 cited above, certain arrangements can be made between belligerent states. Nothing would prevent the states which have prisoners in Germany from themselves providing the bread which is necessary for them. These states have wheat, or can obtain it, or instruct a neutral state, such as Norway or Sweden, to introduce it into Germany. In each camp the Germans would have to build ovens to bake bread, under the control of neutrals, who would ensure that the flour was not used for the needs of the population. The question of bread would thus be resolved. We could also imagine that the powers at war with Germany provided the additional flour necessary to feed their captive nationals, still under the control of neutrals. If we do not try to resolve this question in this way or another, it is to be feared that if Germany's bread ration decreases further, the prisoners will be the first to suffer. Beyond that, no one is bound.[108]

Eugster's proposal for Entente states to send food for their own prisoners interned in Germany became a major focus of German agitation throughout 1915. The ICRC, including Ador, rallied behind Eugster's suggestion and established the infrastructure in Geneva necessary to carry out the transfer. POWs in Germany first began to be supplied by private measures rather than by diplomatic agreement between states in the spring of 1915. Families and humanitarian associations in France and Switzerland, upon hearing the ICRC's plan, began sending train wagons full of parcels that included food and clothing to Geneva to then be forwarded to POWs in Germany. The parcel exchange system benefitted German prisoners held in France as well.[109] Their families in Germany, as well as German humanitarian associations and pro-German charities in Switzerland, could send care packages to their loved ones interned in France. By March 1915, Geneva's Cornavin train station received eleven train wagons of packages a day

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[107] Dr. G. Ambühl to A. Eugster, March 20, 1915, in CICR*, Documents 1914-1915,* second series (May 1915), 79-80.

[108] CICR*, Documents 1914-1915,* second series (May 1915), 40.

[109] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* first series (March 1915), 31-53.

just for French prisoners in Germany and an estimated 20,000 parcels going both directions per day.[110] The logistical undertaking for this system was massive for both the ICRC and the local Genevan transport system. The sheer quantity forced the ICRC to acquire entire hangars for storage and to hire workers to sort the parcels. By the end of April 1915, the ICRC estimated that around 965,000 parcels had already passed through Geneva with the number surpassing 15.8 million by the end of the year.[111]

The parcel exchange system provides an example of a positive and constructive means by which Germany solved one of its wartime needs using the social network of international humanitarian societies. Germans alleviated pressure on their domestic resources by reducing their captive population, initiated a parcel system that fed and clothed those still interned using foreign aid, and compelled France to adhere to international law and humanitarian norms to safeguard the treatment of their own wounded soldiers imprisoned in France. In a follow-up report in May 1915, Eugster summarized German camp improvements since his first visits: "The German authorities are constantly striving to improve the material and moral situation of prisoners of war; they are guided by the desire to conscientiously fulfill the duties dictated to them by the laws of humanity."[112] By publically demonstrating allegiance to humanitarian ideals in the form of allowing neutral oversight of their POW system in 1915, the German War Ministry gained an avenue through which agitation could alleviate some of their home front burdens. The ICRC acted as a conduit through which diplomatic negotiations and material goods flowed. Germany could tap into this network, so long as it did so by invoking the identity and culture of international humanitarianism. In turn, the ICRC's humanitarian activity enabled Swiss

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[110] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 182 (April 1915), 161.

[111] CICR, *Renseignements Complémentaires sur l'Agence internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre*, 59.

[112] CICR, *Documents publiés a l'Occasion de la Guerre de 1914-1915: Rapports de M. le Dr C. de Marval et de MM. A. Eugster et C. de Marval sur leurs visites en commun de certains camps de prisonniers en Allemagne et en France,* third series (Genève: Librairie Georg & Cie, June 1915), 26-27.

constructive participation in the war. As the example of Arthur Eugster demonstrates, this work became tied to Swiss national identity and active neutrality through the defense of his viewpoint and actions. The connection between humanitarian activity and Swiss participation served as another route through which German agitation could work to recruit Swiss in order to further fulfill wartime goals and needs.

4.3.4: German Agitation and Differing Opinions of Returning Medical Staff

Not all of Germany's successes in agitation towards the ICRC appealed to a humanitarian ideology, but its pre-war socio-cultural capital as good humanitarians afforded them leniency in the first half of the war. Loose interpretations concerning how certain international laws were to be applied often divided German military necessity from the ICRC's own standard. One difference revolved around the repatriation of medical staff captured on the battlefield. By the end of November 1914, the ICRC received complaints from French medical staff interned in Germany requesting release back to France to which they were entitled by the Geneva Convention of 1906. The ICRC estimated that the Germans held 2,500 French medical staff captured since the start of the war.[113] Additionally, the Swiss Political Department relayed to the ICRC that they had received through diplomatic channels similar complaints from Belgian medical staff in Germany. The ICRC forwarded complaints from 500 doctors and 1,000 nurses or stretcher-bearers in German captivity to the German Red Cross.[114] Germany's only response was an informal rebuttal relayed through the Swiss political department that "given the very large number of prisoners, the German War Ministry considers the assistance of interned doctors and medical personnel as essential for the possibility of epidemic or other disease in the prison

[113] Susan Barton, *Internment in Switzerland during the First World War* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 16.

[114] SFA, E2001#1000/45#714, Ferriere to President des Department Politique Féderal, January 6, 1915.

camps, the doctors of [Germany] being currently insufficient in number to take care of the prisoners in an eventuality of this kind."[115]

The debate centered on Articles 9 and 12 of the Geneva Convention. Article 9 declared that militaries could not treat captured medical personnel as prisoners, which included doctors, nurses, and stretcher-bearers and covered both state and voluntary staff. Instead, Article 12 stated: "Persons described in Articles 9, 10, and 11 will continue in the exercise of their functions, under the direction of the enemy, after they have fallen into his power. When their assistance is no longer indispensable they will be sent back to their army or country within such a period and by such route as may accord with military necessity."[116] The problem of these articles lay in the open-ended interpretation of "when their assistance is no longer indispensable." The ICRC interpreted these articles to mean that medical staff should accompany their wounded compatriots until they stabilized behind the frontlines.[117] Once medical personnel no longer rendered immediate medical service, their captor should return them to their home country. In contrast, Germany interpreted the clause "no longer indispensable" as including caring for prisoners in POW camps as well. Therefore, if the Germans could find essential work for captured medical staff, specifically in treating wounded and sick compatriots, then they should be allowed to keep them indefinitely.[118]

The ICRC issued a formal protest on December 7, 1914, arguing that the failure to repatriate medical staff, some of who had been in captivity since August and September, violated

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[115] Ibid.

[116] ICRC, "Article 12," in *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field.* Geneva, July 6, 1906. https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gc-1906/article-12 (accessed June 20, 2024).

[117] A CICR, A CS-020, Ed Naville and Dr. F. Ferriere, *Renvoi du Personnel Sanitaire : Interprétation des articles 9 et 12 de la Convention de Genève du 6 juillet 1906,* (December 7, 1914).

[118] Comparative interpretations reprinted in *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46*,* no. 183 (July 1915), 314-319.

the Geneva Convention.[119] However, instead of singling Germany out, the ICRC cast their complaint as a reminder for all belligerents to follow international law. They included France in this blanket criticism, even though the French had in part met the ICRC's interpretation of the law when repatriating German medical staff. Even Eugster did not completely agree with Germany's interpretation, but the ICRC's early susceptibility to German arguments held sway in his reports. Eugster recorded a meeting of the German POW central committee concerning the matter on January 23. He advised the Germans to "free French doctors, provided that they were not absolutely necessary for the wounded French." In response, "the representative of the War Ministry told me that Germany did not have an overabundance of doctors and that it was only fair that the prisoner doctors devoted themselves to their compatriots."[120] Again, this phrasing of "absolutely necessary" allowed enough room for interpretation that Germany could bend the rules to their war time needs. Eugster relayed what he believed to be a compromise to the ICRC, but in reality, he acquiesced to the War Ministry's argument: "I agree that where there is a shortage of doctors, we can and must keep the absolutely essential number of French medical staff, but keeping unemployed doctors is in contradiction with the Geneva Convention."[121] Eugster proposed a compromise to the ICRC: "I believe that the powers should agree to set a proportional number, namely out of so many prisoners, a doctor can be retained. In this way we would clearly interpret the somewhat elastic sentence from the agreement of July 6, 1906 that follows: "when their assistance is no longer essential."[122]

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[119] A CICR, A CS-020, Ed Naville and Dr. F. Ferriere, *Renvoi du Personnel Sanitaire : Interprétation des articles 9 et 12 de la Convention de Genève du 6 juillet 1906* (December 7, 1914).

[120] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* first series (March 1915), 86-87.

[121] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* second series (May 1915), 86-87.

[122] CICR, *Documents 1914-1915,* second series (May 1915), 40.

The ICRC received a formal response from the German Red Cross on February 24, 1915, which continued to defend its actions as only a matter of differing interpretations.[123] The Germans argued that their retention of medical staff actually aligned with humanitarian principles: "It was in the interest of the wounded and prisoners to be treated by doctors of the same nationality as them." Germany offered a solution in line with Eugster's suggestion of freeing nonessential staff: "Due to the divergence of interpretation that may have occurred […], the German government has proposed to France, England and Russia through diplomatic channels, an agreement in this regard." Regardless, no talks over a deal to trade interned medical staff took place until French threats of reciprocal action against German POWs in March forced Germany to move forward with an agreement. Still, it was June 1915 before Germany and France agreed to a one-time trade of 4,000 French and 1,000 German medical staff.[124]

No automatic releases of medical staff occurred between the two countries for the remainder of the war, despite the ICRC's perennial requests. Instead, captured medical staff became a bargaining chip for the belligerents' diplomatic demands. The transfers under the French-German agreement in the first half of the 1915 quickly stalled out in July.[125] Any further exchanges came as a result of one-time agreements that took months to reach, rather than the prompt and regular releases imagined by the Geneva Convention. Only in June 1916 did negotiations open back up for a transfer of medical staff, and these did not conclude until October when 2,790 French and 1150 Germans were exchanged through Switzerland.[126] Another round of negotiation in July 1917 concluded with the ICRC-sponsored Bern Agreement in

[123] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 182 (April 1915), 144-146.
[124] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 184 (October 1915), 507-510; further details of the exchange in Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima,* 52.
[125] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 184 (October 1915), 507-510.
[126] CICR, *Rapport général 1912-1920*, 98.

December 1917, which supposedly promised a permanent system of exchanges every two months, but even this failed to materialize in 1918.[127]

When comparing Germany's position on returning captured medical personnel to their agitation directed towards the ICRC for the repatriation of wounded soldiers, it is even more apparent that military interests rather than purely humanitarian ones guided their decisions. When Germany delayed returning captured French medical staff, they actively looked for means to recover their own soldiers held in French captivity. The Geneva and Hague Conventions did not require states to repatriate soldiers, particularly wounded soldiers, as it did for captured medical staff. Article 2 of the 1906 Geneva Convention stated only that belligerents could reach agreements on their own over the transfer of the wounded and recovered back to their country of origin or to a neutral state.

The ICRC's central committee discussed a mutual agreement between the belligerents for an exchange of severely wounded with Hoffmann at the Swiss Political Department as early as November 1914. [128] Ador brought these ideas to the German War Ministry when he visited Berlin during his diplomatic tour from December 9 to 16, 1914. He proposed that a trade could take place of seriously wounded prisoners, who could never return to the frontline, through Switzerland with the help of the ICRC and the Swiss Red Cross. The German representatives supported Ador's proposal and encouraged him to apply pressure on France. When Ador wrote d'Anthouard at the French Red Cross after his trip to Berlin, the French disapproved. The French feared that any soldiers who returned to Germany could be used for the German war effort. In particular, wounded officers might be physically unable to serve at the front, but they could certainly still be used in office work or to train new troops or an occupation duty. Whether

[127] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 49, no. 194 (April 1918), 270; also, see Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War,* 239-240.

[128] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181 (January 1915), 63-66.

this was Germany's real intent is unclear, but the German War Ministry did indeed continue to use wounded officers in non-combat roles. In addition, wounded prisoner exchanges would further alleviate the German home front's supply burdens. It would allow them to offload unthreatening French prisoners in their own camps, while returned Germans would be a much needed public morale boost, international diplomatic victory, and a possible source of military manpower in the rear zones.

Germany issued announcements in favor of a wounded prisoner exchange deal through ICRC channels throughout December. Upon hearing the appeals of the ICRC and Germany for freeing severely wounded prisoners, Pope Benedict XI published a letter of support in the European press on January 1, 1915.[129] The stirring of the Catholic community finally forced France to accept the ICRC's proposal and negotiations began for a prisoner exchange with Germany. The first exchanges took place through Switzerland in early March 1915. The Swiss Political Department lent the ICRC its diplomatic staff to negotiate the terms, and the Swiss Red Cross implemented the exchanges.[130] The Swiss Red Cross loaded medical trains with French prisoners in Constance, Germany and German prisoners in Lyon, France, providing medical care for 2,500 total wounded soldiers on their way back to their respective home countries.[131] These exchanges continued periodically for the remainder of the war. Though always carefully negotiated, the exchanges lacked the arm-twisting, reluctant bargaining associated with the release of medical staff as the beneficial return of German officers outweighed the cost of sending back Entente officers in the minds of German military leaders. Other countries participated in the exchanges as the war progressed, and the ICRC estimates that they facilitated

[129] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181 (January 1915), 63-66.
[130] Bugnion, *Confronting the Hell of the Trenches,* 76.
[131] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 182 (April 1915), 166-167.

the exchange of 16,780 Germans, 29,223 French or Belgians, and hundreds of other nationalities before the end of the war in 1918.[132]

In contrast, the ICRC simply chose to live with the situation regarding Germany's retention of captured medical staff.[133] They allowed Germany too much leniency in their interpretation of international law during the first year of the war, and could not revoke the leeway first conceded to the German War Ministry. Germany's ability to influence Eugster into acquiescing to a shaky compromise without the ICRC's direction exacerbated the issue. The ICRC trusted that Germany acted within the international humanitarian norms of the Geneva Convention, but military advantages motivated their decisions. Their pre-war connections to international humanitarianism now afforded Germany the leverage to chip away at international law for immediate military necessities. It became increasingly clear that the German War Ministry violated the international norms expressed by the ICRC. Yet, despite reaching this realization later on in the war, the ICRC never targeted Germany as the sole perpetrator of this violation. Instead, their complaint cast this as a European-wide issue of the war. Nevertheless, the refusal to repatriate medical staff marked the beginning of Germany's use of humanitarian identity for negative reciprocity.

4.4.1: The Swiss Red Cross, "Pro Captivis" Office, and the Internment of Soldiers in Switzerland

Like the belligerent's national societies, the Swiss Red Cross had been mobilized alongside the Swiss military at the start of the war.[134] On August 3, 1914, the Swiss government replaced the Swiss Red Cross's civilian-led assembly with Colonel Charles Bohny, a chief

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[132] [Swiss Red Cross], *La Croix-Rouge suisse pendant la mobilisation,* 72.
[133] CICR, *Rapport général 1912-1920,* 92.
[134] Summary of Swiss Red Cross work in the first half of the war recounted in *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 47, no. 185 (January 1916), 141-142.

medical officer in the Swiss military, who was pre-selected to the position in 1912 as part of Switzerland's military readiness.[135] The Swiss Red Cross mobilized 12 medical columns, which included doctors, nurses, trains, and field hospitals tied to hospitals for long-term care in the Swiss hinterland. They also oversaw the preparation of cold weather and mountainous terrain clothing in the winter of 1914-1915 by organizing donations of mittens, sweaters, underwear, and boots.[136] With their priorities being with their own military measures, German agitation had little room to influence the Swiss Red Cross in 1914. While the leadership of the Swiss Red Cross engaged in theoretical discussions about sending extra aid to the belligerents, the fears that these could be interpreted as anti-neutral acts overruled any underlying sympathies.[137]

The Swiss Red Cross's oversight of wounded POW exchange between France and Germany in March 1915 represented their first real role outside of Switzerland's own military efforts. The ICRC may have arranged it at the level of international diplomacy, but its logistics were left to the Swiss Red Cross to manage. In fact, Colonel Bohny personally went to Germany to coordinate the transfer and become acquainted to Prince Max von Baden, whom he invited to travel through Switzerland in the Swiss Red Cross trains in order to greet the returning German wounded.[138] In Swiss memory of the war, the exchange of wounded POWs symbolized their humanitarianism and neutrality. Images of cheering Swiss crowds as trains rolled into cities and gifts being handed into train windows are inescapable in the popular memory of the war. These crowds warmly greeted French and Germans alike, becoming a symbol of Swiss unity against divided national sympathies of 1914. However, the ICRC did record hostile actions taken against

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[135] [Swiss Red Cross], *La Croix-Rouge suisse pendant la mobilisation*, *1914-1919* (Berne: Imprimerie Coopérative, 1920), 5-6.

[136] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 181 (January 1915), 101-102.

[137] [Swiss Red Cross], *La Croix-Rouge suisse pendant la mobilisation*, 3-4.

[138] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 182 (April 1915), 255-166; [Swiss Red Cross], *La Croix-Rouge suisse pendant la mobilisation*, 70-71.

transferring belligerent soldiers with examples of towns where rocks were thrown at passing trains and hostile shouts and insulting messages displayed along the way, demonstrating the Swiss public's divided wartime sympathies. [139]

While seeing the success of the negotiations for the wounded POW exchange, France and Germany both asked the ICRC to approach the Swiss Political Department over the possibility of interning severely sick, mostly officer, POWs in Switzerland in February 1915.[140] Switzerland's health resorts were internationally recognized for medical convalescent care, particularly in the treatment of lung ailments such as tuberculosis. Though each belligerent was financially responsible for their prisoners' upkeep, Germany saw internment as a way of relieving its medical services of treating severely sick POWs while France saw it as a way of demonstrating humanitarian goodwill while still not allowing Germany to regain its captured officer corps.[141] The Swiss military's general staff under Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg also gave their consent to allow internment of foreign soldiers in the country in the spring of 1915.[142]

The Swiss military left negotiations to the Swiss Political Department. The first internees were accepted in January 1916, with the initial transfer being 883 French and 364 German soldiers.[143] Tuberculosis was the primary ailment that granted a soldier approval for internment in Switzerland, but the list grew to include chronic, often incurable illnesses, amputees,

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[139] [Swiss Red Cross], *La Croix-Rouge suisse pendant la mobilisation*, 68.

[140] CICR, *Renseignements Complémentaires sur l'Activité de l'Agence International des Prisonniers de Guerre à Genève en 1915 et 1916,* 38; *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 183 (July 1915), 335-336.

[141] Thomas Bürgisser, "L'Humanité comme Raison d'Etat: L'internement des prisonniers de guerre étrangers en Suisse pendant la Première Guerre mondiale," in *14/18 : La Suisse et la Grande Guerre,* eds. Roman Rossfeld, Thomas Buomberger, Patrick Kury (Neuchâtel: Éditions Livreo-Alphil, 2019), 261-262; Bugnion, *Confronting the Hell of the Trenches,* 84-85.

[142] *Nouvelles de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre,* no. 9 (March 18, 1916), 65-66.

[143] CICR, *Renseignements Complémentaires sur l'Activité de l'Agence International des Prisonniers de Guerre à Genève en 1915 et 1916,* 38.

blindness, and deafness.[144] Internees were housed in Switzerland largely by linguistic relationships with the Germans being sent to the health resorts in German-speaking Davos and the French to the French-speaking mountain towns of Leysin and Montana in Western Switzerland.[145] The Swiss Army Health Institute in Lucerne was one of the few places that housed both French and German internees as they received the most extreme surgical cases.[146]

ICRC staff, including Ador, frequently visited the internees, but they were not involved in the management or treatment. The Swiss Red Cross's only responsible was the transportation in Switzerland, not the actual staffing of the hospitals or health resorts.[147] Instead, the Swiss military's own medical services treated and policed POW internees.[148] Nevertheless, the Swiss Red Cross and the Swiss public had a strong desire to help internees. To provide additional, voluntary assistance to POWs in Switzerland, the Swiss Red Cross created new offices in 1916 with the approval of the ICRC. These groups retained a large amount of autonomy from the Geneva office and even the Swiss Red Cross. Located in Bern, they were responsible for sending material aid, such as food and clothing. The commissions were divided between the two belligerent alliances, with the office "Pro Captivis" working for the Central Powers and "*Secours aux prisonniers de guerre*" working for the Entente.[149] They were designated as official auxiliary branches by the ICRC, Swiss Red Cross, and Swiss federal government. As such, they received all of the Red Cross's benefits, including postal exemptions, the official use of the Red Cross, and the ability to directly interact with representatives of foreign governments.

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[144] *Nouvelles de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre*, no. 3 (February 5, 1916), 1-2; *Nouvelles de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre,* no. 6 (February 26, 1916), 41-42.

[145] *Nouvelles de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre,* no. 2 (January 29, 1916), 1-2.

[146] Marcelin Oliver Draenert, "Swiss Contributions to War Surgery during the Great War," *Clinic Orthopaedics and Related Research* 471, no. 8 (2013), 2712-2725.

[147] [Swiss Red Cross], *La Croix-Rouge suisse pendant la mobilisation,* 70-71.

[148] R. Woltereck, *Merkbuch für die deutschen Internierten,* vol. 1 (Bern: Verlag A. Francke, 1916), 4.

[149] [Swiss Red Cross], *La Croix-Rouge suisse pendant la mobilisation,* 9-10.

The "Pro Captivis" activities had close relationship with the German embassy in Bern, one that often bordered on outright subordination. It worked through the German Embassy and Ambassador von Romberg to send parcels to German POWs in Switzerland and also in other belligerent states.[150] Also, it was led by Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg's wife, Helene, who was as pro-German as her husband.[151] Like the ones in Eugster's parcel system, these gifts included clothing items, food stuffs, or comfort commodities such as tobacco or chocolate.[152] However, the goods for these parcels were sourced from Switzerland rather than from Germany. This was particularly helpful for procuring goods while not burdening the strained German home front economy and provided a much needed morale boosts for their soldiers in captivity. The German government or German Red Cross would pay "Pro Captivis" to send these parcels so that, when they arrived to a camp in France, they would be labelled as Swiss in origin.[153] Between July 1916 and the end of 1917, "Pro Captivis" sent 90,180 parcels to German POWs in French camps alone.[154] When economic shortages hindered their procurement of Swiss goods in 1918, they sourced items from their Red Cross partners in Barcelona, Spain.

When "Pro Captivis" was created in 1916, the German embassy also established the *Abteilung für Gefangenenfragen,* with several sections dealing with German POW related activities within Switzerland.[155] The section that worked closely with "Pro Captivis" was Section III under Dr. Richard Woltereck, a zoologist from the University of Leipzig. Section III's specialization was welfare and education for German internees.[156] Their joint work with "Pro

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[150] Otto Reichel and Légation Impériale d'Allemagne à Berne Section pour les questions relatives aux prisonniers de guerre, *Les internés Allemands en Suisse : Souvenir de l'hospitalisation des prisonniers de guerre civils et militaires allemands* (Munich : R. Piper & Cie, 1917), 8.

[151] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 136-137.

[152] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#714, Swiss Political Department to Legation de Suisse à Paris, March 6, 1917.

[153] Riesenberger, *Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz,* 136-137.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Woltereck, *Merkbuch für die deutschen Internierten,* vol. 1, 6.

[156] R. Woltereck, *Merkbuch für die deutschen Internierten*, vol. 2 (Bern: Verlag A. Francke, 1916), 10.

Captivis" involved setting up education and work-related training programs for German internees. Woltereck understood that Germany was going to need sufficiently trained men to help rebuild the German economy after the war and used the German internees in Switzerland for preparation for these foreseeable post-war needs: "You then use the waiting time until peace calls you back home to prepare yourself thoroughly for the resumption of your occupation in peace. The *Heimat* will need you after the war, each according to class and according to your strengths. And you will be happy when you return home if you can show that you didn't waste your time in Switzerland."[157] "Pro Captivis"'s intellectual connections opened doors for German internees to study at several of the major universities in Eastern Switzerland, including the universities in Basel, Bern, and Zurich. Zurich Polytechnic offered technical training, along with specially created schools for internees in their area of internment.[158] For those who could not travel, there were also workshop and craftsman courses taught at every German camp in the country.

Switzerland hosted 67,000 sick and wounded internees until the end of the war, which included just over 13,000 German soldiers.[159] It remained a popular means for the Swiss public to participate in the war through shared activity and common identification as humanitarians.[160] By providing aid to both sides of the belligerents, Switzerland justified its active neutrality on an international stage. However, it allowed for German agitation to coopt the symbols and resources of the Swiss Red Cross through the transnational network legitimized by the ICRC. The relationship between "Pro Captivis" and the German Embassy also continued to demonstrate the blurred boundary between civil society and the state, characteristic of the ICRC's international

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[157] Woltereck, *Merkbuch für die deutschen Internierten,* vol. 1, 10; for more on education opportunities for internees, see Barton, *Internment in Switzerland,* 90-92.

[158] Woltereck, *Merkbuch für die deutschen Internierten*, vol. 2, 16-19, 28.

[159] CICR, *Rapport général 1912-1920,* 107-108; Edouard Favre, *L'Internement en Suisse des Prisonniers des guerre malades ou blessés, 1918-1919,* vol. 3 (Berne: Bureau du Service de l'Internement, 1919), 249.

[160] Bürgisser, "L'Humanité Comme Raison d'Etat," 261.

framework. Because the ICRC officially regarded "Pro Captivis" as an auxiliary, it received no complaints from the Swiss population, despite working directly with representatives of the German War Ministry for their unique benefit.

4.4.2: The Deutscher Hilfsverein and the ICRC's patronage of German Nationalist Groups

Along with much of Europe, the ICRC's resources started to reach their breaking point by the start of 1917. The national Red Cross societies, particularly Germany, severely cut relief offered on all fronts and for POWs in foreign countries. Even as a neutral country, Switzerland felt these constraints. Economic shortages and trade limitations forced the Federal Department of Public Economy to reduce significantly the amount of goods that could be exported out of or through Switzerland.[161] This greatly affected the quantity of goods sent through the ICRC's parcel system. Additionally, the Department of Public Economy set new regulations on how parcels could be sent in the first place. Private individuals, in Switzerland or abroad, could no longer send parcels on their own through the ICRC's network. Instead, the regulations required individuals to work with specifically designated relief associations to send these packages. The influx of these shipments overwhelmed the ICRC and the "Pro Captivis" office. As a result, the ICRC released a list of other, officially authorized relief societies operating in Switzerland which could act as auxiliaries for their parcel system.[162]

Swiss enthusiasm for humanitarian activity at the start of the war led to an explosion of public, voluntary relief societies across the country. ICRC historian Daniel Palmieri estimates that 400 operated across Switzerland during the war, with 80 located in Geneva alone.[163] For work with German POWs and wounded, inside and outside of Switzerland, the ICRC ordained the *Deutscher Hilfsverein* as their official partner out of these numerous societies. The *Deutscher*

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[161] *Nouvelles de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre,* no. 19 (May 12, 1917), 149-150.
[162] *Nouvelles de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre,* no. 50 (December 30, 1916), 389-397.
[163] Palmieri, ed., *Minutes from Meetings of the International Prisoner-of-War Agency,* 5.

Hilfsverein originated in Zurich in the 1860s, but was solely dedicated to helping Germans in Switzerland.[164] Their pre-war activity was dedicated to German families that found themselves in need of assistance, especially in times of emergency. In sum, their ideology was a clear mixture of humanitarianism and German nationalism at the start of the war in 1914, with overlapping social ties to other Pan-German nationalist groups in Switzerland.

The *Deutscher Hilfsverein* had chapters all across Switzerland, not just in the German-speaking parts of the country. The ICRC listed 21 offices for the public to contact in 1916, growing to 34 by 1917.[165] The association already had ties to German war relief before the ICRC's official designation, but this focused on supporting Swiss families with members who left to volunteer with the German military. In order to carry out their new wartime efforts, the *Deutscher Hilfsverein* created a sub-section called the *Hilfsbund für deutsche Kriegerfürsorge* (HdK) on December 14, 1915.[166] They established their headquarters at the Kaspar-Escherhaus in Zurich, the same office building as the *Stimmen im Sturm* and the German Consulate office. Arnold Meyer, a theology professor at the University of Zurich, led the HdK alongside a 25-member board.[167] The HdK had an additional advisory board attached to it with three chairmen, all staffed by representatives of the German government. Of these three advisory board chairmen, Ambassador von Romberg from the Bern Embassy and Dr. Woltereck of Section III occupied seats for the duration of the war.[168] The Foreign Office in Berlin even designated them as Germany's official welfare office in Switzerland, further entangling the civic association with

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[164] Historical overview of the Deutscher Hilfsverein in Renate Hochholzer, *150 Jahre Deutscher Hilfsverein Zürich, 1856-2006* (Zürich: Chronik, 2005).

[165] *Nouvelles de l'Agence Internationale des Prisonniers de Guerre,* no. 8 (February 24, 1917), 57-63.

[166] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 1 (May 1, 1916).

[167] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Satzungen: angenommen in der Hauptversammlung am 28. Juni 1918 an Stelle der bisherigen Satzungen vom 29. April 1917* ([1918]); short biography of Arnold Meyer in Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 187.

[168] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Erster Jahresbericht für 1916*, 30-36; *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 3 (September 1, 1916), 15.

the responsibilities of the state.[169] In Meyer's foundation speech on December 14, 1915, he articulated the HdK's mission: "Being German means doing something for the sake of the cause, not for the sake of getting a name. […] That's why these brave men can and may expect from those of us who are left behind that our hearts and hands will open to them in order to truly and permanently help them."[170]

The HdK's local chapters were distributed across Switzerland, taking root first in the cities and towns alongside the *Deutscher Hilfsverein.* Each conducted its own business, but the main office in Zurich coordinated most of its activities. The Zurich chapter had 640 members, but the Basel chapter was actually the largest with 682 members.[171] Its membership included German-Swiss and German expats, with Pan-German crossover from the German nationalist associations. For example, one of noted donors of the Zurich branch was the Fick family of the *Deutscher Schulverein*.[172] In 1917, they restructured the whole organization into a more manageable system, with local chapters organized into districts around a German consular office.[173] German consul representatives sometimes even chaired chapter committees. This enabled better coordination of operations in Switzerland with the German government.

Even in the heart of French-Speaking Switzerland, the HdK pursued pro-German, nationalist language and activities. For example, the Lausanne chapter openly sympathized with the German war effort, mixing in nationalist rhetoric with their humanitarian mission:

> "But for us Germans abroad, who feel the hardship of the times and privations much less, we are still reminded of the warning that we should not be inferior to our German brothers in the fatherland in our […] consciousness of serving the holy German cause.

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[169] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Zweiter Jahresbericht für 1917* (Zürich: Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, 1918), 3.

[170] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 1 (May 1, 1916).

[171] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Erster Jahresbericht für 1916*, 3-10.

[172] Ibid., 30-36.

[173] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Zweiter Jahresbericht für 1917*, 2-3.

> […] that we never tire of persevering, standing together, working in unison and making sacrifices abroad in the uplifting awareness of being German."[174]

They conducted fundraisers for German soldiers, even openly holding a public celebration for the Kaiser's birthday. Its own treasurer, Herr Haussner, left in 1917 to join relief services in Germany and another member, Herr Dycherhoff, was killed in action in the mountains on the Austrian Front. The chapter had 219 members in 1917, with member dues alone directing 96,147 CHF towards aid that year.[175]

In addition to the parcel system and the work for POWs, the HdK's worked directly to aid wounded German soldiers and their families in Switzerland.[176] This included sick German soldiers sent by the German War Ministry to convalesce in the mountains and those German or German-Swiss who had enlisted but returned home after being wounded and discharged. The HdK found treatment or work for those returning while also helping their families. They covered travel expenses, provided money to widows and orphans, and navigated pension paperwork with the German War Ministry. The HdK worked with the German Red Cross and their own Swiss-based medical staff to treat soldiers. One of their most significant joint efforts helped the German Red Cross purchase a Swiss sanatorium exclusively for German soldiers with tuberculosis to convalesce.[177] The German government even used their chapter offices to collect War Bonds from within Switzerland in 1917.[178]

In spite of this openly pro-German work with direct connections to the German government, the Swiss public or Swiss government lodged no objections. In fact, the Swiss

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[174] Deutschen Hilfsvereins in Lausanne, *Jahresbericht des Deutschen Hilfsverein in Lausanne, 1917* 46 (Renens: Buchdruckerei Raible & Chabloz, 1918), 3-4.

[175] Ibid., 6-14.

[176] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 2 (July 1, 1916), 1-3; *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 13 (September 1, 1916), 11-14.

[177] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 4 (April 1, 1917), 20.

[178] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Zweiter Jahresbericht für 1917*, 22-23; Deutsches Rotes Kreuz, *Bericht des Deutschen Roten Kreuzes,* 37.

government went so far as to subsidize their postage usage for the duration of the war.[179] The ICRC's official approval of their activities in 1916 gave them the proper cover to operate unchallenged. International humanitarianism had become so entrenched in Swiss identity and its perspective of its wartime role that the German relief societies like the HdK operated with whole-hearted acceptance within the country. Where the NHG went after the *Stimmen im Sturm* movement for simply publishing propaganda in their newspapers, it ignored the HdK, despite its work as a sort of pubic proxy for the German government within Switzerland. The NHG praised the exchange of wounded POWs by the Swiss Red Cross and the internment of foreign soldiers for medical treatment as signs of Swiss unity in the face of German agitation: "so we need not despair about the military customs of 20th century Europe. […] The wisdom of the medical men upholds the law and charity, even in the midst of the most terrible of war."[180] In reality, it was humanitarianism that served as a conduit for German agitation and enabled the success of pro-German activities within the country.

An example of humanitarianism's cover for German agitation and the HdK's pro-German actions came during the Sauerbruch affair in 1915. Dr. Ferdinand Sauerbruch was a professor of surgery at the University of Zurich at the start of the war. In August 1914, he volunteered his medical expertise to the German military, taking command of an army hospital in Strasburg in the fall of 1914.[181] His medical assistant, R. Heusner von Barmen, also volunteered alongside him, but was killed in September 1914 when French artillery hit his field station. Sauerbruch returned to his position in Zurich at the start of 1915 with outspoken pro-German, anti-French sympathies. He was engulfed in a nation-wide uproar after it was revealed to the public that he

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[179] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Zweiter Jahresbericht für 1917*, 13-14.

[180] SNL, NHG B 93, [N.A.], *Zeichen der Menschlichkeit unter den Kriegsführenden, 1914-1915* (July 3, 1915).

[181] *NZZ,* no. 1353, 2 ed., September 26, 1914.

had fired medical staff at the University of Zurich over their support of Carl Spitteler's address. This provoked the fury of the NHG, who unleashed a campaign in the press against him.[182] However, in 1916, Sauerbruch became a chief medical provider for the HdK, helping them find treatment for soldiers in Switzerland or treating them himself.[183] As such, he was also appointed by the German War Ministry for treatment of German soldiers in Switzerland.[184] The NHG completely ignored this activity. There were no articles published against him by their press service and their archival file on him fails to mention any of his pro-German work with the HdK.

The success of the HdK's agitation lay in its carefully crafted propaganda. Their rhetoric blended the right amount of German nationalism with international humanitarianism. The relief society had a professional advertising committee promoting its publications and fundraising events.[185] Its primary publication, *Der Hilfsbund,* consciously avoided political topics in its articles and language. It still had German nationalistic expressions, but these were carefully couched in the "German duty in volunteering to help the wounded" mantra of international humanitarian values.[186] It shunned articles on wartime politics, focusing instead on topics such as encouraging new developments in prosthetics, public comments from individuals who were grateful for the HdK's support, and practical advice columns. Fundraising events also demonstrated their success. These events often featured overtly nationalistic displays such as one fundraiser in Zurich where donors purchased nails to be tacked into a giant, wooden replica of the Iron Cross.[187] Most fundraisers were put on as cultural events, such as concerts and local craft bazaars. Through personal connections, the HdK brought the famous German opera singer

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[182] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 115; Mittler, *Der Weg Zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 845-847.

[183] For examples of his medical work, see *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 1 (May 1, 1916), 2; *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 2 (July 1, 1916), 2-3; Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Erster Jahresbericht für 1916,*10-25.

[184] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Zweiter Jahresbericht für 1917*, 20-21.

[185] Hilfsbund für Deutsche Kriegerfürsorge in der Schweiz, *Erster Jahresbericht für 1916,* 9-10.

[186] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 2 (July 1, 1916), 3-5.

[187] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 3 (September 1, 1916), 16.

Hanna Lisken to perform charity concerts across Switzerland. The organization's greatest fundraising success was a charity bazaar put on in Zurich in 1917, with proceeds going to both the HdK and to Swiss soldiers in need. The bazaar was a mix of musical concerts and local vendors. It was publically attended by both German embassy and Swiss government officials, with a massive turnout by the local population. In sum, it raised 11,000 Swiss francs for the HdK after expenses, with another 2,300 going to Swiss soldiers.[188] Again, despite being an openly pro-German event, there was no backlash from the NHG, Swiss government, or the Swiss press.

Germany's ability to agitate directly within Switzerland for humanitarian needs is evidenced in the total sum of the HdK's work by the end of the war. Meyer estimated when the relief society was founded in 1916 that they needed 2 ½ million Swiss francs to cover all wartime costs.[189] At the end of 1918, the HdK reported contributing a total of 3 million Swiss Francs in aid to over a thousand German soldiers and their families in Switzerland.[190] The HdK's humanitarianism allowed the German War Ministry and the German Red Cross to garner resources and provide treatment for its soldiers. The ICRC's official blessing of the *Deutscher Hilfsverein* provided the cover of Swiss humanitarianism for the relief society to operate openly and successfully. Their agitation mixed their German nationalism with the same humanitarian values that the ICRC championed, providing a conduit to direct Swiss humanitarian activity. Humanitarian pursuits and the norms of international humanitarianism became so entrenched in Switzerland's wartime identity that even those who targeted pro-German agitation never raised their voice against its activities.

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[188] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 1 (January 1, 1917), 7.
[189] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 3 (September 1, 1916), 4.
[190] *Der Hilfsbund,* no. 8 (Dezember 1, 1918), 97.

4.5: Conclusion: German Military Necessity conflicts with International Humanitarianism

At the end of 1915, the ICRC replaced Arthur Eugster as their representative in Berlin with two Swiss medical doctors, Frederick Blanchod and Felix Speiser. Their 1916 POW camp reports offered a stark comparison to Eugster's 1915 reports. While never overtly anti-German, their matter-of-fact writing removed the defensive, sympathetic tone favorable towards German camp conditions.[191] At the same time, the German War Ministry started to strictly limit neutral POW camp visitations in 1916. They specifically banned neutral observers from visiting camps in the occupied zones on the Western Front, which included Belgium and Northern France. Their arguments for the protocol centered on military necessity, fearing that neutral reports published by the ICRC would reveal military secrets to the Entente.[192] There was some truth to this fear. For example, in August 1916, the German authorities intercepted a parcel of letters on the Belgium-Holland border from Entente military intelligence trying to contact individuals operating in German occupied terriritoy under the cover of fake ICRC letterheads.[193] The ICRC protested vigorously against the ban on neutral observers, but the German War Ministry and the German Red Cross continued to refuse.[194] The Germans stalled the ICRC by referencing Eugster's earlier reports on camp conditions in 1915.[195] They claimed Eugster's previous approval still covered these camps and there was no need for a new inspection. The ICRC was unconvinced and the French argued they "never doubted the testimony of the honorable Mr.

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[191] For example, see their reporting on food conditions in German camps in: CICR, *Documents publiés a l'Occasion de la Guerre Europeenne, 1914-1916: Rapport de MM les Drs Blanchod & Speiser sur leurs visites aux camps et chantiers de travail des prisonniers français en Allemagne, en Mars et Avril 1916,* 10th series (Genève: Librairie Georg & Cie, July 1916), 11-13.

[192] Conflicts between Blanchod, Speiser, and the German military authorities further explored in Hinz, "Humanität im Krieg?," 228-229.

[193] SFA, E2001#1000/45#714, Fink to Agence des Prisonniers des guerres, August 6 & 14, 1916.

[194] A CICR, A CS-001, ICRC to General Pfuel, October 23, 1916.

[195] A CICR, A CS-001, L. Renault, Le Président de la Croix-Rouge Française to Gustav Ador, February 5, 1917; Abteilung für Gefangenenfürsorge, Central Comite der Deutschen Vereine Vom Roten Kreuz to ICRC, Berlin, April 14, 1917.

Eusgter, but […] that relying, as done by the German Red Cross, on an investigation dating back to 1915 to refute accusations which allegedly happened in 1916 as facts, is to create an ambiguity."[196] These protests fell on deaf ears and neutral observers were largely barred from meaningful observation of POW camps in Germany by the start of 1917.[197]

The dispute between German officials and the ICRC over camp visits in the occupied territories signaled the splintering of Germany's reputation with international humanitarianism. The collapse of Germany's favored status is mostly clearly demonstrated through the ICRC's complaints over German violations of international law from 1915 to 1918. At the start of the war, the ICRC only decided broadcast allegations of violations of the Geneva and Hague Conventions in the *Bulletin*, not to investigate or make comments in favor of one side or the other.[198] For example, they intentionally provided equal coverage of British and German complaints over the targeting of hospital ships in the spring of 1915. The *Bulletin* published, side by side, the British complaint over the near-miss attempted torpedoing of its hospital ship, *Asturia,* and the German protest over the sinking of their ship, *Ophelia.*[199] However, Germany's consistent neglect of international law in favor of military necessity tested the ICRC's willpower to retain balance as early as mid-1915.

The first sign of cracks in their relationship appeared in April 1915 over the German military's seizure of the Belgian Red Cross. The Belgian Red Cross refused to allow the German military to direct its relief activities and materials, arguing for their independence as a civic association and their pre-war legal rights under the Belgian government. On April 14, the

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[196] A CICR, A CS-001, Renault to Ador, May 30, 1917.

[197] Hinz, *Gefangen im Großen Krieg,* 76-80; Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War,* 169-178.

[198] [CICR], *Le Role et L'Action du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge pendant in Guerre Européene de 1914 à 1916* (Genève: Imprimerie du Journal de Genève, 1917), 10; for the historical tradition of this unbiased reporting, see Becker, "From the Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix Rouge to the International Review of the Red Cross," 104; Lindsey Cameron, "The ICRC in the First World War: Unwavering belief in the power of law?," *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 900 (2015), 109-113.

[199] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 182 (April 1915), 129-131.

German Governor General of Belgium Baron von Bissing declared the dissolution of the Belgian Red Cross's central committee, placed all of its assets in the hands of the occupying military authorities, and handpicked German authorities to continue the organization's operations. In response, the ICRC published a rare, direct complaint against Germany in both the *Bulletin* and in a special circular sent out to all national Red Cross societies.[200] The ICRC petitioned the national Red Cross societies to issue their own formal complaints to pressure a reversal: "We therefore energetically appeal to all Central Committees to strongly support our protest with their voice of approval. We urge the German Central Committee to work effectively to have this decree revoked."[201] For the first time, the ICRC also called for the national societies to issue their own formal complaints to pressure Germany to restore the Belgian Red Cross's sovereignty.[202] They then circulated these additional objections in the *Bulletin,* which eventually included statements made by Entente states like France, neutrals such as Portugal, and even soon-to-be Central Power allies like Bulgaria. Only the Austrians and Hungarians abstained from criticism, feigning that they simply did not know all the facts yet to form an opinion. Despite this international pressure, German occupation authorities refused to reverse their course. The German Red Cross directly told the ICRC that they would not go against their own military authorities.[203] The German Red Cross's militarization had essentially nullified its ability to act as a public check on the military or government's adherence to international norms and laws.

The ICRC's protest over the Belgian Red Cross was one of only two such direct objections that they made throughout the entirety of the war. Even the use of gas weapons did not

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[200] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 183 (July 1915), 275-295.

[201] Gustav Ador to les Présidents et les membres des Comités Centraux de la Croix-Rouge, "Protestation contre la dissolution du Comité Central de la Croix-Rouge de Belgique, 164me Circulaire," May 8, 1915, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

[202] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*. 46, no. 183 (July 1915), 275-295.

[203] Gustav Ador to Comité Central des Associations allemandes de la Croix-Rouge, May 17, 1915, reprinted in *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 46, no. 183 (July 1915), 275-295.

illicit a targeted complaint, only a general plea to all belligerents to refrain from their use.[204] The ICRC issued their other exact pronouncement of a violation of international law at the start of 1917. Germany announced on January 27, 1917 that it would intentionally target enemy hospital ships as part of their resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare.[205] They argued that the Entente abused international law by using hospital ships for the shipping of healthy troops, munitions, and other war-aiding material. The ICRC issued a formal condemnation of this practice after Germany torpedoed the *Gloucester Castle* and *Malta* in February and the *Asturia* (the same hospital ship hit in 1915) on March 20.[206] Neither the German military nor the German Red Cross replied to the ICRC and the sinking of hospital ships continued.[207]

At the end of the war, the ICRC retrospectively concluded that military necessity was their biggest wartime obstacle.[208] The German War Ministry's blatant and increasingly unapologetic violations of international law contradicted the norms of international humanitarianism. The ICRC, true to its humanitarian spirit, never ostracized Germany from the negotiating table nor hindered its aid activities to POWs and wounded soldiers. Nevertheless, by 1918, Germany voided its pre-war, socio-cultural authority as humanitarian champions and the ICRC would no longer defend them in the court of international public opinion. Germany's "militarization of charity" was exacerbated by the structural subordination of the German Red Cross to the German War Ministry. As such, there was no means through which internationalist norms could provide checks on the military violence, on a domestic or a transnational level,

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[204] CICR, "Appel contre l'emploi des gaz vénéeux, February 6, 1918," in *Circulaires non Numérotées du CICR, 1916-1951,* ed. CICR (Genève: CICR, [N.D.]).

[205] Bugnion, *Confronting the Hell of the Trenches,* 99-101.

[206] ICRC, "Torpillage des navires-hôpitaux : Note du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge au Gouvernment Allemand*,* Genève, April 14, 1917" circulated in *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 48*,* no. 190 (April 1917), 140-142.

[207] CICR, *Rapport général 1912-1920,* 18-19.

[208] ICRC to Red Cross Societies and the Belligerents, "La mission du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge Pendant et Après la Guerre, 174me Circulaire*,*" November 27, 1918, in *Circulaires du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge: 1864-1952.*

against medical staff, POWs, and even the Red Cross's own institutions. This conclusion is in line with Isabel Hull's summation in *Absolute Destruction.* The German Red Cross and humanitarian activity walked hand-in-hand with the radicalization of German military violence as a result of the War Ministry's organizational culture as it superseded their own international norms.[209]

Though reciprocity was a defining consideration for international negotiations on humanitarian efforts, Arthur Eugster's parcel system demonstrated the possibility for activity based on positive reciprocity.[210] The parcel system worked to maintain POW living conditions throughout the war. The ICRC seems to have lost count of the number of collective parcels that passed through Geneva by the end of the war, but they settled on a total of 1,813 full trains exchanged between France and Germany. Additionally, they collected 1,884,914 private parcels through their humanitarian partners such as the HdK. By 1918, the bleak food supply in Germany meant that the parcel system was essentially feeding over half a million POWs.[211] Though the quality of parcels deteriorated alongside overall European economic conditions, there was never a catastrophic breakdown in French and British POW nutrition.[212]

A combination of pre-war international humanitarianism and nationalism allowed Germany to meet wartime needs through the ICRC's transnational network. They recruited Swiss individuals like Arthur Eugster, who trusted their credentials as conscious humanitarians, in order to steer public opinion and war materials in their direction. Eugster's account also demonstrates how international humanitarian activity became an avenue for active neutrality to the point that it became an accepted norm of Swiss national identity. This was so much so that

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[209] Hull, *Absolute Destruction,* 92; Jones finds a similar conclusion in German treatment of POWs within the camps in Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War,* 375-376.

[210] Further defense of "positive reciprocity" in Bugnion, *Confronting the Hell of the Trenches,* 60-67.

[211] Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War,* 263-269; Jones, "International or Transnational?," 689, 708.

[212] Hinz, *Gefangen im Großen Krieg,* 76-80.

German nationalist-oriented relief groups like the HdK openly operated in Switzerland, fully supported by the ICRC.[213] Therefore, nationalism and internationalism successfully coexisted to generate positive relief activity for German POWs and severely wounded.

Despite their positive successes, Germany's refusal to repatriate captured medical staff demonstrates their inclination for negative reciprocity. Because of this, Isabel Hull argues in *A Scrap of Paper* that the normative framework of international law's reliance on reciprocity resulted in a spiraling deterioration of the humanitarian principles laid out in the pre-war Geneva and Hague Conventions.[214] But as the parcel system demonstrates, positive and negative reciprocity actually coexisted in wartime relief efforts, just as nationalism and internationalism coincided in the socio-cultural activity of humanitarian civic associations. Instead, the entanglement of the Red Cross with the state's military apparatus determined the basis of Germany's decision making. The ICRC's pre-war encouragement of the German Red Cross's union with the War Ministry truly blurred the boundary between civil society and the state. As such, the Red Cross was victim to the German military's organizational culture.[215] Therefore, extremities of military necessity were the catalyst behind Germany's humanitarian decision making and the breakdown of their relationship with the ICRC, rather than negative reciprocity or German nationalism.

[213] Moos, "Neutralié(s) Suisse(s)," 221-222; Bürgisser, "L'Humanité comme Raison d'Etat," 252.
[214] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper.*
[215] Hull, *Absolute Destruction.*

Chapter 5: International Pacifism and German Agitation for a Durable Peace

5.1.1: Arthur Eugster, Franz Bucher-Heller, and Peace as a German War Goal

Arthur Eugster returned to Switzerland from his post at the Berlin Prisoner of War office in late 1915. His stint as the ICRC's neutral inspector, an embodiment of Swiss active neutrality, only furthered his national popularity. He resumed his duties as the Swiss National Council delegate of Appenzeller Ausserrhoden and the council immediately elected him president from 1915 to 1916. He also earned authority and recognition among the Swiss public, particularly among internationalist-leaning associations, and he continued to participate in their transnational social circles. On May 28, 1916, the Swiss Peace Society convened its annual assembly at the town of Herisau in Eugster's Appenzeller precinct. In addition to the association's members, representatives from other pacifist societies, both domestic and international, attended that year's gathering. Switzerland had grown into a nucleus of pacifism in the decades prior to 1914. The outbreak of war only further attracted pacifist activists, both those seeking to avoid the battlefield and those pursuing a means to end it. The Swiss Peace Society's president, Franz Bucher-Heller, invited well-known exiles, members of international organizations, and foreign diplomats to attend the assembly at Herisau to showcase Switzerland's energy in war-time pacifist activity.[1] Bucher-Heller asked Eugster to attend as his guest of honor primarily because of the audience's truly international character. In his speech, Eugster mixed pacifist and humanitarian rhetoric by reminding the audience "to always keep a warm heart for all those who suffer. Deep empathy leads to the desire for peace and to humanity."[2]

Eugster had worked with Bucher-Heller and the international pacifist community prior to the Swiss Peace Society's 1916 assembly in Herisau. Both men worked in 1914 and 1915 with

[1] UNOG, IPM/IPB 302.6, Dr. Bucher-Heller to IPB, Luzern, May 24, 1916.
[2] UNOG, IPM/IPB 302.6, C. Sturzenegger, *'Hie Welsch – Hie Deutsch': Eine Freundeidgenösische Tagung*, ([May 31, 1916]).

the Frankfurt-based *Ausschuß für Rat und Hilfe in staats- und völkerrechtlichen Angelegenheiten für In- und Aüslander* (Committee for Advice and Assistance in Constitutional and International Law Matters for Nationals and Foreigners).[3] The German Peace Society's Frankfurt chapter established the office in August 1914 as a way to stay active after the start of the war. Like most national pacifist organizations in the belligerent states, the German Peace Society's peace promoting work came to a halt with the outbreak of the war.[4] Many members rallied in support of the German war effort, believing the war was defensive in nature or were convinced of the *Burgfrieden*'s promise of post-war democratic reforms. Others chose self-imposed exile in neutral countries, namely in German-speaking Switzerland. The office in Frankfurt dedicated itself to supporting international law rather than overtly pacifist activities. Members provided the public and government officials with answers to questions regarding the practice of international law during war time. As a result, they worked closely with the Frankfurt Red Cross, the ICRC, and the POW office in Berlin in relaying correspondence on questions related to POWs and missing persons. The Frankfurt Red Cross assisted Eugster during his POW camp visits in Germany in 1915 and even helped in the proper delivery of letters and parcels to POWs through the ICRC's network.[5]

However, the Frankfurt pacifists' pre-war, ideological connection did not make it dispassionate towards the German war effort. Instead, they were markedly pro-German at the onset of the war, with many of their activities involving agitation at home and abroad. They collected testimonies from returning German POWs from recent ICRC exchanges and published

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[3] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nippold Coll. 102.5, Alexander Dietz, "Zweiter Bericht über seine Tätigkeit von August 1914 bis Ende Juli 1915," *Ausschuß für Rat und Hilfe in staats- und völkerrechtlichen Angelegenheiten für In- und Aüslander* (July 30, 1915).

[4] UNOG, IPM/IPB 297.4, H. Golay, [Untitled], April 29, 1915.

[5] UNOG, IPM/IPB 297.5, Office de Renseignements de Droit Public et International pour Nationaux et Etrangers, *Extrait du Rapport de l'Office sur les Affaires solutionées d'août à fin décembre 1914* ([1915]).

their accounts of violations of international law as anti-Entente propaganda. They also translated the German White Book and published leaflets in foreign languages on the causes of the war from the German perspective. Bucher-Heller worked as an intermediary between the German pacifists in Frankfurt and the Swiss-based pacifist organizations in order to transmit their publications outside of Germany. Through this channel, German pacifist agitation reached major foreign newspapers in other neutral states, including the United States. Bucher-Heller even helped them transmit letters, packages, and money to Germans outside of Germany.[6] Therefore, Bucher-Heller served as the heart of a transnational, communicative network of pacifists through which German agitation flowed for the benefit of the German war effort.

As Arthur Eugster gave his "desire for peace" speech at the Swiss Peace Society meeting in May 1916, conditions of the war exerted dire new pressures on the German war effort. The home front faced further deterioration, after its second resource-intensive winter of wartime. Cracks in public support of the war started to show, especially after unrestricted submarine warfare failed to bring the western Entente states to heel. Though the Germans and Austro-Hungarians successfully held off the Italians at the Alps in 1915, Romania's entry on the side of the Entente in August 1916 added another battlefront to their already overextended lines. The Russian Brusilov Offensive in the summer of 1916 only intensified this pressure on the Central Powers' positions on the Eastern Front. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians were forced on to the defensive rather than making further, large scale territorial gains in the East like those made after the Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes in February 1915. The German War Ministry's plans for victory on the Western Front hinged on their February 1916 Verdun offensive. Its failure, alongside the taxation of resources during the Battle of the Somme against the British,

[6] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nippold Coll. 102.5, Alexander Dietz, "Zweiter Bericht über seine Tätigkeit von August 1914 bis Ende Juli 1915."

led many in the German Reichstag reconsidered the viability of a German victory through military means. This included Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, who began to weigh the risks of concluding the war by a negotiated peace.

Initiating peace talks between the Central Powers and the Entente was not a straightforward process. Neither side wanted to be the first to formally offer peace conditions, fearing that it would be interpreted as a sign of defeat by both their enemies and their own general public. German politicians in the Reichstag also risked backlash from their own war ministry as well as the fervent antagonism of the Pan-Germans. They, thus, needed an informal backchannel to pursue peace talks and to gauge and shape international public sentiment. With peace now a war aim for many in the German parliament, the European pacifist community held the potential to negotiate a peace on favorable grounds for Germany. The transnational connections of the international pacifist movement provided a means by which German agitation for peace could flow into neutral countries as well as make contact within the Entente states. Switzerland, already a central hub of international pacifism before the war, offered an ideal ground for German initiatives.[7] German-Swiss pacifists, especially Bucher-Heller, and civic associations like the Swiss Peace Society and the IPB, were receptive and authoritative actors through whom agitation and dialogue could take place. By relying on international pacifists, this chapter argues that the German government unintentionally opened the door for peace activists to make their own demands, organize their own agitation, and shape the imagined post-war world.

A Lucerne lawyer, Franz Bucher-Heller (1868-1925) was the leader of the German-speaking Swiss pacifists during the First World War. He was president of the Lucerne chapter of the Swiss Peace Society from 1900 until his death in 1925 and also president of the whole

[7] Even American Ambassador Stovall recognized Switzerland as the ideal meeting ground for peace resolutions and talks throughout the war: Stovall, *Switzerland and the World War,* 57-58.

society from 1909 until 1919.[8] Bucher-Heller's leadership within Swiss pacifism propelled him to another significant social position before the start of the war. The International Peace Bureau (IPB) in Bern chose him to fill a seat on their central council before the war. The IPB provided pacifism with a centralized, international organization akin to the ICRC for humanitarians. They coordinated international assemblies, facilitated communication across state boundaries, and agitated governments on a continental scale. The IPB's location in Switzerland provided a neutral, central ground for discourse and activity between national pacifist societies. However, national pacifist societies were not beholden to its authority in the same way as the national Red Cross societies. Also unlike the ICRC, the IPB was a truly international body with its central committee chaired by well-respected pacifists from throughout the world, not just native Swiss. Since at least the turn of the century, the IPB was criticized for not granting equal representation with its central committee membership, favoring English and French-speaking pacifists over German-speaking ones. To remedy this imbalance, the IPB elected Bucher-Heller, because his known social ties to German social circles. When war broke out, German pacifists found a vital ally in the IPB.

Despite Bucher-Heller's significance to the Swiss and international pacifist movement, he has received little attention from historians of the pacifist movement and the First World War. His biography and wartime significance are even conspicuously absent from Swiss works. He perfectly matches Sandi Cooper's description of the "disappeared" person in the First World War historiography.[9] Part of this forgottenness lies in the undervaluation of Switzerland's role in the war, particularly in the diplomacy "from below" of everyday individuals. Another part, however, stems from the favoritism shown in the history of international pacifism towards writers and

[8] Helmut Donat and Karl Holl, *Die Friedensbewegung: Organisierter Pazifismus in Deutschland, Österreich und in der Schweiz* (Düsseldorf: Econ Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983), 59.

[9] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 9.

ideologues rather than the movers and the doers. Bucher-Heller left little to no published writings. He even left the reporting of organization-wide news in the Swiss Peace Society's journal, *Der Friede,* to the society's secretary, Rudolf Geering-Christ. Bucher-Heller simply did not contribute original, intellectual ideas to the international pacifist movement. Rather, he was the primary social activist around whom all the movement's activities centered in the years prior and during the war. This chapter remedies this lapse in the historiography by demonstrating that Bucher-Heller was in fact at the heart of a transnational, socio-cultural network of international pacifists that also worked in favor of German wartime interests.

5.1.2: Methodology/Historiography

The turn towards cultural and social histories in the 1980s has led to a well-developed field on the history of pacifists in the First World War. Additionally, new work continues to investigate the activity of national and international peace societies. For German pacifists, the numerous works by Karl Holl and Friedrich-Karl Scheer pull organizations of the German Peace Society out of obscurity.[10] Both demonstrate how the German pacifists continued to organize and agitate for peace within Germany, even covertly, despite their ideas being unpopular and censored by the German authorities. In contrast, the Swiss Peace Society, like Bucher-Heller, has received little attention, even among Swiss historians. A national history of the Swiss Peace Society only recently appeared with Jean-Luc Rickenbacher's published thesis, *"Für den Frieden in einer Zeit des Krieges."*[11] In the English-language historiography, Roger Chickering's *Imperial Germany and a World without War* continues to stand as a pillar of the field, alongside

[10] Karl Holl, *Pazifismus in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988); Friedrich-Karl Scheer, *Die Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, 1892-1933: Organisation, Ideologie, politische Ziele,* 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Haag und Herchen, 1982).

[11] Jean-Luc Rickenbacher, "*Für den Frieden in einer Zeit des Krieges*"*: Schweizerische Friedensgesellschaft und organisierter Pazifismus während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Bern: Bern Open Publishing, 2018).

David Welch's more recent coverage of the German pacifist movement in *Germany and Propaganda in World War I.* Both historians conclude that the peace movement in Germany "was never more than a fringe phenomenon" and "could not flourish in an underground form and tended to fade from the scene."[12] The current historiographical consensus is that the government's, and particularly the military's, oppression of the German Peace Society rendered its activities and ideas futile during the war.

It is easy to reach the same conclusion if the entire international peace movement is surveyed only from a single, national perspective. However, several historians have recognized that the pacifist movement during the First World War must be investigated in a transnational framework in order to understand the full scope of their activity. Charles Chatfield was among the first to do this with his multiple works on Anglo-American pacifism during the war. As a contributor to Harvey Dyck's edited collection, *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective*, Chatfield argues that transnational norms, relationships, and behaviors shaped international pacifism. In consequence, their associations made pacifist principles widely accepted internationally before, during, and after the First World War.[13] For example, the international laws championed by turn-of-the-century pacifists were the same ones argued over by the belligerents, as seen in Isabel Hull's *A Scrap of Paper.*[14] Historians such as Norman Ingram have recently picked up Chatfield's transnational lens and demonstrated its effectiveness in understanding other areas of pacifist activity and the First World War. In his work, Ingram focuses on the pacifists of the Francophone world during and after the war. He shows how French pacifists and their allies in neutral countries like Switzerland shaped the politics of post-

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[12] Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I,* 53; Roger Chickering, Imperial Germany and a *World without War: The Peace Movement and German Society, 1892-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975)*,* 217; Chickering, "War, Peace, and Social Mobilization," 11.

[13] Chatfield, "Thinking about Peace in History," 43.

[14] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper.*

war France after the war.[15] This chapter seeks to follow in these historians' valuable methodology by providing a new, transnational examination of the socio-cultural network of German-speaking pacifists in Central Europe and how their activities influenced the pursuit of German war aims during the First World War.

Just like humanitarianism, pacifist internationalism in the early twentieth century coexisted with nationalism. Both served as a means of imagining one's community. Pacifists opposed war, promoted international laws, and sought to create a universal body to mediate disputes between states. They imagined a future, united world based on shared norms and values, but this decidedly did not mean that they dreamed of abolishing or ursurping the nation-state, nor were they anti-nationalistic.[16] Sandi E. Cooper's work, *Patriotic Pacifism,* is the hallmark reference illuminating this relationship between pacifist internationalism and nationalism.[17] She reveals that many leading pacifists in the late and early nineteenth centuries couched their progressive ideas in terms of strengthening the nation-state. For example, after the Swiss Peace Society's 1916 meeting in Herisau, Bucher-Heller renewed Swiss pacifism's pledge to Swiss national identity in an address to the Swiss government:

> The peace societies have never condemned enlightened patriotism respectful of the rights of others. […] We like to think that [our activities] will leave no doubt in your mind as to the quality of our patriotism and the value of the principles that we have sought to triumph in the past, and which we would like to see Governments take inspiration from when the time of peace comes.[18]

Even though the outbreak of the war seemed to shatter internationalist ideals, German pacifism was not a dead end for German agitation. Their ideological desire to work towards an imagined "better world" allowed space for activities favorable to the German war effort. William

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[15] Norman Ingram, *The War Guilt Problem and the Ligues des droits de l'homme, 1914-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[16] Chatfield, "Thinking about Peace in History," in *The Pacifist Impulse,* 43.

[17] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism.*

[18] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#771, Bucher-Heller to Ministre Dunant, June 20, 1916.

Mulligan supports this assertion in his work, *The Great War for Peace.* He argues that the war counter-intuitively bolstered pacifist ideas and their activities. Pacifists spent decades warning that arms races, secret diplomacy, and oppression of minority nationalities would march Europe on a path towards catastrophic conflagration. The war in 1914 bolstered the legitimacy of their warnings, but also centered them on the meanings and ideas of the war.[19] All the belligerents attempted to sell their public their image of a post-war world, a "war to end all war," to mobilize them to undertake the sacrifices needed to win. As Mulligan puts it, peace provided meaning to the conflict.[20] The pacifists' decades of ideas and work provided a ready-made vision of a post-war world for states and civic associations to strive towards with their war aims.[21] As Mulligan argues, this is why so many belligerents cast their war effort in the light of a grand crusade for concepts like justice, defeat of militarism, and freedom for national minorities. The war then created a political space for the socio-cultural activity and discourse of pacifist internationalism both to thrive and hold legitimate authority in formulating belligerent war aims.

The German authorities attempted to tap into this international network of pacifists to steer their ideas and activities in favor of German war aims, particularly after 1916, when many feared the war was beginning to turn against them. They adapted the rhetoric of international pacifism and recruited members of the German pacifist movement, knowingly or unknowingly, to spread their agitation outside of their borders. However, they wanted to steer public opinion and political pressure in neutral and Entente countries without undermining their own war support at home. This study requires a transnational view, as German authorities attempted to effectively paralyze pacifist activity at home while still encouraging activity in neutral countries. Switzerland is especially crucial in understanding this agitation effort. German pacifists had

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[19] Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace.*
[20] Jackson and Mulligan, "The Great War and the Political Conditions of Internationalism," 21.
[21] Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace,* 4.

established socio-cultural relationships with those in Switzerland through whom they could communicate to spread agitation or who could act as proxies, such as in the example of Franz Bucher-Heller. This empowering of the pacifist movement consequentially forced the German government to adhere to their principles in order to align with their internationalist identity. As a result, in this indirect way, pacifists themselves played an active role in constructing and imagining the war aims of the German empire "from below."

5.2.1: The Development of Pacifist Ideology in the mid-nineteenth century

International pacifism emerged during the discourse of the Enlightenment era, but it did not develop into an organized social movement until after the Napoleonic Wars and the rise of civil society in the nineteenth century. And even then, it was not an evenly distributed, European-wide phenomenon.[22] The early pacifist communities grew in English-speaking Britain and the United States and were grounded in progressive Protestantism, such as Quakerism. The conscientious objection movement has its roots in this nineteenth-century absolute pacifism.[23] The first continental pacifist society did not emerge until 1830 with the creation of the *Société de la Paix* (Society of Peace) in Geneva. It opened under the direction of Jean-Jacques, Comte de Sellon, a Reformed Protestant noble who had hosted gatherings of pacifists in Geneva since the Treaty of Vienna in 1815.[24] He underpinned the society with a mix of Enlightenment and religious principles, similar to those in America and Britain. Nevertheless, the society never gained traction in German-speaking Switzerland and did not outlive his death in 1839. German-speaking Central Europe mirrored this lack of energy for organized pacifism throughout the early half of the nineteenth century. Germans did not attend the first International Peace Conference in

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[22] Leo Elsner, *Ein Wort an die Friedensgesellschaften und Friedensfreunde aller Länder* (Wien: [Self-published], 1915).

[23] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 4-15.

[24] Harold Josephson, et al., eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Peace Leaders* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 868-870; Donat and Holl, *Die Friedensbewegung,* 353-356.

Brussels in 1848, which American and British pacifists wholly dominated. Only after the 1848 revolutions did German pacifists begin to participate in the social organization of international pacifism with the convening of the Frankfurt International Peace Conference in 1850. [25] Still, German pacifists in the 1850s largely focused on contributing to international organizations rather than developing their own local societies.

The mid-century wars, especially those between Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and France, finally spurred the development of organized German-speaking pacifism, particularly in Switzerland. The wars pushed nearly all pacifist activity into neutral states. Pacifism also rallied in Switzerland as a result of the ICRC's Geneva Convention of 1864, which they saw as influenced by their own ideas.[26] In consequence, the *Internationale Freiheits- und Friedensliga* (International Freedom and Peace League) was founded in Bern in 1867-1868. It served as one of the first true social centers of continental pacifism, with its agitation focused on the German wars of unification. However, the society stagnated after 1871, but it did encourage further pacifist organization and a further popularization of its ideology among the educated middle-class in Central Europe.

Historians refer to the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the "Golden Age" of pacifist internationalism.[27] Central Europe experienced a boom in the creation of and participation in both national and international pacifist societies from 1870 to 1900. However, German-speaking pacifism of this era was rooted in a different ideological soil than their progressive Protestant, Anglo-American counterparts, even if they often shared political agendas. German-speaking pacifists developed their internationalism based on principles of materialistic

[25] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 27-29.
[26] Leo Elsner, *Ein Wort an die Friedensgesellschaften.*
[27] Chickering, *A World without War,* 8-9.

positivism.[28] Scientific progress, economic development, and the growing interconnectedness of global markets, it was argued, inevitably marched the world towards international cooperation and an end of the socio-political problems which made war between nation states possible.[29] Nevertheless, the similarities in their international goals still united continental and Anglophone pacifists. They all generally agitated on a platform in favor of the creation of an international arbitration court to settle disagreement between states and an end to arms races. Importantly, German pacifists joined with their western European counterparts in campaigning for an international political body, often imagined in the form of a world parliament with nation-state representatives. In Germany and Austria-Hungary, this meant that pacifists allied with liberal, and even socialist, activists who supported further democratization measures within their own nation-states. German-speaking pacifism therefore involved an underlying democratic tone that often put them at odds with their own governments and conservative social establishment.

5.2.2: Foundation of the Pacifist Societies in Switzerland, 1880-1914

Switzerland's history as an early site of the organized pacifist movement continued on through pacifism's golden age of the late nineteenth century. By the 1880s and 1890s, Switzerland was already a global center for all sorts of international social organizations like the ICRC and institutions like the Universal Postal Union and Telegraphic Union. Additionally, it was a neutral state at the crossroads of Europe and had an established culture of democratic principles and institutions. As a result, it attracted international pacifist organizations.[30]

British and French pacifists began working towards an international association with the convening of the 1889 Universal Peace Congress in Paris. Pacifists from Central European states

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[28] Neil Hollander, *Elusive Dove: The Search for Peace during World War I* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), 92-94.

[29] Chickering, *A World without War,* 13-14.

[30] F. S. L. Lyons, *Internationalism in Europe, 1815-1914* (Leyden: A.W. Sythoff, 1963), 16-18.

joined in the effort in 1891 when the third congress convened in Rome. There, they agreed that an organization should be established to coordinate interstate pacifist activity, communication, and propaganda. The third congress voted to create the International Peace Bureau (IPB) and settled on Bern for its headquarters.[31] A permanent secretariat and central council formed in 1892 after the fourth congress met in Bern to finalize the bureau's structure. Élie Ducommun served as the IPB's first director, a well-respected Genevan pacifist whose capability to bridge the different philosophies and personalities of international pacifism earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1902. Pacifist representatives from around the world chaired the central council. Though the IPB attempted to balance the council by nationality, it leaned towards the more established pacifist circles in Western Europe and North America. This began to change with Ducommun's death in 1906 and the appointment of his replacement, the German-speaking Bernese lawyer and Swiss National Council member, Albert Gobat.[32] The IPB quickly grew into an authoritative socio-cultural center for pacifist internationalism. It continued to host annual peace conferences all the way until the outbreak of war in 1914 and was a hub for the exchange and distribution of pacifist propaganda all across Europe.[33]In recognition of its authority over the international pacifist movement, the organization won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1911.[34]

A second international organization in Switzerland before the war is also worth mentioning. At the same time as the first Universal Peace Congress, the First Parliamentary Conference met in Paris in 1889 and created the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) in Berne in

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[31] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nipppold Coll. 102.5, Le Bureau International de la Paix, [No Title] (October 1915); also, see Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 59.

[32] Werner Simon, "The International Peace Bureau, 1892-1917: Clerk, Mediator, or Guide?," in *Peace Movements and Political Cultures,* eds. Chatfield and van den Dungen (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 67-72.

[33] Chickering, *A World without War,* 12-14.

[34] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nippold Coll. 102.5, Le Bureau International de la Paix, [No Title] (October 1915).

1892.[35] Many elected European officials served as delegates, and, while the IPU was internationalist-leaning, liberals rather than pacifists comprised its makeup. The association functioned as a civic international legislature, a social precursor to the League of Nations, and dealt with issues of international mediation rather than permanent peace. Despite their ideological differences, the IPB and IPU worked together on topics such as an international arbitration court.[36] Some crossover existed between their memberships and their shared location in Bern allowed for an amicable relationship to develop. For instance, Albert Gobat was the IPU's founding executive director, a role for which he earned the Nobel Peace Prize alongside Ducommun in 1902. After taking over the IPB in 1906, he stepped down in 1908 and the IPU moved its headquarters to Belgium.[37] Nevertheless, the joint work of the IPB and IPU laid the groundwork for the success of The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and for close, working relationship later during the war.

A local pacifist circle existed in Geneva since the first attempt at a Swiss society in the 1830s, but only in the 1890s did the Swiss establish a national association. This new energy for organized pacifism emerged out of German-speaking Switzerland rather than its previous center in the west. In 1892, a group of pacifists gathered in St. Gallen under the name *Schweizer Friedensvereine* (Swiss Peace Association)" and quickly set up sections across the rest of Switzerland.[38] The sections congregated in Olten in September 1895 to establish the society, though the name later changed to *Schweizerische Friedensgesellschaft* (Swiss Peace Society) in

[35] Josef Scherrer-Füllemann, a Swiss member of the IPU, describes their history in the context of the First World War in an article in *NZZ,* no. 1627, 2 ed., October 13, 1916; also, see Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 59.

[36] Lyons, *Internationalism in Europe,* 327-330.

[37] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 81-82.

[38] For example, see SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, Schweiz. Friedensverein, *Statuten der Sektion (Kanton) Zürich* (May 28, 1894).

1915.[39] They established sixteen sections by 1914 with near equal representation between German and French-speaking Switzerland.[40] From its conception, the society outlined its purpose as working with peace associations across all countries, to educate the public on the futility of war, and to promote agreements on international law, an interstate political system for mediation, and an international arbitration court.[41] However, the Swiss pacifists continuously underlined their support of Switzerland's military system up until 1914. They advocated for the nationalist symbol of the Swiss militia system and supported preparation for a defensive war.[42] This, alongside their championing of Swiss democracy, shows they truly were, as Sandi Cooper argues, "patriotic pacifists," intertwining ideals of both pacifist internationalism and Swiss nationalism.

Franz Bucher-Heller was already an authoritative leader in the Swiss pacifist movement when he became president of the Swiss Peace Society in 1908.[43] He had a true transnational education, studying law at universities in Munich, Heidelberg, Bern, and Lausanne. An established liberal, Bucher-Heller served on Lucerne's cantonal council from 1903 to 1919 and worked as an editor for the German-Swiss liberal paper, *Eidgenossen* from 1901 to 1907.[44] Bucher-Heller led the Swiss Peace Society with ample experience as a seasoned social organizer.[45] He turned the Lucerne section into the centerpiece of the national society during his leadership from 1900 until his death in 1925, moving much of the pacifist energy away from Geneva in the years before the war.

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[39] SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, Rod. Gsell and Hottinger, *Statuts de la Société de la Paix adopté par l'Assemble des délégués à Olten,* (September 29, 1895). On the Swiss Peace Society's name change in 1915, see Rickenbacher, "*Für den Frieden,*" 9.

[40] Rickenbacher, "*Für den Frieden,*" 23.

[41] SoArc, Ar 201.280.1. Schweiz. Friedensverein Sektion Zürich, *Friede* (1900).

[42] For example, see the articles in *Der Friede,* no. 19/20 (October 20, 1911).

[43] Donat and Holl, *Die Friedensbewegung,* 59.

[44] *NZZ*, no. 186, February 5, 1925.

[45] Rickenbacher, "*Für den Frieden,*" 23-24.

Though he firmly associated himself with the socio-cultural sphere of pacifist internationalism, he was also a staunch Swiss civic nationalist dedicated to Swiss neutrality and democratic practices. He held a leadership position in the Lucerne section of the New Helvetic Society and had the respect of the whole association. He was a firm supporter of Carl Spittler's address and committed the entirety of the Swiss Peace Society to the direction of his "Schweizer Standpunkt" (Swiss Standpoint).[46] The NHG chose Lucerne for the location of its 1915 general assembly in September 1915, the first since the start of the war. This was largely due to its proximity to the site at Rütli field, which is one of the foremost symbols of Swiss national unity because of this association with the William Tell myth. On one of the days of the assembly, the NHG members gathered at the field to reenact the pledge of the Rütli Oath, with Bucher-Heller chosen to give the keystone address during the event. [47] In fact, Bucher-Heller meant for the Swiss Pacifist Society's 1916 annual assembly to also represent Swiss unity during the heightened tensions of "Colonel Affair," after several Swiss colonels were discovered sending intelligence on the Entente to the Central Powers.[48] The heightened linguistic bitterness between French and German-speaking Swiss at the time prevented this dream from coming to fruition. Eight of the society's nineteen sections did not attend the meeting, almost all from French-speaking Switzerland. This failure to bridge the linguistic gap typified the primary difficulty for all of Bucher-Heller's activities during the war.

Before his election as president of the Swiss Peace Society in 1909, Bucher-Heller also held a symbolically important role with the International Museum of War and Peace. The museum was established at Lucerne in 1902 as a memorial for the 1899 Hague Convention and

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[46] *Der Friede* (January 1915), 8.

[47] NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 1 (September 1915); SNL, NHG A 1, Alfred Lautier to Marcel Godet, October 16, 1915.

[48] *Der Friede* (June 1916), 41-49.

contributed to cementing Switzerland's status as a meeting ground of the international pacifist movement. As leader of the pacifists in Lucerne, he was often seen as the spiritual overseer of the museum, granting him an authority in the movement that extended beyond Switzerland's borders. He already worked closely with the IPB, as can be seen when he convinced them to hold the 14th annual Universal Peace Congress in Lucerne in 1905. This provided him with an opportunity to build international relationships with other non-Swiss pacifists, crucial for his later wartime activity. Alongside his network with the international pacifist movement, Bucher-Heller built strong transnational relationships with German pacifists in Germany and Austria-Hungary, the network he used later for German agitation during the war.

5.2.3: Foundations of the German Peace Society, 1880-1914

As a transnational effort, the German Peace Society formed in parallel with the establishment of pacifist societies in the rest of the German-speaking world. However, unlike the Swiss, Germans had no prior experience with organized pacifism other than as individual participants in international conferences. The real initiative for a national peace society came from Austrian sources rather than German ones. In 1891, the Austrian Peace Society formed around the personalities of Baroness Bertha von Suttner and Alfred H. Fried, often seen as the founding parents of German-speaking pacifism. Both won Nobel Peace Prizes before the war, von Suttner in 1905 and Fried in 1911. An aristocrat, von Suttner published *Die Waffen nieder!* (*Lay Down Your Arms)* in 1899, which became an internationally recognized manifesto of the pacifist movement. Her work firmly grounded the future of German pacifism in a positivist

philosphy by insinuating that international cooperation through law and government were natural, evolutionary steps of mankind's progress.[49]

Born into a Jewish Viennese family, Fried followed von Suttner's pacifist philosophy, but provided much of the on-the-ground social work of the movement.[50] A prolific writer, he was also an experienced publicist with a personal mission to create a successful publishing house for pacifist agitation. As such, he provided much of the social mobilization and networking needed to launch the Austrian society in 1891.[51] First, Fried moved to Berlin in 1883 and worked as a journalist until he opened his own publication house there in 1887, slowly focusing most of his energy on pacifist agitation. He participated in local pacifist circles and pressured Germans into forming some sort of official association. Von Suttner's book in 1889 motivated him to reconnect with the Austrian pacifist movement and together they founded the Austrian Peace Society. He brought this momentum to Germany in 1892 with von Suttner's support. In addition, the organizational effort of pacifists at the IPB inspired the German delegation to the 1892 Universal Peace Congress in Bern to finally establish a national society.[52] When they returned, Fried and von Suttner oversaw the creation of the German Peace Society before the end of 1892, becoming the society's initial leaders. The members of the German Peace Society occupied a wide spectrum of pacifist philosophy. Though there were many religiously motivated pacifists, the society largely fell under positivist and materialist influence as a result of Fried and von Suttner's tutelage.

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[49] For biography on Bertha von Suttner, see: Brigitte Hamann, *Bertha von Suttner: A Life for Peace,* 1st ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996); on German pacifism and positivism, see Hollander, *Elusive Dove,* 92-94.

[50] Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism,* 15.

[51] Petra Schönemann-Behrens, *Alfred Hermann Fried: Peace Activist and Nobel Prize Laureate,* trans. Edward T. Larkin and Thomas B. Ahrens (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 1-40.

[52] Chickering, *A World Without War,* 46-47; Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I*, 143.

Despite the presence of internationally renowned personalities, the German pacifist movement never mustered widespread, national support. The German government eyed pacifists with suspicion, resulting in their decision to move the society's headquarters from Berlin to the more liberal atmosphere of Stuttgart in 1900.[53] Additionally, antagonistic Pan-Germans, who saw the pacifists as ideologically anti-German, countered pacifist agitation in the public sphere. In defense of these accusations, German pacifists continuously couched their propaganda with nationalistic arguments and symbolism. They stood with the common platform of an international arbitration court, freedom of seas and trade, and reduction of armaments, but they presented their agitation as a means to furthering German culture and economic dominance in Europe. In their words, less spending on armaments and more energy going towards the promotion of free trade and interstate cooperation better served German national aspirations, even in achieving further colonial gains. Thus, as Roger Chickering puts it, these "patriotic" German pacifists used the same nationalistic symbols, but "suggested a different collective image."[54] German nationalism was never in question, but pacifists imagined the national as simply part of a larger, further harmonious, international system rather than the end point of their imagined community.

Ludwig Quidde, the German Peace Society's pre-war leader, embodied the patriotic, German pacifist. A Bavarian historian, Quidde's work included editing the German historical journal, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* and directing the Royal Prussian Historical Institute in Rome.[55] Initially rooted in liberalism, Quidde began shifting towards pacifism in the early 1890s, around the time of the creation of the German Peace Society. In

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[53] UNOG, IPM/QuC/FrK 137, File 1.1.1, Die Stuttgarter Ausschuss-Mitglieder, *Kundgebung der Geschäftsleitung der deutschen Friedensgesellschaft Stuttgart* (1900).

[54] Chickering, "War, Peace, and Social Mobilization," in *Peace Movements and Political Culture,* 11-12.

[55] Ludwig Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus wâhrend des Weltkriegs, 1914-1918,* eds. Karl Holl and Helmut Donat (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt, 1979)*,* 11-19; Chickering, *A World Without War,* 85-88.

1890, he was elected to the Bavarian Landtag as a member of the liberal Süd-deutsche Volkspartei, a seat he held until 1903 and was reelected to in 1907. He began publishing pacifist pamphlets around 1891-1892, but only once he published *Caligula* in 1893 did he gain national notoriety. The work appeared to be a historical survey of the Roman emperor Caligula but was an obvious parody of Wilhelm II's pro-war saber-rattling. This criticism essentially ended Quidde's career as a historian, but pushed him further into Bavarian politics and increased his involvement in the German pacifist movement. Quidde joined the German Peace Party around the time of *Caligula* and, as a German liberal holding an elected office, became a member of the IPU in Bern. By the turn of the century, he had garnered both national and international respect among the pacifist community. In 1904, the German Peace Society selected him to be the German representative on the IPB's council, sitting next to Bucher-Heller, in addition to the society's own board of directors.[56] His national and international connections culminated in his successful planning and operation of the Universal Peace Congress in Munich in 1907, which received high praise from figures like Bertha von Suttner and other heads of the international pacifist movement.[57]

Quidde's pacifist philosophy combined patriotic pacifism with liberal internationalism. Despite criticizing the crown, he strongly supported Germany's success. He envisioned a future German nation with greater international political participation, unified in Central Europe as a "United States of Germany" modeled on the Swiss political system. This vision redefined German national identity from an ethno-cultural perspective to a civic one within a larger Swiss-style system.[58] Quidde borrowed the idea of military reform based on a militia structure from the

[56] Chickering, *A World Without War,* 62.
[57] Ibid.*,* 69-70.
[58] Ludwig Quidde, "Zur Organisation der Interparlamentarischen Union: Fragen der Mitgliedschaft und des Stimmrechts," *Friedens-Warte* 13 (1911), 6-8.

Swiss. This stance was common among German pacifists, including Fried, who promoted defensive war preparation as an alternative to German militarism.[59] These principles earned respect from Swiss pacifists and even French pacifists like Gustav Moch, who also supported the defensive militia system and collaborated with Quidde through the IPB.[60] Thus, Quidde was an authentic, patriotic pacifist whose ideology resonated internationally and demonstrated how deeply interconnected German pacifists were on a transnational level.

The German Peace Society boasted 98 sections and around 10,000 members on its rolls on the eve of the war, but only a few hundred actively participated.[61] This state of affairs confirms the political and social marginalization of German pacifists even after two decades of organization. However, this assessment changes when viewed on a transnational scale. By 1914, the international peace movement had developed a multilayered system of national and international organizations, most of which looked to the IPB in Switzerland as the authoritative center. Their interconnectedness fostered active transnational and sociocultural relationships between individual pacifists and established a robust propaganda network.[62] National societies did not solely produce their own agitation. The German Peace Society was able to tap into a network of propaganda that included exchanging books and brochures, traveling lectures and conferences, and even government lobbying on an international scale.[63] In May 1914, the IPB boasted that it distributed propaganda material in twenty-three different languages through its bureau. Their international strength in applying public pressure to states and setting cultural

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[59] Schönemann-Behrens, *Alfred Hermann Fried,* 120-121.
[60] See a review of Moch in Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 121.
[61] Chickering, *Imperial Germany,* 66-67.
[62] Enrica Costa Bona, "The International Peace Bureau and the Universal Peace Congresses, 1899-1914," in *Reconsidering Peace and Patriotism during the First World War,* ed. Justin Quinn Olmstead (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 3-14.
[63] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 60-61.

norms is evident in the success of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.[64] The IPB poured propaganda into Germany, and the German Peace Society mobilized a petition campaign to pressure the Reichstag into accepting the conventions' regulations. Quidde's Munich branch alone gathered over 37,000 signatures to send to Berlin.[65] Therefore, despite its little size, the German Peace Society's transnational relationships allowed for it to use an internationally established and effective propaganda machine, built before the war, for its political agitation.

5.3.1: International Pacifism and the Outbreak of the First World War

Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination and the subsequent July Crisis in 1914 caught the international pacifist movement at a time of internal uncertainty. The IPB's long-serving central committee director, Albert Gobat, collapsed and died during a pacifist committee meeting in Bern on March 16.[66] Henri La Fontaine, the IPB's president, was a Belgian pacifist not based in Switzerland. Consequently, much of the daily operation of the Bern office was left to its secretary, Henri Golay, until the IPB's central committee could find a replacement for Gobat. Bucher-Heller and Jozef Scherrer-Füllemann, the Swiss IPU leader and national representative from St. Gallen, were particularly anxious about finding a new central committee director because they feared La Fointaine planned to move the bureau to Belgium. They even worked with Arthur Hoffmann in charge of the Swiss Political Department, but who was also still serving in the capacity as Federal President in 1914, to find a local candidate to retain Swiss prestige as the social organizational center of international pacifism.[67] They believed they had found a replacement in Theodor Curti, a former national councilor from St. Gallen who had moved to

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[64] Jackson and Mulligan, "The Great War and the Political Conditions of Internationalism," 28; Lyons, *Internationalism in Europe,* 11-14.

[65] Jost Dülfer, "Citizens and Diplomats: The Debate on the First Hague Conference (1899) in Germany," in *Peace Movements and Political Culture,* eds. Charles Chatfield and Peter van den Dungen (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 23-39.

[66] *Der Friede* (March 1914), 17.

[67] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#537, J. Scherrer-Füllemann to A. Hoffmann, St. Gallen, June 25, 1914.

Germany in 1902, became a German citizen, and directed the pacifist-friendly *Frankfurter Zeitung*.[68] Curti would have been an ideal candidate for Bucher-Heller and Scherrer-Füllemann, orienting the IPB towards German-speaking influence, but they could not confirm his appointment before the onset of the July Crisis.

Further, in addition to losing Gobat, German-speaking pacifists in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria mourned the death of Baroness Bertha von Suttner on June 21. Her passing dealt a blow to the ideological heart of the German-speaking pacifist movement.[69] The national societies focused their activities on mourning her loss, leaving them unprepared to react to the drums of war in July. Her death also coincided with new leadership in the German Peace Society. Quidde was elected president in May 1914 in an assembly that included international acquaintances like French leader Gustav Moch.[70] This election marked a warming of relations between French and German pacifists, as Quidde worked closely with French pacifist associations on a Franco-German rapprochement concerning the Alsace-Lorraine question.[71]

As good patriotic pacifists, the German Peace Society supported Germany's decision to back its alliance with Austria-Hungary. The pacifists largely interpreted the assassination of the archduke as a sign of growing Slavic aggression, particularly encouraged by Russia. However, they also called for inter-governmental mediation, either regionally or internationally, hoping to avoid outright military conflict.[72] The Swiss remained fearful but inactive over the crisis for most of July. This dramatically changed once Austria's ultimatum to Serbia was released to the public. The IPB interpreted the ultimatum as a near-inevitable sign of war and quickly gathered its

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[68] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#537, Politisches Department to Dr. Bucher-Heller, Bern, June 26, 1914.
[69] See how the Swiss Peace Society mourned the loss of Bertha von Suttner in *Der Friede* (July 1914), 47.
[70] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 40-44.
[71] Ibid., 43-44.
[72] UNOG, IPM/QuC/FrK 137, File 1.1.1. [L. Quidde], "Vor dem europäischen Krieg?" *Erstes Kreigsflugblattt der Deutschen Friedensgesellschaft* ([Fall 1914]).

members for a response. They were unable to meet in Bern until July 28, the day Austria declared war on Serbia.[73] They issued a public letter to Wilhelm II and the Austrian Foreign Minister Leopold Berchtold imploring them "to put an end to the anguish which grips the peoples by bringing about, through your mediation, the settlement of the Austro-Serbian Conflict."[74] The letter was also circulated to newspapers and translated into non-German languages.[75]

As soon as the letter was sent out, the IPB committee received news of Austria-Hungary's declaration of war. La Fontaine called for an extraordinary, emergency meeting of the IPB's full International Council. Telegrams were sent to convene on July 31 at a meeting in La Fontaine's home of Brussels, rather than Bern.[76] Bucher-Heller attended the session with secretary Golay and Gustav Maier, president of the Zurich section of the Swiss Peace Society.[77] Around fifty members from France, Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Holland and Belgium attended the meeting, with Ludwig Quidde acting as one of Germany's representatives. The other members asked Quidde to provide a statement on the situation within Germany. Quidde attempted to calm them by arguing against the possibility of a European-wide war outside of the Balkan theater. However, he asserted that Germany would fight defensively against Slavic aggression if Russia came to Serbia's military aid. Still, he emphasized that Germany did not desire war with France.[78]

The pacifists quickly settled on a course of action. They rushed out telegrams to European governments, pleading for immediate mediation and a de-escalation of mobilization

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[73] *Mouvement Pacifist* (August/December 1914), 365-368.
[74] *La Suisse libérale,* no. 175, July 29, 1914.
[75] For example, see the French text in the internationally read *La Tribune de Genève,* no. 167*,* 4 ed., July 29, 1914.
[76] Rickenbacher, "*Für den Frieden*," 29.
[77] *Der Friede* (September/October 1914), 63.
[78] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism*, 186-188.

orders. The IPU's secretary general, Norwegian Christian Lange, attended the Brussels meeting and ensured that the telegrams reached the governments through the organization's connections with elected officials.[79] Despite this flurry of activity, the pacifists learned in the afternoon that the Germans had cut off the railway lines on the Franco-German border in Alsace-Lorraine. The meeting adjourned, and the international pacifists returned to their respective countries on August 1, as Germany declared war on Russia. The German and Swiss pacifists departed on one of the last trains crossing the German-Belgian border that evening, before Germany issued an ultimatum to the Belgian government the following morning.[80]

The pacifists' telegrams to the Great Power governments had little influence on slowing down the outbreak of the war. The Swiss delegates returned to Switzerland on August 3 and made a last-ditch effort for peace. The IPB sent a message to the Swiss government, asking neutral countries to coordinate a final mediation effort.[81] Bucher-Heller sent a letter directly to President Hoffmann, urging him to press the Swiss Federal Council to intervene immediately to avoid a general European War.[82] In reality, the Swiss government likewise could do nothing to stop the belligerent war machines.

5.3.2: German pacifism and the outbreak of the war, 1914-1915

The outbreak of war caused an identity crisis for the German pacifist movement, a trend seen among all peace societies in belligerent states. Rather than protest, the German pacifists found themselves swept up in the "Spirit of 1914" and rallied in support of the German war effort. They aligned with the concept of the *Burgfrieden* that emerged in August 1914. Historian David Welch writes that the war's outbreak "created a new sense of solidarity in which class

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[79] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nippold Coll. 120.3, Gustav Maier and A. Raschle, *Verehrte Friedensfreunde!* (September 1914).

[80] Ibid.

[81] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#764, IPB to President confederation Suisse, August. 3, 1914.

[82] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#764, Bucher-Heller to Bundespresident Hoffmann, August 3, 1914.

antagonisms were transcended by a 'national community' (Volksgemeinschaft)."[83] This socio-political truce, conceptualized as *Burgfrieden,* defined the war as one of defense rather than aggression. German pacifists supported *Burgfrieden* partly because they perceived Germany as militarily threatened by Russia and believed the Entente had broken faith with international pacifist principles first. Many also saw *Burgfrieden* as a promise and opportunity for future progress. Internally, more liberal pacifists believed their war support would lead to further democratization of the German political system. Externally, pacifists interpreted the war as proof that their warnings of impending, devastating conflict were vindicated and hoped the eventual peace would create an atmosphere where their ideas could be fully institutionalized.

The *Burgfrieden* resulted in some unlikely alliances within the German public sphere during the first months of the war. German pacifists promoted agitation alongside Pan-Germans, and chauvinistic nationalism entered their publications' rhetoric. The German Peace Society published articles and distributed leaflets calling on Germans to fight in defense of the nation.[84] Many pacifists became supporters of Friedrich Naumann and his concept of *Mitteleuropa,* viewing a future Central European super-state as a step towards their vision of a future international governing body and socio-cultural community.[85] Fried even argued at the start of the war that pacifists could still uphold their duty as patriots in order to defend their county.[86] Some pacifists in the German Peace Society, like astronomer Wilhelm Foerster, went as far as to sign the nationalistic rallying cry of intellectuals in the *Manifesto of the Ninety-Three* in October 1914.[87] Foerster latter regretted this decision and worked with others like Albert Einstein to

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[83] Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I,* xi-xii.

[84] For an example, see *Berliner Volkszeitung*, August 4, 1914, cited in Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I,* 144.

[85] Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order,* 29.

[86]Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, "Nach Ausbruch des europäschen Krieges," August 15, 1914, cited in Chickering, *A World Without War,* 322-323.

[87] Holl, *Pazifismus in Deutschland,* 105.

publish the counter-appeal, *Manifesto to the Europeans*, in Switzerland. Nevertheless, his initial support demonstrates the flight towards nationalism that the German pacifist community experienced in the first months of the war.

Ludwig Quidde's activities embodied this pacifist-nationalist support at the start of the war. After returning from the IPB Brussels meeting on August 1, Quidde held a meeting of the German Peace Society in Stuttgart, relaying his hopes for a localized war in the East. He then returned to Munich to meet with the British and French consulate offices. Again, he pressed for international mediation through official, diplomatic channels, but it was of no use after the full declaration of war by the British government on August 4.[88] Quidde then rallied in support of the war effort and attempted to pull the German Peace Society along with him. On August 15, he published a pamphlet outlining his vision for the German Peace Society's purpose with the outbreak of the war: "Our nation, threatened in the East, North, and West, is engaged in a fateful struggle; every German friend of peace will have to fulfill his duty toward the fatherland as any other German. He will not be outdone in patriotic devotion by those who had nothing but contempt and ridicule for the idea of peace when there was still time."[89]

Other than this initial nationalistic saber-rattling, the German Peace Society's actual pacifist activity slowed considerably. Some chapters continued to hold meetings, though government officials began to eye pacifists even more suspiciously and placed new restrictions on their ability to gather. Other smaller chapters shuttered entirely. The regional military authorities allowed the German Peace Society to continue publishing its journal, *Völker-Friede,*

[88] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 44-48.

[89] Ludwig Quidde and Otto Umfrid, "Zweites Kriegesflugblatt der Deutschen Friedensgesellschaft vom 15. August 1914," reprinted in Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifimsus.*

and Fried's *Frieden-Warte* alongside its pro-war leaflets sent by Quidde.[90] However, many German pacifists, like the society's secretary Fritz Röttcher in Stuttgart, were not as enthusiastic about supporting the German war effort and chose to quietly redirect their activity towards humanitarian activity.[91] Across Europe, national peace societies retreated from pacifist agitation at the start of the war, fearing both governments and the public would target them for subverting the war effort. Those who continued working for peace, or preparing for a future peace, established new associations. For the Germans, the most consequential was the creation of the *Bund Neues Vaterland* (BNV) in November 1914.[92] Led by liberal pacifist Kurt von Tepper-Laski, the BNV counted Quidde and Fried among its members, as well as other left-leaning internationalists like Paul Cassirer and even anti-war socialists like Karl Liebknecht and Käthe Kollwitz.[93] The BNV was selective with its membership, giving it a "working group" atmosphere. The German War Ministry allowed the BNV to operate primarily because of this, despite viewing most pacifist activity as dangerous and subversive of the war effort.[94] The BNV focused on resolving the issue of future peace aims that would fix the current, broken system of international politics. The members of the BNV mostly supported the idea of a future supranational government in line with pacifist concepts of an arbitration court and an end to secret diplomacy. But the BNV did not deliberate on who was responsible for the war, focusing on the future rather than the past or present. They quickly formed a working relationship with the IPB and with the new Dutch *Nederlandsche Anti-Oorlog Raad* (NAOR), led by Benjamin de

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[90] UNOG, IPM/IPB 297.4, H. Golay, [No Title], 29 April 1915; James D. Shand, "Doves among the Eagles: German Pacifists and their Government during World War I," *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, no. 1 (January 1975), 96-97.

[91] Ibid.

[92] UNOG, BPC/LON/37 218, Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, et al, *Pazifismus und Belagerungszustand,* 15-19.

[93] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 67-68.

[94] David S. Patterson, *The Search for Negotiated Peace: Women's Activisim and Citizen Diplomacy in World War I* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 14; Shand, "Doves among the Eagles," 97.

Jong van Beek en Donk.[95] The NAOR spawned a massive, grassroots, pacifist movement in the Netherlands during the war and allied with German pacifist agitation. These connections, built on the pacifists' international network, provided the BNV with an important route for transnational cooperation as well as German agitation.

Not all German pacifists supported the German war effort, and many feared that it was only a matter of time before the authorities cracked down on their activities. Initially, Fried continued his work in the German Peace Society at the start of the war, but his publication, *Friedens-Warte,* came under stricter censorship.[96] With assistance from Bucher-Heller, Fried moved to Switzerland on October 18. Settling in Bern, Fried joined a community of pacifist exiles who had left Germany at the start of the war. These included Hermann Fernau and Richard Grelling, both leading figures in the German Peace Society and staunch opponents of Prussian militarism.[97] In contrast, Fried maintained a moderate voice advocating for negotiated peace and German liberalization but not outright German military defeat.[98] While in exile, Fried found a social home in the Swiss Peace Society while also retaining a seat on the IPB Central Committee. Bucher-Heller served as his patron and point of contact for international pacifists wanting to reach him in exile.[99] As such, Bucher-Heller provided Fried with necessary connections and a platform to continue his wartime agitation. Fried was introduced to the *NZZ* and took a position as a staff writer at the start of 1915, allowing him to publish pacifist agitation direct at both a public Swiss and transnational audience.[100]

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[95] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus*, 48-50.
[96] Schönemann-Behrans, *Alfred Hermann Fried,* 181-206.
[97] Clavien, "Les Intellectuels Suisses et la Grande Guerre," 119-120; Hollander, *Elusive Dove,* 120-121.
[98] Landry Charrier, "Le Pacifisme Allemande Face à la Grande Guerre: Trajectoires et Postérités," in *La Suisse et la Guerre de 1914-1918: Actes du colloque tenu du 10 au 12 septembre 2014 au Château de Penthes,* ed. Christophe Vuilleumier (Genève: Éditions Slatkine, 2015)*,* 247-258.
[99] Rickenbacher, "*Für den Frieden*," 92-93.
[100] Schönemann-Behrans, *Alfred Hermann Fried*, 186.

With both Fried and Bucher-Heller able to contact the IPB in person, Fried hoped to use their international network to agitate for peace from his exile. However, the IPB's pacifist activity was in fact even more paralyzed than the national societies. Since most national societies in the belligerent states rallied in support of their war efforts, the IPB's ability to coordinate an international pacifist response collapsed. They could still relay communications between the belligerents, but most pacifists refused to work with those across the frontlines. Internally, the IPB's leadership was in disarray. Not only was the Central Committee split between German and French sentiments, its president, La Fontaine, was forced into English exile due to the German occupation of Belgium and personally turned vehemently hostile to German pacifists for the duration of the war.[101] This essentially incapacitated the IPB office in Bern. As a result, secretary Golay, who also co-chaired the board of the Swiss Red Cross's wartime commission, refocused the IPB's activity on to humanitarian activity.[102]

La Fontaine's exile left all IPB activities and communication to Golay. Though Golay maintained a neutral public stance, he privately supported the Entente, viewing Germany's invasion of Belgium as the principal violation of international law at the heart of the war.[103] The IPB's three Swiss representatives also leaned towards pro-Entente sympathies. Henri Carrière and Georges Bovet, both French-Swiss, vocally supported the Entente and opposed neutral or pacifist mediation throughout the war. Bucher-Heller, the lone German-Swiss representative, favored IPB involvement in mediation.[104] Golay, fearing a loss of international authority for the IPB, also supported an active role in peace efforts. Bucher-Heller began agitating for neutral

[101] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 188-189.
[102] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 45, no. 180 (October 1914), 301; SFA, E2001A#1000/45#714, Bohny to the Politische Department, Bern, September 5,1914.
[103] UNOG, IPM/IPB 304.3, H. Golay to Dr. Jong van Beek en Donk, June 4, 1917.
[104] Simon, "The International Peace Bureau," 72-78.

mediation through both the IPB and the Swiss government in October, but a divided, leaderless organization meant none of these early initiatives gained traction.

5.3.3: German Pacifist and IPB Meeting in January 1915

The IPB did not provide the international pacifist community with a statement on its wartime position until the end of 1914. The IPB's German camp pressed for a central committee meeting to discuss the organization's direction and to attempt to craft a unifying platform as early as September 1914.[105] La Fontaine refused to call a meeting with representatives of the Central Powers, even if they were fellow pacifists and friends before the war. Yet, Quidde forced La Fontaine's hand by invoking Article 10 of the IPB statutes, submitting a petition signed by eight committee members demanding an immediate council meeting.[106] These signatures included Swiss allies like Bucher-Heller, Austrians under Alfred Fried, and Dutch via Quidde's connections to the NAOR. A meeting was arranged in Bern for January 6 and 7, 1915, attended by pacifists from thirteen states.[107] The English and Belgians sent representatives, but the French committee members, including Quidde's pre-war friend Gaston Moch, refused to sit down with Germans and gave proxy votes to other Entente chairs.[108]

On January 6, the Entente coalition, which already included Italian pacifists even before Rome's entry into the war in May, sought a resolution condemning Germany's violations of international law with the invasion of Belgium. Quidde countered:

> All belligerent powers are accused of regrettable violations of international law. Standing firmly on the principles of pacifism, we deplore and reject all violations of international law, regardless of which side they come from. But in view of the difference of opinion over the formulation of a protest against such violations of rights, in view of the danger that the discussion about them can lead to a disruption of the unit necessary for the

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[105] UNOG, IPM/QuC/FrK 137, File 1.1.2. Quidde, *Zu Frage der Einberufung des Berner Bureaus* (September 18,1914).

[106] UNOG, IPM/IPB 400.2 IPB, *Protokoll der Ratssitzungen vom 6. und 7. Januar 1915* ([1915]).

[107] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 59-63.

[108] Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism,* 193.

> fulfillment of the tasks of international pacifism, given the even greater danger of a majority vote in one direction or the other, and given the urgent interest in not impairing the intervention and influence of the international peace movement and the International Peace Bureau in the future formulation of peace terms and the further development of coexistence between states, we refrain from any further participation in the discussion of this question and request: a) that a vote on such a protest not be taken.[109]

Quidde argued that the IPB and international pacifist activities would be best used to prepare the framework for a future peace agreement and promoting their ideas internationally. The German camp would not accept a one-sided resolution targeting Germany and called a vote on Quidde's proposal for a blanket condemnation of international law that did not provide specifics targeting one state over the other. The vote resulted in a tie, with Bucher-Heller and the Dutch representatives balancing out the Entente coalition.[110] Bucher-Heller voted for Quidde's resolution because "this of course also includes the violation of Belgian neutrality, and as a Swiss I can assure you how I felt about Belgium, because I told myself the same thing could have happened to us!"[111] However, he also argued for the impossibility of a final assessment on responsibility until after the war and the importance of uniting the pacifist movement to prepare for a future peace treaty.[112] The meeting adjourned without a resolution on responsibility for the war or condemnations of violations of international law.

The next day, the pacifists focused on pathways for peace mediation and principles for a future peace. The neutral delegates floated a proposal to have the Swiss Federal Council ask the belligerents to announce their conditions for a negotiated peace.[113] Fried argued that it was not yet the time for pacifists to insist on an early end to the war while the Entente delegates outright refused to discuss peace mediation as long as Germany occupied Belgium and northern France.

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[109] Quidde, *De deutsche Pazifismus,* 59-63.

[110] UNOG, BPC/LON/37 218, L. Quidde, "Die 'Deutschfeindlichkeit' des Anti-Oorlag-Raad," June 24, 1917, in *Pazifismus und Belagerungszustand,* 60-62.

[111] UNOG, IPM/IPB 400.2, *Protokoll der Ratssitzungen vom 6. und 7. Januar 1915.*

[112] UNOG, IPM/IPB 400.2, *Protokoll des Komitees der IFB* (January 6, 1915), 15.

[113] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 63-64.

As such, a baseline was set that no peace mediation could begin as long as annexations were a possibility. The Entente's delegates refused to even vote on the measure and the topic of peace mediation was dropped.

The only productive development of the IPB meeting occurred in the afternoon. Fried presented drafts of possible peace conditions for the IPB to adopt. Despite other sessions being hotly contested, the delegates swiftly agreed on a resolution. The agreed-upon principles for the IPB to propagandize and prepare for while waiting for the first peace negotiations included: 1) Neutral participation in the peace process, 2) No annexations and guaranteed rights of minority nationalities, 3) An international organization of states, 4) Arms reductions, 5) Diplomacy conducted by elected officials, 6) End of military alliances, 7) Freedom of trade and seas, 8) An international arbitration court, and 9) An established peace conference to end the war.[114] The results of the IPB's January meeting, especially its peace principles, were published and sent to both belligerent and neutral states. However, the French refused to help the IPB even with these basic steps without a condemnation of German violations of international law.[115] The meeting still resulted in a divided international pacifist community.

The German camp thought the meeting largely succeeded. Quidde and the others secured guidelines for the IPB and national societies while avoiding blame for the war. They prevented the IPB from directing propaganda and pressuring public opinion against Germany due to its violation of Belgian neutrality as Bucher-Heller's crucial vote denied any possible Entente majority vote in their favor. With Bucher-Heller's pro-German sentiments, Quidde and Fried

[114] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nippold Coll. 120.4, IPB, [Untitled] (January 1915); IPB, "Friedensprogramm des Internationalen Friedensbureaus beschlossen in Bern am 7. Januar 1915," *Friedens-Warte* 17 (1917), 7; *Mouvement Pacifiste,* no. 1/2 (January/February 1915), 5-6.

[115] UNOG, IPM/IPB 295.6, Théodore Ruyssen to IPM, February 5, 1915.

maintained a balance between Entente and Central Power sympathies, effectively neutralizing the IPB while retaining the capacity to agitate through its international network.

5.4.1: 1915 and the Search for a Durable Peace

With the IPB essentially neutered after the January 1915 meeting, international pacifists seeking to agitate for a negotiated peace were forced to find alternative social circles and routes. In April 1915, the NAOR hosted an international conference of pacifists and international law experts at The Hague. Auguste Forel represented Swiss pacifists instead of Bucher-Heller, who stayed in Switzerland to agitate the Federal Council for a soon-to-fail conference of neutral countries.[116] Quidde attended as one of several Germans under the banner of both the BNV and German Peace Society. The German Foreign Office consented to Quidde's attendance due to a secret arrangement with British representatives to discuss a possible separate peace.[117] Regardless, the German government continued supporting German pacifists traveling to neutral countries as a show of influence and a potential avenue for pro-German agitation.

The conference agenda included drafting a program that a future peace agreement would need to fulfill to ensure a "durable peace," rather than agitating for an immediate end to the war. By the final day, the attendees unanimously agreed on a five-point "Minimum Program": 1) No annexations or transfers of territory without the population's consent, 2) freedom of trade and freedom of the seas, 3) Strict adoption and further expansion of international law as laid out by The Hague Conventions, including a permanent international council for mediation, 4) Arms reductions, and 5) No secret treaties with all state foreign policy under elected parliamentary

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[116] SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, Decoppet and Schatzmann to Dr. Bucher-Heller, March 30, 1915; SFA, E2001A#1000/45#764, Initiative Kommitee Pax to Schweizerischen Bundesrat, February 24, 1915.

[117] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 68-69; SCPC, CDG/B/Germany/Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte, *History of the German League for the Rights of Man, reported by Kurt Grossmann, Secretary General, 1926-1933*, [N.D.].

control.[118] Essentially, this minimum program codified the basics of Wilson's Fourteen Points long before President Wilson articulated them, imprinting them into the global public conscious.[119] Most importantly, the Germans fully supported the no annexation clause. Quidde adamantly defended this position, fearing that annexations without considering national self-determination would inevitably lay the groundwork for another war. [120]

The conference also resulted in the creation of a new international organization, the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, with representatives from both neutral and warring states.[121] Quidde was chosen as Germany's representative, Fried for Austria, and Scherrer-Füllemann, Bucher-Heller's friend at the IPU, was chosen as Switzerland's. The members were also tasked with setting up national sections for studying a durable peace once they returned home. This provided a network similar to the IPB's for exchanging and disseminating propaganda. Their main purpose was to agitate and bring public pressure to bear on governments in line with their minimum program principles. Throughout 1915, this rhetoric of a "durable peace" entered the lexicon of the international pacifist movement and the general public. It influenced the normative language of public and political leaders as they began discussing and imagining what peace at the end of the war might look like. German pacifists quickly adapted this term from neutral states and wielded it as an important tool for their own agitation.

From April until June 1915, German pacifists conducted an extensive campaign on the points of the minimum program. Both the BNV and the German Peace Society endorsed the

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[118] UNOG, IPM/QuC/FrK 137, File 1.1.2, H.C. Dresselhuys and B. de Jong van Beek en Donk, "Mindestprogramm," *Zentralorganisation für einen Dauernden Frieden* (April 1915).

[119] For comparison, see "President Wilson's Fourteen Points, January 8, 1918," in *Documents and Statements relating to peace proposals and war aims (December 1916 – November 1918),* ed. G. Lowes Dickinson (London: G. Allen & Unwin 1919), 116-122.

[120] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 73-75.

[121] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nippold Coll. 120.4, NAOR, *Zentralorganisation für einen Dauernden Frieden,* ([April 1915]).

conference's minimum program and held meetings with their members.[122] The BNV published a serious of pamphlets on "real Guarantees for a durable peace" until the end of June. In May, Kurt von Tepper-Laski sent a private letter to the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* explaining the possibility of a negotiated peace with Britain if Germany could be pressured to drop its annexation demands, but the military authorities discovered this.[123] He and Walter Schücking also wrote directly to the German Foreign Office on this possibility. A month later, Quidde published the manuscript, *Sollen wir annektieren?* (Should We Annex?), on the minimum program's first point, specifically addressing the problems of Germany annexing Belgium and northern France.[124] Quidde circulated copies directly to members of the Reichstag, regional and local governments, and other political influential figures. As a result, the tolerance the German government and War Ministry once allowed the Germany pacifists since the beginning of the war evaporated.

The German government invoked the law on the State of Siege on July 31, 1914, allowing them to police civic associations they deemed dangerous to military efficiency and public morale. However, due to the pacifists' initial war support and usefulness in neutral agitation, military authorities largely left them alone. This changed in mid-1915 when pacifists began agitating against annexation within Germany. Authorities raided Quidde's office and confiscated his anti-annexationist works, claiming they promoted "defeatist" literature.[125] They also raided the BNV's headquarters in Berlin and confiscated any anti-annexationist material. They decreed that the pacifists could not publish or publicly discuss anything related to German

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[122] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 73-75.

[123] UNOG, BPC/LON/37 218, Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, et al, *Pazifismus und Belagerungszustand,* 15-19; *Norddeutschen Allgemeinen Zeitung,* June 8, 1915.

[124] SCPC, CDG/B/Germany/Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte, BNV, *Sollen wir annektieren?: Kritische Denkschift zur Eingabe der Sechs grossen wirtschaflichen Verbände* (May 20, 1915).

[125] UNOG, BPC/LON/37 218, Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, et al, *Pazifismus und Belagerungszustand,* 4-19; Shand, "Doves among the Eagle," 97-101.

war aims. They censored nearly all material in the German Peace Society's regular publication, *Völker-Friede,* until outright banning it in November. They closed the society's bookstore in Stuttgart. Meetings of members could be held but had to be closed to the public and often included a police observer. Many smaller chapters shuttered for the remainder of the war. The IPB noticed the lack of material from Germany in September.[126] Golay sent several requests for more material from the German Peace Society and BNV, but their publications were stopped at the borders by German authorities.[127] Pan-German groups also targeted pacifists with anti-pacifism and pro-annexation agitation in the German public sphere.[128] The German Peace Society attempted to address this one-sided application of the "no war goal discussion decree" through public appeals and direct appeals to the Reichstag to little effect. The German military authorities and pro-annexation factions were determined to snuff out pacifist agitation.

Quidde staged a final organized attempt to reverse the government's censorship of pacifist activity in late 1915. Personally, his position as an elected official in the Bavarian Landtag provided him an extra layer of protection of the military authorities, affording him more flexibility than others in the German Peace Society. He even circulated durable peace propaganda using his official letterhead in order to circumvent the censorship office before eventual discovery by military authorities, eventually leading to a raid on his private office.[129] On November 6 and 7, Quidde and Röttcher organized an annual meeting of the German Peace Society in Leipzig.[130] The meeting was allowed under the condition that it was closed to the public and no publications on its discussions would be distributed. The German Peace Society

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[126] UNOG, IPM/IPB 300.6, IPB to Quidde, Heilburg, and Wehburg, Bern, September 18, 1915.
[127] UNOG, IPM/IPB 300.7, Hans Wehberg to H. Golay, Düsseldorg, September 23, 1915.
[128] UNOG, BPC/LON/37 218, Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, et al, *Pazifismus und Belagerungszustand,* 15-19.
[129] Charrier, "Le Pacifisme Allemande Face a la Grande, " 147-148.
[130] "Entschließungen der Hauptversammlung der Deutschen Friedensgesellschaft vom 6. und 7. November 1915 in Leipzig," *Friedens-Warte* 18 (1916), 33, reprinted in Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 254-256.

doubled down on its anti-annexationist platform and wrote an official petition to the Reichstag arguing against the ban on discussing war goals while Pan-German nationalists were allowed to run rampant.[131] One of the main arguments was that this one-sided censorship damaged neutrals' opinion of Germany's war effort. This contention finally stirred a response from von Bethmann Hollweg, who invited Quidde to meet on November 16.[132] In their talks, Quidde spoke against annexations in the west. Von Bethmann Hollweg did not necessarily disagree but stated that it was not an "opportune time to announce this position" and any declaration of war goals "would weaken [Germany's] position in the negotiations."[133] Von Bethmann Hollweg also did not see the possibility of mediation coming from neutral countries, but recognized their importance for shaping international public opinion. Therefore, he agreed with Quidde that some censorship need lifting, particularly their ability to send propaganda material abroad.

Despite von Bethmann Hollweg's endorsement of lifting censorship on pacifists, military authorities controlling regional censorship offices intensified their crackdown on peace societies at the start of 1916.[134] The Leipzig meeting was the last gathering of the German Peace Society allowed until later in 1917. The authorities even banned local private assemblies outright. These societies were prohibited from speaking to the press, and even non-pacifist societies working with pacifists, including humanitarian organizations, faced threats of closure. Military authorities eventually demanded that the German Peace Society turn over its membership rolls to monitor those connected to the peace movement. Pacifist communication became a primary concern, with all correspondence between members under surveillance by postal censors until full confiscated

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[131] UNOG, IPM/QuC/FrK 137, File 1.1.2, L. Quidde and O. Umfrid, *Eingabe betreffend Kriegsziele und deren Erörterung: An den Deutschen Reichstag* (December 1, 1915).

[132] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 92-93.

[133] "Bericht Quiddes über seine Unterredung mit dem Reichskanzler von Bethmann Hollweg am 16. November 1915," *Friedens-Warte* 18 (1938), 101-104, reprinted in Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 256-260.

[134] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 95-112.

was implemented towards the end of 1916. Government censors particularly targeted communication with pacifists in neutral countries to sever the transnational network of propaganda. By the summer of 1916, the IPB noted that the German Peace Society and the German pacifist movement had largely ceased operation due to these oppressive measures.[135]

5.4.2: Swiss agitation for a Durable Peace, 1915-1916

The Swiss involvement with the durable peace movement contrasted sharply with the German pacifist experience. When Scherrer-Füllemann returned from the April 1915 meeting at The Hague, he found popular, national support for the minimum program and approval by the Swiss government. In May, he invited all Swiss pacifists through the IPB's network to participate in a new association, the Swiss Association for the Study of the Foundations of a Permanent Peace Treaty (SVDFV).[136] Bucher-Heller became an enthusiastic and active member, convincing many major leaders of the Swiss Peace Society and the NHG to participate. This included Arthur Eugster, who joined Bucher-Heller on the association's central board in 1916 after returning from his work at the Berlin POW office.[137] Others included Paul Seippel, NHG leader and close friend of Carl Spitteler, and foreign exiles like Fried. With its main goal being the promotion of the minimum program, the SVDFV created a propaganda commission with Bucher-Heller as a chairing member at its first meeting on May 6. This propaganda effort aimed not only at the Swiss public but also at an international audience. Their founding meeting recognized Switzerland's role as the "Bridge of Europe" and emphasized leveraging this position to spread its traditions of "international law and international understanding."[138]

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[135] UNOG, IPM/IPB 302.6, H. Golay to F. Moscheles, May 11, 1916.
[136] UNOG, IPM/IPB 297.6, VSGDF, *Brief der VSGDF an der IPB* (May 15, 1915).
[137] UNOG, IPM/IPB 264.1 Bucher-Heller to Golay, December 14, 1915; SSA, Ar 201.280.1, H Amstein, Franz Bucher-Heller, et al, *Kommitee zum Studium der Grundlagen eines dauerhaften Friedensvertrages* ([N.D.]).
[138] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nippold Coll. 120.3, SVDFV, *Aufruf* ([N.D.]).

Henri Golay worried that the IPB was losing its role as the center of international pacifism to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace due to the SVDFV's whirlwind of activity, even though he also joined in May 1915.[139] Additionally, he feared that it was a sign of German domination over the international pacifist movement.[140] French-Swiss participated in the SVDFV, but German-Swiss like Scherrer-Füllemann and Bucher-Heller mainly directed its energy. French pacifists refused to associate with the Central Organization for a Durable Peace and did not send members to The Hague in April. Consequently, Golay noted a shift in international opinion favoring the minimum program's principles and a negotiated peace versus the Entente's mission to ensure future peace by defeating German militarism. Golay tried to keep the IPB active by hosting another international conference on May 28 on "future interests of humanity."[141] However, it lacked French representation and was led by Germans, with Otto Umfrid, Quidde's second chairman of the German Peace Society, as one of the main lecturers. The conference succeeded for German agitation purposes, as reported in the German press as part of the German Peace Society's anti-annexation campaign. For the IPB, Golay realized the IPB's failure to bridge the divide between French and German pacifists and focused on maintaining the transnational network of pacifist propaganda for the durable peace movement.

Like the IPB, German exiles in Switzerland struggled to engage their pre-war French colleagues. Over the summer of 1915, Fried attempted to engineer a private dialogue between a few French and German pacifists.[142] He envisioned a small salon-style gathering for informal discussion, but his old French acquaintances refused to meet. Gustav Moch, once a close friend

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[139] Simon, "The International Peace Bureau," 73-74.

[140] UNOG, IPM/IPB 300.2, Moch to Golay, August 13, 1915; IPM/IPB 298.1, Golay to Moch, May 19, 1915.

[141] Examples of reporting in *Vorwärts* (Berlin), May 28, 1915; *Der Bund,* May 29, 1915; *Courier de Genève,* May 30, 1915.

[142] Simon, "The International Peace Bureau, 1892-1917," 74-79.

of both Fried and Quidde, accused the Germans of sacrificing their identity on the altar of invading Belgium and went as far as calling them Pan-Germans since several members had supported the *Manifesto of Ninety-Three*.[143] Fried's attempt to showcase their anti-annexation stance as part of the durable peace movement failed to convince Moch.[144] In a last effort, Fried enlisted Bucher-Heller as a mediator between French and German pacifists. Bucher-Heller used his position at the IPB to communicate with French pacifists, but the result was still the same.[145] Some French pacifists even accused the IPB of being non-neutrality because of the associations' continued contact with Germans.[146] This failure of international cooperation shows that while German pacifists could recruit German-Swiss, they could not use Switzerland to bridge the gap between themselves and pacifists in the Entente.

The cleft between German and French pacifists was also evident in the durable peace movement's efforts in Switzerland. The Central Organization planned another conference in Bern in December 1915 to further discuss measures for promoting the minimum program through propaganda.[147] Instead of the NAOR, Swiss representatives led by Scherrer-Füllemann organized and covered the meeting's costs. German pacifists continued to actively participate in the international organization despite the concurrent crackdown by German military authorities. Though their ability to travel to neutral countries became limited, Quidde and Walter Schücking still managed to leave Germany.[148] Additionally, the German Peace Society and BNV relied on members with dual German-Swiss nationality, like Hans Mühlestein, to attend international

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[143] UNOG, IPM/IPB 299.4, G. Moch to H. Golay, July 14, 1915.

[144] UNOG, IPM/IPB 300.1, H. Golay to Alfred Fried, August 9, 1915.

[145] UNOG, IPM/IPB 299.6, H. Golay to Bucher-Heller, August 3, 1915; UNOG, IPM/IPB 299.6, Bucher Heller to Golay, August 4, 1915.

[146] UNOG, IPM/IPB 300.3, Horace Thivet to G. Bovet, August 19, 1915.

[147] SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, Dr. C. Drusselhuys and Dr. de Jong van Bee ken Donk, et al, *Beschlüsse des internat. Volllzugsausschusses der Zentralorganisation für dauerhaften Frieden: Sitzung im Haag v. 21 August 1915* (August 22, 1915); UNOG, IPM/IPB 300.3, H. Van der Mandere to Henri Golay, (August 24, 1915); UNOG, IPM/IPB 300.7, H. Golay to Jean Pélissier, (September 28, 1915).

[148] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 106-107.

conferences as their special status eased transnational travel.[149] Regardless, German, Swiss, and Dutch pacifists found no support from pacifists in Entente countries for the conference.[150] Even those who joined The Hague meeting in April 1915 were now absent either through outright refusal or their governments denying travel permits. Many, like Moch, warned that pacifists in neutral countries supporting the durable peace movement were "playing into the hands of the defenders of Kaiserism."[151] Thus, the gathering from December 14 to 18 was reduced to a "study congress" rather than an international convention with only seven countries in attendance: the Central Powers, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and Scandinavia.[152] By the end of 1915, German pacifists' capacity for agitation was greatly diminished. Their propaganda reach was limited to a few neutral countries, while even their work inside Germany was now in question.

4.3: Pacifist Agitation in Switzerland targets Germany, 1916

Switzerland became a hub for German pacifist propaganda even before the military crackdown on their material in the latter half of 1915. At the start of the war, German pacifists sent propaganda into Switzerland and met socially with Swiss pacifists to agitate for the German war effort. In 1916, the direction of agitation reversed due to the German military authority's crackdown on domestic pacifist activity. A significant portion of this activity came from German exiles like Fried, who moved their publications to Switzerland and used the IPB's correspondence network to send texts back into Germany. For example, Fried found ways to send copies of the *Frieden-Warte* directly to pacifists in Germany using the IPB, which even used its humanitarian connection with the Frankfurt Red Cross to relay correspondence to the

[149] UNOG, IPM/IPB 301.10, Ortsgruppe Göttingen der deutschen Friedensgesellschaft to Röttcher, November 25, 1915.

[150] UNOG, IPM/IPB 300.7, H. Golay to Jean Péllissier, September 28, 1915.

[151] UNOG, IPM/IPB 301.4, G. Moch to H. Golay, October 24, 1915.

[152] SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, Henri L. Etienne and E. Mueller-Hess, *Internationaler Kongress zum Stadium der Grundlagen eines dauerhaften Friedens-vertrages* (December 14-18, 1915).

German Peace Society without alerting censors. Later in 1917 and 1918, Fried managed to send this pacifist "poison" directly into Germany by hiding it under discrete, false titles that he changed from issue to issue, such as *Zeitschrift für die Finanzpolitik Mitteleuropas* (Journal for Financial Policy in Central Europe).[153] He also maintained its publication by finding sympathetic printing companies such as Orell Füssli, which became a common publishing house for pacifist material throughout the war.[154] Additionally, Swiss pacifists provided funding when German sources were cut off at the border. Bucher-Heller and the Swiss Peace Society gave funds to Fried, as well as others like Scherrer-Füllemann and Eugster.[155] Therefore, an underground network of pacifist propaganda built on the IPB's sociocultural network emerged in 1916, through which German exiles and Swiss pacifists sent material into Germany to agitate for their own war aims of a negotiated and durable peace.

The IPB constantly evolved ways to get its pacifist material into the hands of German pacifists after the censorship crackdown in 1915. This mainly affected its journal, *Mouvement Pacifiste,* which was considered the international pacifist movement's central organ.[156] In September 1915, Golay began sending all copies bound for Germany to Röttcher's home in Stuttgart. From there, Röttcher personally distributed them to German pacifists.[157] This method limited the number of hands the material passed through, decreasing its chances of being stopped by postal censors. By the summer of 1916 though, military inspectors at the border started turning away these shipments, recognizing Röttcher as a known pacifist and identifying the

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[153] *Friedens-Warte 20,* no. 11/12 (November/December 1918), 291; SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, J. Scherrer-Fullemann to A. Büchler, A. Eugster, et al, January 1, 1918; also, see Schönemann-Behrens, *Alfred Hermann Fried,* 272-273.

[154] Alfred Herman Fried, *Mein Kriegs-Tagebuch: Das erste Kriegsjahr (7 August 1914 bis 28 Juli 1915),* vol. 1 (Zürich: Max Rascher Verlag, 1918), 234.

[155] SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, J. Scherrer-Fullemann to A. Büchler, A. Eugster, et al, January 1, 1918.

[156] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.2, E. Montandon to Röttcher, 28 Juli 1916; IPM/IPB 300.6, E. Montandon to Röttcher, September 22, 1915.

[157] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.3, F. Röttcher to IPB, September 11, 1916.

journal as intended for pacifist agitation. The IPB even developed a means of sending propaganda material disguised under humanitarian work to the Frankfurt Red Cross, which would then forward it to German pacifists.[158]

German pacifists found ways to publish their material in Switzerland and then smuggle it back into the country for distribution. The most common method involved sending articles to major internationally read newspapers like the *NZZ*. For instance, the April 21, 1916 copy of the *NZZ* carried an article by Berlin pacifist Emil Schiff titled *"Wer kann es verantworten?"* (Who can be responsible for it?).[159] The article demonstrated the economic cost of the war for society and called for the German public to demand an immediate end to the war. German border authorities did not ban the *NZZ* from entering the country completely due to its international importance but tried their best to censor certain editions that carried pacifist articles. German pacifists also sent literature to Swiss publishing houses for printing. They often sent material first to the IPB, which recommended a publishing company to use.[160] Foremost was Orell Füssli, which published books and sent copies to the IPB free of charge when home front conditions and paper shortages made financial matters tight for the society in 1916.[161] The influential anti-war periodical *Die Weissen Blätter*, written by German pacifist René Schickele, moved to Switzerland in 1915 and was published by Max Rascher's company in Zurich.[162] Payot & Cie publishing house in Lausanne distributed works into Germany such as the anonymous *J'Accuse.*[163] The German military authorities tried to keep a running list of these "undesirable" books to turn them away at the border, but German pacifists found ways around the censors.

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[158] UNOG, IPM/IPB 452, *Affaires Roettcher*.
[159] Emil Schiff, "Wer kann es verantworten?" *NZZ*, no. 633, 1 ed. April 21, 1916.
[160] UNOG, IPM/IPB 295.7, IPB to Dr. Vlaeting, February 18, 1915
[161] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.5, Generaksekretär to Art. Institut Orell Füssli, December 23, 1916.
[162] For the history of Rascher Publishing House's anti-war activity, see Patrick Bridgewater, "German Poetry and the First World War," *European History Quarterly* 1 (1971), 180.
[163] UNOG, IPM/IPB 301.2, Payot & Cie to IPB, October 9, 1915.

Georg Friedrich Nicolai, a German anti-war cardiologist at the University of Berlin, took inspiration from Alfred Fried's methods for distributing his own propaganda from Switzerland.[164] In 1917, he smuggled his manuscript for *Die Biologie des Krieges* (The Biology of War) to Orell Füssli in Switzerland. They managed to smuggle two thousand copies back into Germany using a false jacket bearing the title *Die Getreidewirtschaft der Schweiz* (The Grain Economy of Switzerland).

Swiss pacifists also circumvented censors at the border by personally visiting German pacifists in Germany. Though German pacifists could no longer travel to neutral countries in 1916, Bucher-Heller could still travel into Germany freely. In March 1916, he met Quidde across the border at Lindau on Lake Constance.[165] There, Bucher-Heller discreetly relayed discussions the IPB was having with British pacifists about a negotiated peace guaranteeing the restoration of Belgian sovereignty. These talks were a continuation of those held at the Central Organization for a Durable Peace's convention in April 1915, but now the German pacifists' hands were even more tied, and nothing further came of these proposals. Still, Bucher-Heller's interstate traveling demonstrates another means through which German pacifism continued to agitate for peace despite the military's crackdown in 1916. Though their national organizations were paralyzed, German pacifists continued agitating for peace through their socio-cultural connections in Switzerland. Consequently, the transnational pipeline for German agitation that German authorities had encouraged at the start of the war now turned in the other direction.

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[164]Wolf Zuelzer, *The Nicolai Case: A Biography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982).

[165] UNOG, IPM/IPB 302.4, H. Golay to Dr. Bucher-Heller, March 16, 1916; IPM/IPB 398.1, Bucher-Heller, *Rapport* "*Meine Besprechung mit Dr. Quidde am 23 & 24 März in Lindau*" (April 17, 1916).

5.5: Pacifist Agitation's Impact in Germany: Von Bethmann Hollwegs's Peace Note, December 1916

The influence of transnational pacifist agitation from Switzerland extended far beyond the German public. By the end of 1916, many in the German government believed that German military gains had peaked.[166] This included Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, who began considering a negotiated peace as early as September 1916. On September 9, he completed a draft of German war aims that included annexations of Belgian and French territory and an economic customs union. Historian Fritz Fischer highlighted this document as evidence of Germany's desire for hegemonic dominance over Europe.[167] However, recent historians like William Mulligan have reexamined its underlying aims. Mulligan argues that these war aims indicate von Bethmann Hollweg's struggle with broader European concepts similar to those proposed by international pacifists before and during the war.[168] His focus on Germany's economic and military security was crafted to emphasize a lasting, durable peace when the war concluded. Quidde's meeting with him at the end of 1915 revealed his openness to pacifist ideas. He continued to develop his war aims throughout the latter half of 1916, gradually incorporating pacifist rhetoric for a durable peace and the minimum program's principles.

From October to November 1916, von Bethmann Hollweg collaborated with key figures, including Hindenburg and Austrian Foreign Minister Count Istvan Burian, to develop a framework for German war aims that could serve as the basis for a negotiated peace. Over the course of this month, von Bethmann Hollweg adjusted German annexation plans from extreme territorial gains in Northern France and Belgium to a return of these territories, albeit with

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[166] Justin Quinn Olmstead, "Peace, a Tactical Approach: How Britain and Germany abused the promise of peace during the First World War," in *Reconsidering Peace and Patriotism during the First World War,* ed. Justin Quinn Olmstead (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 117-125.

[167] Friedrich Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 100-116.

[168] Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace,* 86.

financial compensation. These adjustments, combined with other points such as freedom of the seas and trade, aimed to provide "real guarantees and security" for Germany.[169] Von Bethmann Hollweg revealed a shift in Germany's annexation goals during a speech to the German Reichstag on November 9, stating that the annexation of Belgium had never been one of Germany's war aims.[170] In fact, annexations were the point of contention between German pacifists and the government since the war's start.[171] Both Quidde and Fried noted that von Bethmann Hollweg's renunciation of Belgian annexation marked a significant step towards incorporating pacifist war aims.

On November 29, Quidde and other members of the German Peace Society signed a petition to the Reichstag in support of von Bethmann Hollweg's November 9 speech and asked for clarifications regarding government support for other parts of their platform, such as an international parliament and arbitration court.[172] Before they received a response, von Bethmann Hollweg made his greatest attempt at a negotiated peace between the Entente and Central Powers. On December 12, he addressed the Reichstag with a speech intended for both the Entente and the neutral states, walking a fine line between militarism and pacifism. He recounted Germany's recent military success, highlighting their "invincibility" on multiple fronts. Nevertheless, he believed it was time for peace and invited the other belligerents to announce their peace conditions as a step towards negotiations. "Prepared for war, but ready for peace," von Bethmann Hollweg also threatened that, if this proposal was rejected, the German military

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[169] For a full summary of the talks between von Bethmann Hollweg, Hindenburg, and Count Burian, see Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany's Drive to the West (Drang Nach Westen): A Study of Germany's Western War Aims during the First World War*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 139-194.

[170] Friedrich Thimme, ed., *Bethmann-Hollwegs Kriegsreden* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1919), 163.

[171] UNOG, BPC/LON/37 218, Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, et al. *Pazifismus und Belagerungszustand,* 46-51.

[172] Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 122-124.

was prepared to pursue the war to its conclusion. Though he did not outline his own peace conditions, he emphasized Germany's desire for a "lasting peace."[173]

Switzerland and Swiss pacifists played a vital role in the diplomatic events following von Bethmann Hollweg's peace speech. Von Bethmann Hollweg personally invited the Swiss embassy to attend the speech, which telegrammed their observations to the Swiss Political Department: "Mr. von Bethmann spoke in a less thunderous voice than usual; he was slightly emotional and shared the serious mood of the entire assembly, which applauded the parts of his speech which were devoted to country and the army's efficiency and willingness to make sacrifices, but even more so to the statements that the blessings of peace should be returned to the country."[174] Simultaneously with the delivery of the speech, the Swiss diplomatic corps' consulate offices in both Berlin and Vienna received a note intended for the Swiss Political Department, requesting the Swiss government relay von Bethmann Hollweg's proposal to the Entente governments:

> The Central Powers declare that they do not seek to crush or annihilate their adversaries. They are convinced that the proposals they would bring to the negotiations and which would aim at ensuring the existence, honor, and free development of their peoples would be suitable to serve as a basis for the establishment of a *lasting peace.* They declare that respect for the rights of other nations is in no way incompatible with their own rights and legitimate interests.[175]

The note concluded by highlighting Germany's favorable military situation and a declaration that if the proposal is rejected, the Central Powers are determined to fight to the end.

Once the peace note reached the Swiss government, it quickly became public. The German Peace Society immediately issued their full support for von Bethmann Hollweg's

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[173] Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, "The German Peace Note, December 12, 1916," in *Documents and Statements relating to Peace Proposals and War Aims*, 2-3.

[174] SFA, E2001B#1000/1501#3124, Schweizerische Gesandtschaft in Berlin to [Swiss Political Department], December 12, 1916.

[175] SFA, E2001B#1000/1501#3124, [Vienna] Légation Suisse Bourcart to Affaires Etrangères, December 12, 1916.

speech, emphasizing their hope that it was the first step towards a "durable peace."[176] Military restrictions on pacifist activity meant that the German pacifists could muster little organized agitation within their own country, but German exiles in Switzerland mobilized support to sway public opinion in favor of the peace note. The Swiss press responded favorably to the news in the next day's papers, particularly the German-speaking liberal newspapers.[177] The *NZZ* even called the peace note a "ray of light," and some staunch Entente-leaning French-Swiss papers welcomed the possibility of a negotiated peace.[178] Energized by both the diplomatic movements and the response in the Swiss press, Fried immediately sent Bucher-Heller a telegram on December 13 regarding von Bethmann Hollweg's peace note.[179] He requested that Bucher-Heller help convene an emergency meeting of the IPB's council to "support the Central Powers' peace offer."

Bucher-Heller required little convincing to support the German Peace Note. He forwarded Fried's appeal to Golay, who sent the message on to the other members of the IPB council.[180] Despite being pro-French, Golay believed that the German peace note could signal the IPB to finally mobilize its efforts for a negotiated peace. The other French-Swiss council members, Carrière and Bovet, were unconvinced. Instead, they thought an emergency meeting was futile since they did not know the exact nature of Germany's peace proposal and feared that IPB support could be seen as further support of Germany by Entente pacifists. Additionally, the council would need to act without the participation or the approval of its president, La Fontaine,

[176] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.5, Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, [Untitled], [December 1916].
[177] *Der Bund,* no. 586, December 13, 1916.
[178] *NZZ*, December 13, 1916; *Journal de Genève,* December 14, 1916.
[179] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.5, Alfred Fried to Bucher-Heller, December 13, 1916.
[180] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.5, H. Golay to Dr. Bucher-Heller, December 14, 1916.

who was still in exile in Britain. Nevertheless, Bovet and Carrière agreed that Bucher-Heller had the right to convene the meeting since he occupied one of its leadership chairs.[181]

After receiving positive replies, the IPB members scheduled a meeting in Bern for December 19. Meanwhile, Bucher-Heller pressured national councilors with ties to the Swiss Peace Society to support the German peace note.[182] He enlisted Scherrer-Füllemann and his connections as a national councilor and leader within the IPU for this effort. Since the war's beginning, Bucher-Heller had urged the Federal Council and Political Department to step out of inactivity and work towards a negotiated peace since the beginning of the war, either personally, through the Swiss Peace Society, or a host of other civic initiatives. Government members consistently responded that they did not see the current state of the war as an opportune time to mediate between the belligerents. Now, many in the government, particularly German-Swiss representatives, were convinced by Bucher-Heller's arguments that the German peace note signaled their opportunity to act as neutral mediators. On December 15, national councilor E. Zürcher invited Golay to a meeting at the Swiss parliament building in Bern.[183] There, he gave Golay parliamentary endorsement to mobilize the IPB in support of the German peace note and use its transnational connections to agitate for peace across Europe. The Swiss Federal government would relay the peace note to belligerent and neutral states and facilitate further international discussion towards peace negotiations.

As the IPB prepared to meet, President Wilson released a public statement on December 18 welcoming the initiative taken by the German chancellor.[184] He supported the chance for a

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[181] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.5, Bucher-Heller to Dr. Bovet and Dr. Carriere, December 18, 1916.

[182] UNOG, IPM 303.5, H. Golay to Zürcher, Lochner, Calane, et al, December 18, 1916; Bucher-Heller to Dr. Bovet and Dr. Carriere, December 18, 1916.

[183] Simon, "The International Peace Bureau," 75-76.

[184] Woodrow Wilson, "President Wilson's Note to the Belligerents, December 18, 1916," in *Documents and Statements relating to Peace Proposals and War Aims,* 4-6.

negotiated peace while also carefully noting that the United States was already working on such a proposal and his support should not be seen as sympathy for the German war effort. He also outlined what he believed should be the principles of a negotiated peace, highlighting how officials from both the Entente and Central Powers spoke of future peace with similar goals: rights of minority nations and the formation of a league of nations. Thus, Wilson was essentially adopting the platform promoted by international pacifists. American Ambassador in Bern, Pleasant A. Stovall, delivered Wilson's official diplomatic response to the Swiss Federal government on December 21.[185] In it, Wilson outlined the next steps needed for negotiations to take place. First, he called for all belligerent states to publicly release their war goals and peace conditions. Only then could neutrals and belligerents alike gauge the likely success of entering a dialogue to end the war. The Germans replied to Wilson's note on December 25: "The high-minded suggestion made by the President of the United States of America in order to create a basis for the establishment of *lasting peace* has been received and considered by the Imperial Government in the friendly spirit in which it is expressed."[186]

Also on December 18, the day before the emergency meeting, Bucher-Heller sent a final letter to Bovet and Carrière to address French-German Swiss differences concerning the German peace note: "The time has soon come when the Bureau must come out of its reserve, because it is no longer a question of German or Entente peace, but of European peace. It would be incomprehensible if the highest authority of the peace movement did not want to say anything about all the demonstrations for peace that will soon take place!"[187] Golay invited many federal councilors and members of the IPU to attend the meeting in a show of official support, but only

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[185] SFA, J1.6#1000/1355#295, Politisches Department, "Note des Präsidenten Wilson. Anschluss Schweizerischerseits," Dezember 21, 1916; Stovall to Bundesrats, *Uebersetzung* (December 21, 1916).

[186] "The German Reply to President Wilson's Note of December 18th, December 25, 1916," in *Documents and Statements relating to Peace Proposals and War Aims*, 7.

[187] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.5, Bucher-Heller to Dr. Bovet and Dr. Carriere, December 18, 1916.

the actual council members had a binding vote. Despite Bucher-Heller and Golay's efforts to solicit support for the German peace note, Carrière and Bovet remained unconvinced that it was the right course of action for the IPB. The divide between German and French-speaking sympathies was clear. Bovet and Carrière refused to bring the IPB out on inactivity for Germany's benefit. The split vote meant that the default committed the IPB to passivity once again.

Bucher-Heller refused to let the defeat at the IPB emergency stop his public agitation in favor of Germany's peace note. He mobilized the resources of the Swiss Peace Society to rally Swiss public sentiment.[188] He quickly adapted his yearly Christmas newsletter into an appeal for the German peace note: "While we are preparing to lament in wistful contemplation that there is still no glimmer of hope for the 'peace on earth' so longed for everywhere, news of the peace offer from the German Reich and its allies is spreading across the world. Although it is impossible to predict whether this approach will lead to peace, given the mood of blind hatred among governments and peoples, we can nevertheless be very happy about this fact."[189] In just a few days, by Christmas Eve, Bucher-Heller distributed 20,000 copies of this appeal to Swiss newspapers, influential public figures, and chapters of the Swiss Peace Society to hand out on the streets. In a letter to Golay, Bucher-Heller reported positive responses: "The time will come when we can use the taboo word 'peace' again and the international peace bureau will perhaps have to take action sooner than we thought last Wednesday. I can tell you that the ground is very favorable for peace propaganda."[190]

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[188] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.5, Zürcher, Lochner, Scherrer-Füllemann, et al, to Comité Permanent du IPB, December 15, 1916.

[189] SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, Die Schweizerische Friedensgesellschaft, *Weihnachtsgruss der Schweizerischen Friedensgesellschaft* (1916).

[190] UNOG, IPM/IPB 303.5, Bucher-Heller to Golay, December 24, 1916.

Despite the outlook of many in the Swiss national council, the Swiss diplomatic corps already doubted a positive response from the Entente countries. The Swiss embassies in Paris, London, and Rome reported to Hoffmann that the Entente was unlikely to accept Germany's olive branch but were waiting for Wilson to make the first move.[191] By December 22, after the Entente received Wilson's reply, Hoffmann noted that he expected a negative response and feared they would interpret Switzerland's role in the peace note as a breach of neutrality.[192] Hoffmann and the Swiss Political Department received the Entente's response from Paris on December 30, which also asked the Swiss diplomatic corps to relay the message to the Central Powers following the same route as the German peace note.[193] The Anglo-French response was indeed negative. It followed the same line of arguments that had divided German and French pacifists throughout the war. They considered the German peace note a "sham proposal," "less an offer of peace than a war maneuver," lacking any real substance or suggestions for peace negotiations. They saw it as an attempt to demoralize their own public and as an "endeavor to deceive and intimidate public opinion in neutral countries whose inhabitants have long since made up their minds where the initial responsibility rests." The response rehashed Germany's history of breaking international law, particularly violating Belgian neutrality, while also providing the Entente's war aims of rights for small states and international law. The invasion of Belgium was an irreparable crime, and they refused to sit at the negotiating table with those who would cast aside international law for military expediency. Thus, only with the outright

[191] SFA, E2001B#1000/1501#3124, Paravicini to Political Department, 14 December 1916; Hoffmann to von Planta, December 14, 1916.
[192] SFA, J1.6#1000/1355#295, Hoffmann to Kollege [?], December 22, 1916.
[193] SFA, E2001B#1000/1501#3124, Lardy to Hoffmann, December 30, 1916.

destruction of German militarism could there "be effective guarantees for the future security of the world."[194]

5.6: Conclusion

Bucher-Heller attempted one final push for peace negotiations in January 1917 after the Entente declined the German peace note. Throughout the month, he called on all peace societies in Switzerland (the IPB, the Swiss Peace Society, Durable Peace movement) to pressure the Swiss government to convene a conference of neutral states.[195] He believed that the events of December 1916 showed that the "warring parties are pursuing the same ultimate goal: a lasting peace."[196] He thought a conference of neutral states would demonstrate solidarity against expanding the war and he outlined points for peace mediation like those asked in von Bethmann Hollweg and Wilson's notes. However, the opportunity for negotiations disappeared in 1917 as quickly as it had emerged and Bucher-Heller's petitioning was unsuccessful.[197] The resumption of Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare at the end of January dashed pacifist hopes for a non-military conclusion to the war.[198] America's entry into the war in April essentially ended pro-German pacifist agitation in Switzerland as Swiss pacifists embraced Wilson's post-war vision. Bucher-Heller acquiesced to its French-Swiss members, and the IPB began siding with the Entente.[199] The defeat of pro-German agitation also led to a significant change for the Swiss Peace Society. The momentum of the French-Swiss sections pushed the association into adopting a rotating presidency between French and German-speaking sections in 1917, similar to that of

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[194] "The Allies' Reply to the German Peace Note of December 12th, December 30, 1916," in *Documents and Statements relating to Peace Proposals and War Aims,* 7-10.

[195] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#771, Dr. Bucher-Heller, L. Quartier-la-Tente, et al, to haut Conseil fédéral suisse, 23 Janvier 1917; Bucher-Heller to hohen schweizerischen Bundesrat, January 27, 1917.

[196] *Völker-Friede* (March 1917), 10.

[197] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#771, *10e Séance du Conseil national suisse* (March 27, 1917); *11e Séance du Conseil national Suisse*,(March 29, 1917).

[198] UNOG, BPC/LON/37 218, Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, et al, *Pazifismus und Belagerungszustand,* 46-51; Quidde, *Der deutsche Pazifismus,* 156-162.

[199] UNOG, IPM/IPB 263.1, Golay to Ruyssen, August 2, 1918.

the SAC.[200] Bucher-Heller started seeing the war as one of international democratic values against autocratic militarism. For the remainder of the war, Bucher-Heller focused his efforts on advocating for Switzerland to join the League of Nations after the war, especially following Wilson's Fourteen Points statement in January 1918.[201]

In 1917, pacifist propaganda continued to enter Germany from Switzerland. Books were smuggled over the border using false covers with titles of agricultural studies or children's novels.[202] The difference now was that many leaders of the German Peace Society openly opposed the German war effort, embracing Wilson's vision of a post-war world as the most likely chance of achieving their ideological goals. Fried worked with the IPB to translate more pacifist literature from the West into German and send it to Germany.[203] Other exiles contributed to anti-militarist papers like the *Freie Zeitung*, which was smuggled across the border to agitate the German public.[204] This change of heart is most evident in the work of the German Peace Society's secretary, Röttcher, who distributed these smuggle works throughout Germany, particularly for Fried.[205] He also sent material antagonistic towards the German military command to the Swiss press. In a series of articles for the *Zürich Post,* he expressed support for Wilson's democratic and internationalist ideals and even threatened the German government with an investigation into their responsibility for the war after the looming defeat. Röttcher was

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[200] *Der Friede,* (November 1917), 83.

[201] *Der Friede,* (February 1918); for example of agitation towards the public: *La national Suisse,* vol. 62, March 19, 1918; for example of petitioning the government for formal support of the League of Nations, see SoArc, Ar 201.280.1, Schweiz Komitee für Vorbereitung des Völkerbundes to Nationalrats, April 15, 1918.

[202] Hollander, *Elusive Dove,* 216-220.

[203] UNOG, IPM/IPB 304.4, Alfred H. Fried to H. Golay, October 12, 1917.

[204] Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 399-400; Clavien, "Les Intellectuels suisses et la Grande Guerre," 119-120.

[205] UNOG, IPM/IPB Nippold Coll. 101.3, Fritz Röttcher, *Der Kampf um den Frieden,* 1917.

arrested in the summer of 1917 and then forced into military service as punishment, only to be released towards the end of the war due to deteriorating health.[206]

Von Bethmann Hollweg's resignation as chancellor on July 13, 1917 further marked the end of a possible negotiated peace. Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg's military regime was now in full force, and only a military victory was seen as a possibility. Still, July 1917 demonstrated how effectively pacifist agitation was steering the German public and influential Reichstag members towards their ideas. A principal example is the change of heart in Matthias Erzberger. Before the war, Erzberger was a Catholic Center Liberal in the Reichstag and a member of the IPU alongside Scherrer-Füllemann. When the war started, his support for the military and the war effort rivaled that of the Pan-Germans.[207] He was even selected to head the intelligence office in charge of operations in neutral countries because of his relationship with the IPU.[208] However, by the time of von Bethmann Hollweg's resignation, Erzberger had fully converted to international pacifism's war aims.[209] In conjunction with a petition by Quidde and the German Peace Society, Erzberger presented the Reichstag Peace Resolution on July 19, 1917, just days after von Bethmann Hollweg stepped down as chancellor. The resolution established three war aims for the Reichstag: 1) No annexations by force of arms, 2) freedom of seas and trade, and 3) the creation of an international legal organization.[210] Essentially, Erzberger's resolution fully adopted the ideas promoted by German pacifism's agitation.[211] The majority of the Reichstag voted in favor of the resolution, but it had little to no impact on the direction of the

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[206] UNOG, IPM/IPB 304.3, Röttcher to Golay, July 17, 1917; BPC/LON/37 218, Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, et al, *Pazifismus und Belagerungszustand,* 38-41.

[207] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa,* 230-231.

[208] Klaus Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959)*,* 98-99; Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I*, 24.

[209] Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace,* 90; Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger,* 158-162.

[210] Matthias Erzberger, "The Reichstag Majority Resolution, July 19, 1917," in *Documents and Statements relating to Peace Proposals and War Aims,* 44-45.

[211] Matthias Erzberger, *Erlebnisse im Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1920)*,* 254-256.

war. There were no initiatives for peace negotiations as the country was now fully under German military command. Instead, it legitimized several political actors in Germany in the eyes of international pacifists, placing them at the forefront for peace negotiations and German politics at the end of the war.[212] Erzberger even joined Quidde, Fried, and Swiss pacifists at a study conference in Bern in November 1917 to discuss Germany's inclusion in the future League of Nations.[213]

German pacifism and the German Peace Society failed politically during the war. Their early agitation in 1914 successfully neutralized possible one-sided criticism for Germany's violations of international law and kept neutral public opinion divided. But their benefit to the German war effort ended once Quidde returned from the durable peace meeting at The Hague in April 1914 and the peace associations began agitating domestically against annexations. The German military authorities' crackdown led to their social marginalization, ending practical attempts at mobilizing the public on the platform of a negotiated peace and international principles. Yet, culturally, German pacifism as part of the wider international peace movement succeeded. By tracing their transnational socio-cultural relationships during the war, German pacifists and their agitation influenced German war aims, particularly in 1916-1917. German leaders like Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg were forced to adapt their war goals to meet the demands of a European public that began to imagine a lasting "peace to end all war" based on international pacifism's wartime norms and values.[214]

For German pacifists, Switzerland provided a physical space for exile, a social space to continue their international dialogue with other pacifists, and a cultural space to participate in the

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[212] UNOG, IPM/IPB 304.3, Röttcher to IPB, July 26, 1917.

[213] SoArc, AR 201.280.1, [N.A.], *Assemblée de Berne pour la discussion des relations entre peuples après la guerre, 19 au 22 novembre 1917,* (November 1917); also, see Rickenbacher, *"Für den Frieden,"* 113-115.

[214] Jackson and Mulligan, "The Great War and the Political Conditions of Internationalism," 25.

performative conventions led by the IPB and other associations. In this dynamic, German agitation in Switzerland was not a one-way street. German agitation did not simply flow into Switzerland and influence Swiss civic associations. Instead, it was an intersection through which Swiss and other international agitation could also travel into Germany. The activity of individuals like Franz Bucher-Heller proved vital. Although Bucher-Heller's initiatives for a negotiate peace continuously failed, he managed to coax the Swiss government into political action with von Bethmann Hollweg's peace note. Nevertheless, his social activity was the critical link between the IPB and the German Peace Society that allowed agitation to flow in and out of Germany despite severe censorship. Alfred Fried and other pacifists are remembered for their ideological writings during the war, but it was social activists like Bucher-Heller who put pacifism's ideas into action and established the accepted international norms on which post-war European peace was built.

Chapter 6: The Swiss Socialist Youth Organization, Lenin, and Antimilitarist Agitation against Germany during the First World War

6.1: The Russian Revolution and Lenin's *Kegelklub* in Zurich, 1917

The failure of the peace campaign in early 1917 exacerbated the dire situation for Germany both on the war front and at home. Several years of fighting on multiple fronts had overstretched the German military, now running low on resources. This crisis deepened with the looming entry of the United States into the war, triggered by Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare and the exposure of the Zimmerman Telegram in March 1917. Meanwhile, worsening living conditions in Germany led to growing war fatigue and social unrest, which overwhelmed the military-police apparatus. In desperation, German political and military leaders turned to extreme measures, often disregarding their long-term consequences.

The outbreak of the Russian Revolution in March 1917 provided Germany with its best opportunity for relief. Russia was in turmoil, struggling with its own dire conditions both at home and on the front lines. Mass protests erupted in Petrograd, leading to violent clashes between demonstrators and governmental forces. On March 12, the local military garrison defected, and on the same day, Liberal and Social Democratic members of the Duma formed a Provisional Government, challenging the monarchy's authority. Three days later, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated, leaving the Provisional Government as Russia's de facto ruling power. However, this transition did not end the nation's unrest. The Provisional Government faced opposition from various groups, including nationalist movements demanding independence and socialist revolutionaries represented by the Petrograd Soviet, a council of workers' organizations that retained authority in the city. Recognizing this instability as an opportunity, the German military and Foreign Office sought to exploit Russia's internal divisions to secure a separate peace on the

Eastern Front in order to redirect manpower and resources elsewhere. To achieve this, Germany supported political dissenters exiled in neutral countries who could further revolutionize and destabilize Russia.[1] Among these, revolutionary socialists led by Vladimir Lenin in Switzerland were particularly significant. Germany facilitated their return through its territory, anticipating that their influence would deepen Russia's chaos and potentially lead to negotiations favorable to German interests. However, this chapter argues that, by facilitating Lenin's return through his Zurich-based circle, the German government inadvertently tapped into a transnational network of "alternative" German agitation without considering the long-term consequences of that network's challenge to the legitimacy and authority of the German state.

Switzerland, long known for its tradition of asylum, became a haven for left-wing political exiles well before the First World War.[2] The country consistently sheltered dissidents from across Europe, refusing extradition requests even under intense pressure. A notable challenge to this tradition occurred after the 1898 assassination of Empress Elisabeth "Sisi" of Austria-Hungary in Geneva by Italian anarchist Luigi Lucheni. This incident prompted the convening of an International Conference for the Social Defense against Anarchists and widespread European demands for Switzerland to surrender other anarchist exiles.[3] Nevertheless, the Swiss government upheld its asylum tradition and the country remained a refuge for left-wing radicals through to the turn of the century. German socialists established a base in the country uniting in exile those who fled after Bismarck's anti-Socialist laws of 1878. After these laws lapsed in 1890, Russian revolutionaries replaced the German exiles, seeking sanctuary from Tsarist crackdowns following the failed 1887 assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander III.

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[1] L. L. Farrar, *Divide and Conquer: German Efforts to Conclude a Separate Peace, 1914-1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 27-29.

[2] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkreig,* 398-399.

[3] Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878-1934* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 131-184.

International socialist agitation continued to use Switzerland as a transnational hub into the twentieth century.

The German Social Democratic Party (SPD), like most socialist parties in the warring nations, initially supported their country's war effort. In August 1914, they endorsed the "Burgfrieden" and voted in favor of war credits.[4] However, Switzerland became a refuge for those socialists who opposed their countries' involvement in the war.[5] Among these exiles were Lenin and his Bolshevik allies, who arrived between 1914 and 1915 to join a cadre of anti-war internationalist defectors.[6] In September 1915, these exiles convened with other socialist representatives from neutral countries in Zimmerwald, a small Swiss village, at a conference organized by Robert Grimm, a leader of the Swiss Social Democratic Party.[7] This meeting gave birth to the Zimmerwald movement, an international socialist association advocating for an immediate end to the war. Within this movement, Lenin and his followers formed the Zimmerwald Left, a radical minority that pushed to transform the world war into a global class-based civil war. This was the social circle on which German authorities focused their efforts of securing a separate peace on the Eastern Front in 1917.

The German Foreign Office recognized the Russian socialist exile's potential utility as early as 1915, but Ambassador Gisbert von Romberg remained skeptical whether the Foreign Office could successfully influence this group. German Officials had no social credit with the Zimmerwald Left, who regarded German militarism as abhorrent. Most, like Lenin, believed that Germany would be the future epicenter for the proletarian revolution during the war. The

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[4] Mulligan, *The Great War for Peace,* 72; Ronald N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), 119-134.

[5] Georges-André Chevallaz, *The Challenge of Neutrality: Diplomacy and the Defense of Switzerland,* trans. Harvey Fergusson II (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 214.

[6] Angelica Balabanoff, *Die Zimmerwald Bewegung, 1914-1919* (Leipzig: Verlag von C. L. Hirschfeld, 1928), 4-5.

[7] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkreig,* 863.

outbreak of the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Petrograd Soviet prompted the German Foreign Office to shift its focus towards activating the Russian socialist exiles, particularly those from the Zimmerwald movement who advocated ending the war. However, distrust between Germany and these international socialists remained a persistent obstacle. On the other hand, the revolution energized Russian socialists in Switzerland, who were eager to return and participate in the events unfolding at home. The Entente countries refused to assist them, knowing that radical revolutionaries in Russia would likely further destabilize the Eastern Front. By April 1917, many Russian socialists turned to Grimm to negotiate with von Romberg on their behalf. Grimm, acting with informal support from Hoffmann at the Swiss Political Department, proposed that allowing the Russians to travel through Germany could later be traded for the release of German prisoners of war held in Russia.[8] Although von Romberg and the German Foreign Office were open to this arrangement, Grimm's apprehension delayed formal action. Like the others, Lenin was eager to return to Russia, but did not trust Grimm to negotiate on his behalf. The German Foreign Office attempted direct contact with Lenin through fellow Russian revolutionary Alexander "Helphand" Parvus at the end of March.[9] Lenin and Parvus were long time acquaintances through the revolutionary movement, but Parvus lent his support to the German Foreign Office at the start of the war.[10] Parvus believed Germany's victory could spark a revolution in Russia, and worked with the Foreign Office promoting agitation targeting Russian exiles since 1915. Lenin distrusted his pro-German stance and dismissed Parvus's overtures when he visited Zurich in March 1917. Instead, Lenin turned to Fritz Platten, a Zurich socialist,

[8] Hoffmann did not support a socialist takeover of Russia, but did believe that a weakened and distracted Russia meant that the Entente might finally sue for a general peace. The State Secretary [Zimmermann] to the Foreign Ministry Liaison Officer at General Headquarters, March 23, 1917, reprinted in Z. A. B. Zeman, *Germany and the Revolution in Russia, 1915-1918: Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 25-26; also, see Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 818-820.

[9] Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland,* 224.

[10] Z. A. B. Zeman and W. B. Scharlau, *The Merchant of Revolution: The Life of Alexander Israel Helphand (Parvus), 1867-1924* (London: Oxford,UK: University Press, 1965), 136-173; 210-211.

bypassing Grimm entirely. Platten negotiated directly with von Romberg for Lenin's return with a list of demands similar to Grimm's, but added a key condition: Lenin and his group would travel in a sealed train car to ensure secrecy and diplomatic immunity during their passage through Germany. The German Foreign Office agreed, and on April 9, Lenin and forty loyal Bolsheviks departed for Russia under these terms.

From Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station* to Catherine Merridale's *Lenin on the Train,* Lenin's return to Russia through Germany is one of the most thoroughly examined events in the historiography of the First World War.[11] Yet, prior to this, Lenin's activity in Switzerland, particularly in Zurich, has been underexplored outside of the high diplomatic maneuvers of the Zimmerwald Movement. Why did Lenin choose Platten over Grimm, the leader of the Zimmerwald movement with a recommended reputation with the Swiss government? After the rupture of international socialism at the start of the war, Lenin relied on a vetted, Swiss social circle in Zurich who had proved their ideological integrity through wartime, antimilitarist agitation.

In the heart of wartime Zurich, a small group of revolutionaries regularly met late into the evenings, discussing the state of international socialism. In his 1975 work, *Lenin in Zurich,* Alexander Solzhenitsyn sets these meetings in a smoke-filled café over heavily diluted tea. Lenin was at the center of this gathering, known as the *Kegelklub* or "Skittle Club" (named after bowling pins rather than multicolored candies).[12] In this portrayal, Lenin delivers one of his fiery speeches advocating for transforming the war into a civil war to a small group of handpicked apostles. In mid-delivery of sermon, Solzhenitsyn introduces who was sitting at the table through

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[11] Edmund Wilson, *To The Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 438-466; Catherine Merridale, *Lenin on the Train* (London, UK: Allen Lane, 2016).

[12] Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Lenin in Zurich,* trans. H.T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 41-62.

Lenin's snide personal criticisms of their characters, a habit for which Lenin was well known, even towards his closest associates. These critiques were aimed at fellow eastern European exiles of the Zimmerwald Left, Karl Radek and Mieczyslaw Bronski, as well as Fritz Platten. Among this group, however, Solzhenitsyn highlights Lenin's respect and approval for only one individual: Willi Münzenberg. Münzenberg had arrived in Zurich from Erfurt, Germany, in 1910 at the age of 19. He was a youth activist who fled Germany following the 1908 Law of Associations that banned young people from participating in socialist political activities and dismantled working class youth associations. By the time he attended Skittle Club meetings during the war, Münzenberg had become the preeminent leader of socialist youth in Switzerland. As secretariat of the Swiss Youth Organization (SJO), which he revitalized before 1914, he rebuilt the Youth International across Europe after the collapse of the Second International in 1915. Solzhenitsyn casts Julius Mimiola, a young Tyrolean socialist, as a representative of youth at these meetings, but notes that many SJO members attended throughout the war to hear Lenin's revolutionary socialist firsthand. With Münzenberg among his followers, Lenin controlled one of Europe's most effective international networks for socialists still active during this period. Consequently, the SJO became instrumental in carrying out socialist agitation aligned with the Zimmerwald Left.

Despite the extensive historiography on international socialism during World War I, there are few studies on the working-class youth. Most current research focuses on biographical accounts of Münzenberg, which have seen a revival of interest in the United States and Europe over the last few decades. John Green's *Willi Münzenberg* and Sean McMeekin's *The Red Millionaire* both examine his organizational genius in maintaining social connections among

revolutionaries against the war, both in neutral and belligerent countries.[13] His creation of the Youth International at the start of the war coordinated a grassroots antiwar movement across wartime battlefields, rivaling the Zimmerwald movement. By tracing his pre-war history, scholars also highlight how his social background shaped his ideological identity during and after the war. Münzenberg's coming of age as an impoverished factory worker in Erfurt, Germany at the turn of the twentieth century led to his admiration for Karl Liebknecht. Liebknecht, already known as an against-the-grain revolutionary within the Social Democratic Party, served as president of the International Union of Socialist Youth from 1907 to 1910 during Münzenberg's introduction to organized youth activism. Münzenberg was particularly inspired by Liebknecht's *Militarism and Anti-Militarism,* which fostered his staunch opposition to Prussian militarism.[14] He carried this ideological foundation with him to Switzerland, where he found an asylum for anti-militarist agitation through the SJO.

There is also a lack of detailed, bottom-up investigations into the lives of working-class youth, like Mimiola, whom Münzenberg relied on to agitate both internationally and nationally within Switzerland. Organizational histories of the SJO remain scarce. The foundation of its historical analysis lies in Hans Ulrich Jost's *Linkradikalismus in der Deutschen Schweiz,* which remains a touchstone for understanding Swiss-left politics.[15] However, this work only surveys the SJO as part of a broader kaleidoscope of socio-economic upheavals caused by wartime economic hardships. Recent efforts to provide a fuller picture of the SJO rely on a handful of graduate theses from Swiss universities. For example, Romina Gavio's "Radikalisierung und

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[13] John Green, *Willi Münzenberg: Fighter against Fascism and Stalinism* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020); Sean McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

[14] Karl Liebknecht, *Militarism and Anti-Militarism,* trans. Alexander Sirnis (1917; repr. New York: Dover Publications, 1972).

[15] Jost, *Linksradikalismus in der Deutscshen Schweiz.*

Antimilitarismus" illustrates the SJO's wartime antimilitarism was part of a longer trend among Switzerland's working-class youth and not solely influenced by Münzenberg. [16] Their club magazines and other propaganda material demonstrate a pre-war and wartime continuity in their critiques of the Prussianization of Swiss military leadership. Yet, these antimilitarist impulses did not exist in Swiss isolation. The SJO participated in a wider, transnational, and particularly German-speaking, antimilitarist culture among working-class youth at the start of the twentieth century. Social connections were forged through international youth conferences and also by the migration of laboring youth seeking job opportunities across Central Europe. At the outbreak of the war, as international socialism disintegrated, with socialist parties aligning with their respective state's war efforts, the working-class youth maintained their foundational antimilitarism as a counterpoint to official party lines. Consequently, Switzerland became a natural haven for working-class youth, akin to pacifists and other dissenters, when the German military authorities suppressed antiwar activism.

The SJO's significance rests in its sociocultural basis through what Vernon Lidtke describes as the working class's "Alternative Culture" in European civil society during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most historiography of this period portrays European civic associations as dominated by the educated middle class.[17] In contrast, Lidkte uses the provocative term "Alternative Culture" to describe the German working class's participation in civil society and the emergence of societies centered on *Arbeiterbildung* or working class education.[18] These societies focused on a range of educational and recreational activities, with membership rooted in shared working-class experiences. While many were politically aligned

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[16] Romina Gavio, "Radikalisierung und Antimilitarismus: Die Entwicklung der politischen Haltung der Sozialistischen Jugendorganisation in der Schweiz von 1900-1918," (Universität Zürich: Licentiate Thesis, November 2000), 6-10.

[17] Trentmann, *Paradoxes of Civil Society,* 9-10.

[18] Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture,* 159-160.

with socialism, their primary function was to establish a counter-cultural milieu that fostered a sense of community. Their class-based sociability, along with shared symbols and behaviors, "created emotional bonds that were just as important for the vitality of the cultural world of the labor movement as party loyalty and ideological commitment."[19] Similar to their counterparts in Germany, the SJO originated as an educational society aimed at improving the lives of working-class youth through activities such as singing, sports, and hiking.[20] However, it introduced an additional layer of age-based social-culture, as its membership consisted largely of teenagers and young adults. This created a subculture within the broader "Alternative Culture" of working-class civil associations.[21] The SJO's socio-cultural ties based on shared class and age extended across national borders, forming a transnational community.

The SJO was notable for fostering a social circle that included non-Swiss members like Mimiola, who came from other German-speaking areas of Central Europe, and even individuals from as far away as Russia. The war highlighted divisions between adult and youth associations. While adult educational societies largely aligned with the moderate Social Democratic Party and trade unions in supporting the war effort, working-class youth remained committed to opposing imperialist wars that led only to the shedding of proletarian blood. This was true both in Germany and Switzerland. The SJO criticized the German military and government officials, including those in the social democratic parties, who supported mobilization. Consequently, an organized interstate community emerged whose shared ideology and socio-cultural identity was inherently antagonistic to Germany's war efforts.

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[19] Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture,* 50, 74.

[20] Jost, *Linksradikalismus in der Deutschen Schweiz,* 16-17.

[21] The International Bureau for Socialist Youth Organizations recognized this social union through counter-culture trends among the youth as early as 1908, see SoArc, Ar 5.10.1, Das Internationale Bureau der sozialistischen Jugendorganisation, *Internationale Verbindung der sozialistischen Jugendorganisation* (July 1908); also, see Jacob Feldner, *Deutsche Jugend und Weltkrieg* (Zürich: Art. Institut Orell Füssli, 1918)*,* 7-22.

6.2.1: Origins of the Swiss Socialist Youth Organization

Socialist politics developed relatively late in Switzerland compared to its neighbors, largely a result of its late industrialization. Although some local cantonal parties existed, the Swiss Social Democratic Party was not founded until 1888. Trade union participation was also relatively weak, with the national Swiss Trade Union Federation established only in 1880. Instead, the everyday working class engaged with international socialism mainly through educational and entertainment civic societies, an area where Switzerland had a rich tradition. One of the most significant transnational relationships in this context was the German workers' association, "Eintracht," founded in Zurich in 1840.[22] The association emerged from a mix of German political refugees, particularly after 1848, and German craftsmen immigrating to Switzerland for work. Its primary purpose was to provide a social outlet through recreational activities such as lectures, gymnastics, theater, and even operating a dining hall for formal gatherings and events. When addressing socio-political issues in its early years, it gravitated more towards national-liberalism akin to the original Pan-German activists in Switzerland than to international socialism.[23]

Switzerland's sheltering of German socialists during Bismarck's Anti-Socialists Laws in the 1880s contributed to Eintracht's transition from national liberalism to international socialism.[24] Many German socialists in exile joined Eintracht and the association published their journals and other propaganda material to smuggle back into Germany, establishing a precedent for cross-border socialist agitation decades before the war. Industrialization also accelerated in Switzerland during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with factory production flourishing in the eastern regions of the country. From the outset, Swiss factories relied on foreign laborers

[22] Jost, *Linksradikalismus in der Deutschen Schweiz,* 67-70.
[23] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 149-178.
[24] Dame, *History of Switzerland,* vol. 3, 231-232.

to fill their workforce, leading to waves of immigration into eastern urban centers such as Zurich and Basel. Germans comprised the majority of these laborers with poor youth from the Swiss countryside seeking better economic opportunities forming a second major source of industrial labor.[25] Meanwhile, following the repeal of Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws in 1890, the intellectual elite of the German socialist movement returned to Germany. This departure left a void in societies like Eintracht, which was soon filled by newly arriving workers eager for sociability and resources.[26] As a result, these educational societies developed a new distinctly proletarian outlook, combining German and German-Swiss participation.

While it maintained a close relationship with the Social Democrats, Eintracht became home to many revolutionary socialists who diverged from the official Swiss party's mainstream positions. One Swiss socialist who joined Eintracht's social circle at the turn of the century was Fritz Platten, who later acted as Lenin's negotiator with the German Ambassador.[27] Platten was born in St. Gallen in 1883 to German immigrant parents. Unlike the Pan-German Swiss, whose fathers were often political refugees, Platten's father was a working-class woodworker who had immigrated seeking economic opportunity. As a teenager, Platten moved to Zurich and began an apprenticeship in locksmithing, enduring long hours in harsh work environments. Like many Swiss youth seeking employment in Zurich, Platten became involved with Eintracht, eventually earning a leadership position within the organization before the war. Platten's socialist education and connections with foreign immigrants in Eintracht shaped his ideological development. This influence led him to participate in the Russian Revolution in 1905, for which he was imprisoned in Russia until 1908. Upon his release and return to Switzerland, Platten emerged as a prominent

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[25] Erich Gruner, *Arbeiterschaft und Wirtschaft in der Schweiz, 1880-1914*: *soziale Lage, Organisation und Kämpfe von Arbeitern und Unternehmern, politische Organisation und Sozialpolitik,* vol. 1 (Zürich: Chronos, 1987), 165.

[26] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 247-265; Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 384-392.

[27] Jost, *Linksradikalismus in der Deutschen Schweiz,* 37-45; Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 360-370.

local socialist within the Swiss Social Democrats, ultimately securing an official position in Zurich's government.

While youth were welcomed in Eintracht, they often found its activities dull. In 1900, Zurich pastor and socialist Paul Pflüger addressed this issue by founding the *schweizerische Jungburschenvereine*, later known as the *Sozialdemokratische Jugendorganisation* (SJO) or colloquially as the *Freie Jugend.*[28] The SJO's establishment was tied to shifts in youth culture during the 1900s, which resulted in a wave of youth associations across German-speaking Europe, part of what historians call the German Youth Movement.[29] These included working-class associations as well as rivals like the Boy Scouts and Wandervögel, a romanticist back-to-nature society whose unsupervised Alpine hikes drew criticism from the Swiss Alpine Club. Initially, Pflüger organized the SJO as an anti-alcohol club for working-class youth aged 15 to 20, offering lectures and consumption-free entertainment events, a principle it upheld even during the First World War.[30] Pflüger, an ideological moderate, tried to manage the SJO as a youth auxiliary of the Social Democratic Party under party guidance. Despite initial membership growth, young members soon complained that the SJO resembled Eintracht's atmosphere of old men lecturing while they silently observed. Rather than abandoning the SJO, the youth wrested control from Pflüger, especially after launching their journal *Skorpion* in 1907.[31] Under youth leadership, the association adopted a culture of rebelliousness and shifted ideologically towards anarchism rather than socialism. They spent their time reading authors like Heinrich Heine

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[28] Willi Münzenberg, *Aus der Geschichte der sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz* (Zürich: Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz, 1916), 5-7.

[29] Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement,* (1962; repr., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 2018), 66-67; Deutsche Zentrale für Jugendfürsorge, *Der Kampf der Parteien um die Jungen* (Berlin: Verlag von Otto Liebmann, 1912), 9-24.

[30] SoArc, Ar 5.10.8, *Statutes* (March 25, 1900); SoArc, Ar 5.40.1, Band 1, *Die Schweizerischen Jungburschenvereine*, 2 ed. (1910); SoArc, Ar 150.20.1, Julius Mimiola and Wilhelm Münzenberg, *Statuten der Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz* (May 1, 1914).

[31] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 65-66; Gavio, "Radikalisierung und Antimilitarismus," 11-15.

rather than Karl Marx, with their social activities bordering on hooliganism in the streets.[32] The SJO's unruly nature persisted for several years and limited its expansion outside of Zurich. This changed dramatically when Willi Münzenberg joined in 1910.

Münzenberg's upbringing exemplified the experience of working-class youth in Germany at the turn of the century. Born in Thuringia in 1889, he spent his childhood near Erfurt, where his family operated a struggling roadside inn.[33] His mother died when he was four years old, and he faced significant hardships under his alcoholic and abusive father. At the age of 14, after his father's suicide, Münzenberg moved to Erfurt to live with his older sister. He initially worked as a barber's apprentice but was mistreated by his master. Apprentices often endured grueling work schedules (hundreds of hours per week) for minimal pay and were vulnerable to physical abuse as there were few to no legal protections for them. Münzenberg quit after suffering a head injury caused by his master throwing objects at him. He then found work in a shoe factory, where he was first introduced to socialist civic associations in 1906. A colleague invited him to attend a lecture at the local educational society called "Propaganda," and he quickly became one of its leading activists.[34]

Germany witnessed a development of socialist youth organizations similar to that of Switzerland between 1903 and 1906.[35] After gaining experience in "Propaganda," Münzenberg became the leading organizer for a socialist youth association in Erfurt called *Freie Jugend Erfurt* that was connected to a larger movement out of Berlin in 1907. Around this time, he was first introduced to Liebknecht and his anti-militarist ideology through the *Junge Garde* journal.[36] In 1908, he attended the Social Democratic Youth's conference in Berlin, one of the first national

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[32] Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 266-286; McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire,* 20-21.
[33] Green, *Willi Münzenberg,* 9-21.
[34] Ibid., 16.
[35] McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire,* 13.
[36] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 20-23; Laqueur, *Young Germany*, 67.

gatherings for socialist youth.[37] Liebknecht delivered a keynote speech advocating antimilitarism among the youth, which was met with widespread acclaim. This event followed the publication of Liebknecht's *Militarism and Anti-Militarism* in 1907, a work that resulted in Liebknecht serving a brief prison sentence. While the SPD loathed the book, it resonated deeply with young activists like Münzenberg, becoming a cornerstone of his ideological beliefs, even surpassing Marx's writings in influence. Liebknecht further addressed militarism during the International Socialist Youth Congress in Stuttgart in September 1907, the first international gathering of socialist youth.[38] At this congress, an international bureau for socialist youth was established with its headquarters in Vienna, and Liebknecht was selected as its president, a testament to the widespread support for his anti-militarist stance among the youth.

The combination of Liebknecht's *Militarism and Anti-Militarism* and his public speeches exhausted the German authorities' tolerance for his antimilitarist stance. In October 1907, shortly after the International Socialist Youth Congress, Liebknecht was arrested and sentenced to a year and a half in prison. This provoked major demonstrations from youth and workers' associations alike. However, it also drew concern from SPD leadership over the increasingly confrontational political activities of socialist youth. In 1908, the Reichstag passed the German Law of Association, which the SPD celebrated as a political triumph.[39] The law standardized and liberalized participation in civic associations, including granting adult women across all German states the right to join political groups. This led to a substantial increase in SPD membership. However, the law imposed severe restrictions on the rights of association of youth. Working-

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[37] Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg: A Political Biography,* trans. Marian Jackson (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1974)*,* 17-18.

[38] Münzenberg, *Aus der Geschichte der sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz,* 41-54; see how its platform was planned around antimilitarism in SoArc, Ar 5.10.1, H. de Man to the Zentralvorstand der schweizerischen Jungburschenvereine in Zürich, March 19, 1907.

[39] Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture,* 31.

class youths were now prohibited from participating in associations deemed political. If they wished to form or join civic associations, these had to focus exclusively on education.[40] While northern youth associations aligned with SPD leadership managed to adapt to these restrictions, the activism of southern chapters essentially evaporated.[41]

6.2.2: Willi Münzenberg and the SJO, 1910-1914

Münzenberg sought to maintain a politically active and independent youth organization in Erfurt, even at the risk of violating the law.[42] However, after a short imprisonment in 1909, he decided to leave Germany for better opportunities to practice his political activism abroad.[43] He arrived in Zurich in July 1910 with no intentions of staying. He initially approached Eintracht seeking financial aid to continue his journey through Switzerland and onward to France.[44] Through Eintracht, he was introduced to Max Bock, the leader of the SJO, as another potential source of assistance. Bock, a German socialist youth who had immigrated to Switzerland in search of greater social and political freedom, had risen to prominence within the SJO's Aussersihl chapter after filling the leadership void left by Pflüger. While Bock attempted to persuade Münzenberg to remain in Zurich, he was unsuccessful because he could not provide adequate resources to support him. Münzenberg continued to Bern, where he once again found himself short on funds. He was convinced to return to Zurich after Bock arranged a position for a job for him as a pharmacist's assistant.

Despite Bock's leadership, Münzenberg found the SJO in a state of uncoordinated unruliness. Drawing on his experience as a leader in Germany's socialist youth movement, he quickly assumed leadership over the Aussersihl chapter and set out to instill discipline over the

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[40] Alfred Rußbaum, *Zur Jugendfrage* (Bremen: Buchhandlung der Bremer Bürger-Zeitung, 1916), 17-31.
[41] Deutsche Zentrale für Jugendfürsorge, *Der Kampf der Parteien um die Jugend,* 24-28.
[42] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 13; 29-32; 44-45.
[43] McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire,* 16-19; Green, *Willi Münzenberg,* 20-21.
[44] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 20-21.

SJO in Zurich. He implemented fundamental changes to the organization's educational and recreational events, promoting opportunities that were not overtly radical, yet permeated with antimilitarism.[45] Münzenberg organized lectures on diverse subjects, from history to science, and introduced programs to educate working-class youth about their local and national labor rights.[46] For recreation, he sought to curb hooligan behavior by adopting structured activities that had proven successful in other youth associations. He notably increased the number of organized hikes and trips to historical monuments. These reforms proved highly effective, leading to the SJO's first wave of increased membership after 1910, from 420 to 540 in 1911, following years of stagnation since its founding.[47]

Once Münzenberg had successfully attracted working-class youth to the SJO through its educational and recreational offerings, he focused on eliminating its anarchistic ideology.[48] He promoted the study of orthodox Marxist writings in the Zurich chapters, but placed particular emphasis on the works of his idol, Karl Liebknecht. However, this shift was not well received by all members, leading to backlash from the anarchist youth. Rather than seeking a compromise, Münzenberg was resolute in allowing these dissenting elements to leave the association entirely. While some chapters reported drops in membership as a result, the SJO's quarterly reports still reflected Münzenberg' overall recruitment success, showing a net increase in membership across the organization.

An early test of the SJO's evolving political activities occurred in July 1912, when a group of predominantly foreign workers in Zurich's painting and finishing industry went on strike over wages and working hours. The employers hired strikebreakers, leading to

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[45] SoArc, Ar.5.40.1, Band 1, *Frührot: Jahrbuch des Soz. Jugendorganistaion Zürich* III (1911).
[46] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 74-87.
[47] Münzenberg, *Aus der Geschichte der Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation,* 27.
[48] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 74-87.

confrontations in the streets. During one such clash, a strikebreaker shot and killed a striker, triggering widespread outrage among Zurich's working-class population.[49] On July 12, a general strike, the largest in the city's history at that point, was declared, with over 20,000 workers demonstrating peacefully in the streets.[50] In response, the local and cantonal governments called in the military to suppress the strike. Authorities blamed foreign workers for the unrest and retaliated by blacklisting individuals from employment and even expelling some from Switzerland.[51] Although the SJO played only an auxiliary role in the strike, it became a target for government scrutiny due to its significant immigrant membership, as did Eintracht. Bock, because of his German origins and reputation as a prominent left-wing agitator in Zurich's socialist circles, was singled out by authorities and he was expelled from Zurich.[52]

Münzenberg replaced Bock as president of the SJO, then accelerated the reorganization and expansion of the association. Much of this success relied on a dedicated council of youth leaders that he assembled between 1912 and 1913. This group included several holdovers from Bock's administration, notably Edy Meyer. Meyer had served as Bock's right-hand man, acting as the organization's secretary and editor for its publications, including *Vorposten*, an antimilitarist journal published briefly between 1905 and 1906.[53] Though he later stepped back from public-facing roles, Meyer became the SJO's archivist and managed much of its daily correspondence, a crucial task given Münzenberg's notoriously illegible handwriting. Additionally, a core group of young men supported Münzenberg by managing propaganda efforts and serving as skilled public speakers at lectures and recruitment events. This group included Mimiola, Paul Ruegg, Ferdinand Böhny, Ernst Marti, and Willi Trostel. Both Trostel and

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[49] Ibid., 106.
[50] Brupbacher, *Erinnerungen eines Revoluzzers*, 60-61; Urner, *Die Deutschen in der Schweiz,* 393.
[51] Jost, *Linksradikilismus in der Deutschen Schweiz,* 18.
[52] Green, *Münzenberg,* 29-32.
[53] Gavio, "Radikalisierung und Antimilitarismus," 20-21.

Mimiola had backgrounds in the publishing industry and were closely connected to Eintracht's more radical social circle.[54] Trostel, born in Zurich to German immigrant parents in 1894, only became a Swiss citizen in 1913, as children were not automatically naturalized at birth in Switzerland.[55] Böhny and Ruegg were Zurich natives, while Marti hailed from Aargau. Professionally, Böhny worked as a clerical assistant, Ruegg was an apprentice in the merchant trade, and Marti trained as a machinist apprentice.[56]

Within this inner circle, Münzenberg also included an ever-growing number of young women who were essential to the SJO's expansion and activities. This stood in stark contrast to other civic associations surveyed in this study. Münzenberg advocated for women to be treated as equal members within SJO sections as early as 1911.[57] By 1912, he supported the formation of separate groups dedicated to women's issues while ensuring they retained equal rights within general sections.[58] The increasing presence of women in leadership roles, including seats on the SJO central committee leading up to 1918, further solidified the organization's position as part of an "Alternative Culture" within Swiss civil society. One of the most prominent young women in Münzenberg's circle was Anny Morf, a Swiss factory seamstress who emerged as a leader among young working women in Zurich's textile industry before joining the SJO.[59] Her writing and speaking abilities were instrumental to Münzenberg's goals, extending beyond outreach to women. Her proficiency in French was particularly significant, driving the SJO's expansion into Western Switzerland. By 1914, Morf and Edy Meyer had laid durable foundations for socialist youth groups in French-speaking urban areas, starting with the industrial hub of Chaux-de-

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[54] Gavio, "Radikalisierung und Antimilitarismus," 56n284.

[55] SFA, E21#1000/131#10677, Polizeikommando des Kantons Zürich to the Bundesanwaltschaft, September 18, 1919.

[56] SFA, E21#1000/131#9778, Steiner, kantonales Polizeikommando, [Untitled] (August 30, 1916).

[57] SoArc, Ar 5.40.1, Band 1, *Frührot: Jahrbuch des Soz. Jugendorganisation Zürich III* (1911); Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 87-89.

[58] *Die Zukunft: Jahrbuch der sozialdemokrat. Jugendorganisation Zürich* (1914), 12.

[59] SFA, E21#1000/131#9778, Steiner, kantonales Polizeikommando, August 30, 1916.

Fonds.[60] Münzenberg also relied on Morf as a lecturer for educational programs, recruitment efforts, and agitation campaigns across Switzerland.

Münzenberg, Meyer, Trostel, and others revamped the SJO's journal and agitation materials. Following the failure of the original periodical, *Skorpion,* after just one year, the organization relied on sporadic newsletters until Münzenberg joined in 1910. The new journal adopted the name *Freie Jugend* and aimed to function as a quarterly publication. Meyer managed the paper until Münzenberg assumed the role of editor in 1912. The journal featured club news, event notifications from the international socialist youth movement, and ideological educational content focused on foundational Marxist texts and antimilitarist writings. Perhaps the most influential aspect was its inclusion of stories, many firsthand accounts, detailing the everyday abuses faced by working-class youth. These narratives served as powerful recruitment tools and fueled agitation efforts advocating for reforms, such as the implementation of new apprenticeship laws.[61] This approach proved highly effective, moving the publication from the brink of collapse to self-sufficiency with significantly expanded circulation nationally and internationally.

In 1912, Fritz Brupbacher contributed a controversial antimilitarist article to *Freie Jugend* following Kaiser Wilhelm II's visit to Zurich.[62] Brupbacher, a Zurich doctor and Eintracht member, was a regular lecturer for the SJO since before Münzenberg's immigration.[63] Ideologically, he professed a socialism that leaned toward libertine anarchism rather than the gradual reformism championed by the Social Democrats. He also espoused antimilitarist views, a significant faux pas even among Social Democrats due to the Swiss military system's status as a national symbol. His piece in the *Freie Jugend* criticized the Prussianization of the Swiss

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[60] SoArc, Ar 5.10.6, Soz. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz Zentralkomittee to Genossen!, End of April 1914.

[61] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 87.

[62] Ibid., 110-113.

[63] *Der Skorpion,* no. 4 (July 1907).

military and denounced Swiss acceptance of honors from the Kaiser during his visit. This sparked outrage within Social Democratic leadership, which demanded Brupbacher's expulsion from both the party and affiliated associations. A hearing took place with Eintracht's leadership and Platten supervising the proceedings.[64] The SJO rallied in defense of Brupbacher, applying pressure that ultimately forced Eintracht and the Social Democrats to abandon their efforts to expel him.[65] Although Münzenberg had removed anarchistic elements from the SJO, this incident highlighted continuing tensions between the youth association and other socialist groups, including the Social Democrats.

Lastly, Münzenberg achieved a significant milestone in expanding the SJO by forming chapters in rural areas of the country for the first time.[66] He dedicated weeks to traveling daily to small towns, tirelessly agitating for the SJO and establishing new sections, often comprising just a small group of young individuals. This initiative had an immediate impact on membership growth. When Münzenberg assumed leadership in 1912, the SJO consisted of only 20 sections concentrated in Eastern Switzerland's urban centers, with 493 members. By April 1914, on the eve of war, Edy Meyer reported that the SJO had quadrupled its reach to 80 sections spanning all of Switzerland and had grown to 1,342 members.[67] Even during the war, the SJO witnessed explosive growth, reaching 149 sections and 4,729 members by the end of 1916 alone.[68]

With its new ideological foundation and expanded membership, three pivotal events shaped the SJO's sociocultural and transnational network before the start of the war. By late

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[64] SoArc, Ar 3.40.6, Richter, *Protokolle der Unionsdelegierten Sitzungen der „Eintracht:" Kombinierte Sitzung* (December 17, 1912).

[65] SoArc, Ar 150.20.2, Zentralvorstand der Sozialdemokratischen Jugendorganisation der Schweiz, "Bericht des Zentralpräsidenten." Seperatabdruck aus dem *Jahrbuch der Sozialdemokratischen Partei der Schweiz und des Schweizerischen Grütliverein* ([1912]).

[66] For an example of towns in the Interlaken area, see SoArc, Ar 5.10.5, P. Oldani to E. Meyer, June 8, 1913.

[67] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 129.

[68] Münzenberg, *Aus der Geschichte der Sozialdemokratischen Jugendorganisation* 27.

1912, the SJO leadership had revitalized its involvement in the international youth movement. Although the SJO had been an early member of the International Youth Bureau, Münzenberg actively pushed it into a leading role, moving beyond its previously passive participation. The SJO's strongest international ties remained with the German youth movement. Despite being politically constrained by the Association Law of 1908, German youth associations persisted under SPD oversight, with some radical elements continuing to engage in political activism. Münzenberg maintained close connections with these groups, frequently dispatching SJO delegates to attend conferences and events while hosting German representatives in Switzerland. In July 1911, Münzenberg hosted Karl Liebknecht, his ideological hero, in Zurich for a speech and demonstration against militarism.[69] In the other direction, the SJO attended an international youth conference host in Stuttgart by the German youth in 1913.[70] The SJO sent a large delegation that included Münzenberg, Trostel, Mimiola, and others. These attendees smuggled copies of Liebknecht's banned book, *Militarism and Antimilitarism*, into Germany by concealing them within their clothes, suitcases, and provisions. This marked the establishment of a precedent-setting network for cross-border antimilitarist agitation. [71]

Even after Münzenberg assumed leadership in 1912, the SJO continued to struggle financially, often teetering on insolvency. While Eintracht provided assistance on multiple occasions, Münzenberg courted stronger ties with the Social Democrats and trade unions to secure a more stable financial foundation. However, he carefully navigated these negotiations to maintain the SJO's independence and avoid the kind of suppression of activity experienced by socialist youth organizations in Germany. By the end of 1913, the three parties reached an

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[69] SoArc, Ar 5.40.1, Band 1, *Frührot: Jahrbuch des Soz. Jugendorganisation Zürich III* (1911); Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 87-89.

[70] SoArc, Ar. 5.10.5, Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation Basel, Die Festkommission to Jugendgenossen und Genossinnen!, July 12, 1913.

[71] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 132-133.

agreement.[72] The SJO would receive supplementary funding from both groups, while the Social Democrats were granted the right to appoint a representative in an advisory role within the SJO's administration. Although this could have signaled a loss of independence, the first (and only) Social Democrat chosen for this role was Fritz Platten.[73] By late 1913, Platten had already established himself as a leader in Zurich politics, served on Eintracht's central committee, and was a trusted ally of the socialist youth movement. He was soon appointed secretary of the entire Social Democratic Party due to his influence in Zurich at the start of the war. Despite his official positions, Platten, ideologically and socially, diverged from the moderate, reformist leadership of the Social Democratic Party. Additionally, the SJO's new statutes from the agreement now required those who aged out after 20 years old to join the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions.[74] While socialist adults may have believed this would bolster their numbers and strengthen their influence over youth, the opposite occurred. The influx of young members, shaped by an ideological education and social connections fostered in the SJO, created upward pressure for more revolutionary policies, especially antimilitarism.

Finally, at the end of 1913, Münzenberg and his circle completed a major reorganization of the SJO's administrative structure.[75] They established a new secretariat position to oversee the entire organization, with Münzenberg assuming the role, allowing him to continue leading the SJO into his mid-twenties. A new executive central committee was formed with positions for president, secretary, treasurer, and more.[76] Members of Münzenberg's loyal inner circle rotated in and out of these roles throughout the war. Platten was also given a seat as the party

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[72] *Die Zukunft: Jahrbuch der sozialdemokrat. Jugendorganisation Zurich* (1914).

[73] SoArc, Ar 5.10.5, *Präsenzliste: IX Delegiertenversammlung, Liste No. 21* (March 23 and 24, 1913).

[74] SoArc, Ar 150.20.1, Julius Mimiola and Wilhelm Münzenberg, *Statuten der Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz* (May 1, 1914).

[75] SoArc, Ar 5.10.5, Münzenberg, Trostel, Mimiola to the Sektionen der Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation in der Schweiz, October 1913; Münzenberg, *Aus der Geschichte der sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz*, 34-36.

[76] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 125-128.

representative, and there appeared to be little external pressure to replace him.[77] These changes faced dissent from individuals and nearly entire sections across Switzerland, particularly from some of the old guard in other industrial centers. The SJO leadership dismissed these critics as remnants of its anarchist era and held an organizational assembly in Olten on November 14 to address the issue. Münzenberg's faction won the vote, prompting some members to leave the organization. However, the recent surge in recruitment meant that these departures had minimal effect on the SJO's activity.[78]

By the start of the war, the SJO had become a nationwide network of working-class youth led by a capable leader and a loyal circle managing its multifaceted activities. On the surface, it remained an educational and recreational society appealing to everyday working class youth, but its ideological foundation was firmly rooted in international socialism, particularly Liebknecht's antimilitarist principles. The SJO had also evolved into an effective agitation organization through propaganda materials and street demonstrations. Its reach began extending internationally via its involvement in the Youth International and its smuggling of banned socialist materials beyond Swiss borders. Münzenberg could not manage such an extensive operation alone. Instead, the SJO relied on an experienced and trustworthy group of youth activists who represented an entire "alternative culture" within Swiss civil society and, as the start of the war would soon demonstrate, within international socialism.

6.3.1: Fragmentation of International Socialism, 1914-1915

In fact, the roots of international socialism's disintegration can be traced back to November 1912 at the International Socialist Congress in Basel, rather than the outbreak of war in August 1914. The conference was convened as a socialist peace demonstration during the

[77] SoArc, Ar 5.10.6, A. Studer and M. Fähndrich to the Centralvorstand der sozial. Jugendorganisation in der Schweiz, January 5, 1914.

[78] SoArc, Ar 150.20.1, Ed Meyer to E. Arnold, January 1, 1914.

Balkan wars, aiming to showcase the working class's unity against imperialist conflicts. Although the SJO did not directly participate, it sent a group to agitate on an antimilitarist platform outside the congress.[79] The congress concluded with an antiwar resolution, urging all socialist parties to "exert every effort in order to prevent the outbreak of war by the means they consider most effective."[80] If war broke out, it called upon socialists to provoke a crisis in order to accelerate the collapse of capitalist class rule rather than support a national war effort.

With the outbreak of war in August 1914, socialist parties across the belligerent states abandoned the Basel Resolution and rallied behind their respective nations' war efforts. In Germany, the SPD supported the *Burgfrieden* and voted in favor of war credits, while trade unions and socialist working-class organizations marched to the beat of wartime nationalism. The International Socialist Bureau, located in Brussels, was effectively paralyzed due to the German invasion. Eintracht suffered greatly due to the exodus of foreign workers, particularly Germans who left to answer the call for mobilization. Platten and Bronski attempted to salvage the association, but it ceased operations entirely in 1916.[81] In an effort to salvage the Second International, Robert Grimm convened a conference for socialists from neutral states. However, this attempt also failed as only the Swiss and Italian socialist parties agreed to meet in Lugano. The resulting resolution reaffirmed support for the Basel conference but lacked substantive impact. During debates with Italian delegates, even Grimm conceded that if Switzerland were attacked, Swiss Social Democrats "would also be forced to defend it. […] We will seek to defend

[79] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 117-119.

[80] SoArc, Ar 1.260.1, *Manifest der Internationale zur gegenwärtigen Lage: Resolutionen am Basler Kongreß 24-25 November 1912*.

[81] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 143-144; Senn, *The Russian Revolution,* 25-26, 151.

our neutrality to the last moment." This admission revealed that the core of the Swiss Social Democrats shared a fundamentally "social patriot" stance.[82]

The SJO diverged sharply from the trajectory of other socialist associations during the war, remaining an outlier that upheld the Basel Resolution's commitment to resisting imperialist wars. Münzenberg, still a German citizen of military age, refused to return to Germany and instead claimed political asylum in Switzerland. While some SJO members returned home to serve in belligerent armies, Münzenberg's inner circle retained its cohesion. However, several members, including Trostel and Marti, fulfilled their obligatory rotations with the Swiss military stationed at the border.[83] Remarkably, the SJO experienced membership growth during this period, reaching 2,000 members by December 1914, a trend that continued throughout the war.[84] The departure of foreign adult workers left Swiss industries dependent on youth labor, shifting new working-class sociopolitical energy toward younger demographics. This dynamic enabled the SJO to replace the Eintracht as the centerpiece of socialism in civil society.

In early 1915, two important events shaped the SJO's agitation activities and cemented much of its wartime ideological goals. First, fractures began to appear within the SPD by November 1914. A small faction of socialists opposing Germany's war effort coalesced around Rosa Luxemburg during the fall of 1914, with Karl Liebknecht among its members. Although Liebknecht had initially voted in favor of war credits in the Reichstag in August, he broke with the party by refusing to support an extension of these credits in December 1914.[85] This emerging circle represented an anti-war, anti-militarist, and revolutionary minority bloc that would later adopt the name Spartacus League in 1916. Alongside Liebknecht and Luxemburg, prominent

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[82] SoArc, Ar. 1.260.1, *Protokoll der Zusammenkunft der schweizerischen und italienischen Sozialdemokraten in Lugano* (September 27, 1914).

[83] SFA, E21#1000/131#10682, E. Marti to Dr. Bickel, December 10, 1918.

[84] *Die Zukunft: Jahrbuch der sozialdemokrat. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz 1914* (1915).

[85] Merle Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 29-49.

German socialist leaders such as Otto Rühle, closely connected to socialist youth educational societies, aligned with the nascent Spartacus League by early 1915.[86] While the majority of the SPD opposed this radical faction, divisions within Germany's youth movement became evident as support for the war effort waned among its ranks. German authorities, supported by SPD social patriots, began a crackdown on the Spartacus League shortly after Liebknecht's rebellion in the Reichstag. Police confiscated the group's publications, preventing them from issuing any stable periodical in 1915.[87] Leaders of the Spartacus League faced official intimidation, and Liebknecht, despite his position in the Reichstag, was arrested and conscripted into military service in February 1915.

In Zurich, the SJO publicly protested Liebknecht's arrest and became a stronghold for the Spartacus League, untouchable by German authorities.[88] The SJO stayed committed to its antimilitarist principles and they fully embraced Liebknecht's revolt against the social patriots. Even in September 1914, the front page of *Freie Jugend* featured an image of a wild-haired, sword-wielding youth on horseback accompanied by the caption: "War on War!," echoing much of Liebknecht's prewar, antimilitarist mantras.[89] The publication criticized the social patriots and urged the working-class to halt the war by refusing to participate. By early 1915, the SJO's inner circle had essentially been transformed into a Spartacist colony in Switzerland. The *Freie Jugend* began publishing articles by Liebknecht, Rühle, and other Spartacus leaders while reporting on youth movement factions aligning with the Spartacus cause. By mid-1915, the *Freie Jugend* had evolved from an SJO club newspaper into a transnational outlet for anti-German propaganda.

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[86] Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I,* 178-179; F. L. Carsten, *War against War: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd, 1982), 47.

[87] Stromberg, *Redemption by War,* 170-171.

[88] SoArc, Ar 5.10.6, Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz, *Liebknecht verhaftet und wegen Landesverrat angeklagt!* (May [1915]).

[89] *Freie Jugend,* (September 1914).

Rühle, who could still travel internationally in spring 1915, served as the honorary speaker at the SJO's May Day gathering in Zurich.[90] However, their efforts lacked Lenin's revolutionary perspective of transforming a war between states into a civil war between classes.

Second, Münzenberg paralleled Grimm's efforts in the fall of 1914 by attempting to rally the International Youth Bureau into a unified response. At the time, the bureau's headquarters were in Vienna, under the leadership of Austrian socialist Robert Danneberg. While Danneberg was not a fervent social patriot, he also refrained from taking an anti-war stance, instead succumbing to a state of disheartened inactivity. Münzenberg first tried to reconnect with factions of the German socialist youth movement aligned with Luxemburg's course and suggested a meeting between German and Swiss youth in Switzerland by late 1914. Extending his outreach further, he contacted Italian, Dutch, and Scandinavian youth organizations, convinced there was sufficient support to convene an international youth congress, at least among representatives of neutral countries. However, Danneberg rejected Münzenberg's proposal for such a conference. Refusing to accept defeat, Münzenberg circumvented Danneberg and began organizing the conference himself in Switzerland.[91]

On April 4, 1915, delegates from numerous countries, both neutral and belligerent, met in Bern for an international youth congress organized by Münzenberg and the SJO.[92] This congress was the first, publicly reported international socialist meeting since the start of the war. The only exception was the International Socialist Women's Conference, held privately in Bern just days earlier, from March 26 to 28.[93] Unlike the women's conference, whose proceedings and

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[90] SoArc, Ar 150.20.1, W. Münzenberg to the politischen und gewerkschaftlichen Arbeiterorganisationen in Zurich, Beginning of May 1915.

[91] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 44-45.

[92] SoArc, Ar 5.40.1, Band 1, *Bericht über die internationale Konferenz der sozialistischen Jugendorganisation* (April 4, 5, and 6, 1915); Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War,* 57-58.

[93] Patterson, *The Search for Negotiated Peace,* 67-68.

manifesto remained largely secret, the youth congress received public attention despite being rooted in the SJO's unapologetic antimilitarism. In stark contrast to the mainline socialist parties, discussions at the congress did not focus on whether to oppose the war but rather on how far and in which direction their actions should go. The congress concluded with a resolution endorsing a platform of revolutionary, antimilitarist socialism modeled after the Spartacus League's program.

The Russian delegation at the congress proposed a minority resolution that, while not fully accepted, left a significant mark on the wartime trajectory of the international youth movement. As he had done during the women's conference in March, Lenin worked behind the scenes to direct the efforts of the Russian delegates, pushing his agenda to transform the war into a broader continental civil war.[94] At one point, the Russian delegation even threatened to leave the conference over disputes about voting procedures, an attempt to amplify Lenin's platform. This intervention served as a proving ground for Lenin's strategy, which later solidified at the Zimmerwald Conference with his advocacy for civil war rooted in class struggle through the Zimmerwald Left. Münzenberg and his circle found Lenin's approach intriguing but were initially hesitant to openly endorse it due to concerns about its radical implications. Nevertheless, this moment laid the groundwork for closer collaboration between the SJO and Lenin after his relocation to Zurich later that year, marking the beginning of his revolutionary socialism's influence on the youth movement's activities for the remainder of the war.

After successfully organizing an international youth conference against the wishes of Danneberg's bureau, the youth leaders in Bern decided to establish a new international youth association. With the collapse of the Second International, this marked the first international socialist association formed during the war, predating the Zimmerwald Conference. A central committee was created, comprising representatives from both neutral and belligerent countries,

[94] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 156-160.

though leadership remained firmly under the control of the SJO.[95] Münzenberg was appointed head of the new organization, with Mimiola serving as the Swiss representative and Joseph "Joggi" Herzog as secretary. Herzog, a Swiss youth, had recently emerged as a leader within Zurich's SJO sections in the industrial western part of the city. Known for his ardent revolutionary spirit, Herzog favored on-the-ground actions over published works. The association also launched a new international youth journal, *Jugend-Internationale,* with Münzenberg once again taking on the role of chief editor. Published in Switzerland and distributed to other neutral countries, the journal addresses an international audience for the SJO's antimilitarist agitation. Additionally, the International Youth Bureau established a "Liebknecht Fund," which supported their activities and provided financial aid to youths arrested for antimilitarist agitation.[96]

The conclusion of the conference signaled a major acceleration in the youth movement. This new movement reestablished transnational connections among socialist activists, creating a robust network for social contact and the distribution of agitation propaganda. They emerged as direct challengers to the social patriots, grounding their efforts in Liebknecht's pre-war antimilitarism while beginning to incorporate elements of Lenin's revolutionary doctrine. While historians consider the Zimmerwald movement, formed months later, as the primary opposition to social patriotism, its leadership, figures like Grimm in Switzerland, was largely composed of intellectual elites.[97] In contrast, the youth movement mobilized a mass base by engaging ordinary working-class individuals. Although German authorities effectively suppressed Spartacus activity within Germany, the international youth network based in Switzerland disseminated their

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[95] SoArc, Ar 5.40.1, Band 1, *Bericht über die internationale Konferenz der sozialistischen Jugendorganisation* (April 4, 5, and 6, 1915).

[96] SoArc, Ar 5.40.1, Band 1, *Bericht über die internationale Konferenz der sozialistischen Jugendorganisation* (April 4, 5, and 6, 1915).

[97] For example, see Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War,* 75-76.

anti-imperialist message to a transnational audience. This fostered widespread on-the-ground agitation, which proved far more difficult to contain.

6.3.2: Lenin's *Kegelkub* and SJO's Antimilitarist Agitation, 1915-1916

Zurich became known as a "Red League of Nations" by the end of 1915 due to its growing community of socialist exiles, particularly from Russia.[98] These exiles included Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, anarchists, and ordinary military deserters. However, this influx was certainly not a new phenomenon; Switzerland had served as a haven for Russian political exiles since the late nineteenth century.[99] The country's relaxed laws on freedom of association and asylum as well as its civic association culture, exemplified by organizations like Eintracht, provided essential support to these exiles. Additionally, Swiss universities offered sanctuary, much like they had for German political refugees during the mid-nineteenth century. Some institutions, like the University of Lausanne, hosted so many Russian students and faculty that they were humorously called little Russian islands.[100] Lenin himself had a long history with Switzerland prior to before the First World War. From 1900 to 1914, he frequently traveled in and out of the country, using it as both a place of exile and a base for building his social network of revolutionary socialists. Leveraging Switzerland's liberal publication freedoms and access to libraries renowned for their politically subversive literature, Lenin developed some of his most important doctrinal ideas during this period.

Lenin's extensive experience with Switzerland made it a logical choice for his refuge at the start of the war. In August 1914, he fled Polish Austria-Hungary and settled in Switzerland to evade conscription into the Russian military and potential prosecution by the Central Powers as a

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[98] Fritz Brupbacher, preface to *Die Dritte Front,* by Münzenberg, 7-8; Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1938)*,* 67-68.

[99] Senn, *Russian Revolution*, xiii.

[100] Zeman and Scharlau, *Merchant of Revolution*, 16-17.

foreign agent. While Geneva had been his usual destination during earlier exiles, Lenin opted for Bern due to its proximity to internationalist institutions.[101] In Bern, Lenin refined his revolutionary stance, calling to transform the war into a class-based civil war. Like many revolutionary dissenters in Switzerland, Lenin believed that the catalyst for such a revolution would emerge from the working class in Germany, rather than from Russia, which he deemed socioeconomically underdeveloped. The women's conference, the youth conference, and later the Zimmerwald Conference in 1915 served as platforms to test and promote this strategy. Through these events, Lenin established the Zimmerwald Left, a minority faction that he used to steer the majority towards his vision of a continent-wide civil war rooted in class struggle.

After this series of conferences, Lenin settled in Zurich in February 1916 as the SJO transitioned into their new role as international agitators for revolutionary socialism.[102] Münzenberg recognized Lenin's influence behind the confrontation with the Russian delegation at the international youth congress, but bore no resentment. Instead, he admired Lenin as much as Liebknecht. Shortly after arriving, Münzenberg visited Lenin's apartment, paving the way for other SJO youth leaders to do the same.[103] These visits evolved into nightly gatherings at working-class cafes across Zurich, where Morf, Trostel, Herzog, and others joined Lenin's table, nicknamed the *Kegelklub,* to hear him share his revolutionary message.[104] Lenin also attended SJO events, where he critiqued their ideological direction or presented his own speeches.[105] The youth grew deeply devoted to Lenin during these informal discussions:

> In our personal conversations, we never had the impression that he was putting us under pressure. The way he discussed with us resembled a Socratic dialogue. […] What made

[101] Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel,* 67; Helen Rappaport, *Conspirator: Lenin in Exile* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 257-260.
[102] Rappaport, *Conspirator,* 269-292.
[103] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 48-51.
[104] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 215.
[105] Fritz Brupbacher, *Zürich während Krieg und Landesstreik* (Zürich: Unionsdruckerei, 1928), 63-71.

> us enthusiastic about Lenin was the fact that he took us young people seriously, even when he disagreed with our opinion. Finally, we met a grown man who seriously engaged with us, unlike most of the first- and second-tier Social Democratic Party leaders at the time, who treated us as immature but also sometimes got angry with us when we spoiled their ideas at a meeting. It doesn't require any special knowledge of youth psychology to understand that such behavior by Lenin made a strong impression on us and created in us a willingness to listen to his words.[106]

The group was soon joined by other Bolsheviks within the SJO's social circle, such as Bronksi and Karl Radek, as well as Swiss socialist outsiders like Fritz Brupbacher and Ernst Nobs. Nobs, relatively unknown until taking over *Volksrecht* in July 1915, converted it from a Social Democrat Party paper into a platform for the radical left, Bolsheviks, and youth.[107] Another key figure was Platten, who reconnected with Lenin in Zurich. As the Swiss Social Democratic Party's secretary in 1915 and one of Zimmerwald's three Swiss representatives, Platten supported Lenin's Zimmerwald Left resolution.[108] Together, Lenin's leadership among foreign revolutionaries, Münzenberg' connection to youth activism, Nobs' control of the press, and Platten's influence among workers made the *Kegelklub* the heart of the Zimmerwald Left.

The ideological direction of the SJO's anti-militarist agitation shifted in 1916 under Lenin's influence. Lenin was dissatisfied with their focus on combating militarism through conscientious objection. When brought a draft of the *Freie Jugend* by Edy Meyer before it went to print, Lenin criticized a slogan, "refusal to serve," as bourgeois nonsense. He argued that serving in the military was a more effective way to "decompose" it from within.[109] Münzenberg noted that Lenin's involvement in proofreading the journal led to a clear change in their

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[106] Ferdinand Böhny, *Die Sozialistische Jugendbewegung des Ersten Weltkrieges als politischer Faktor* (n.p.: Oeffentlichen Dienst, 1964), 7-9.

[107] Brupbacher, *Zürich während Krieg und Landesstreik,* 56-57; Jost, *Linksradikalismus in der Deutschen Schweiz,* 36-37.

[108] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 864-865.

[109] SoArc, Ar 5.30.2, Jean to Edy, *Kleine Erinnerungen aus meiner Jungburschezeit von anno 1916,* May 15, 1959.

approach.[110] The *Freie Jugend* gradually shifted its focus from workplace abuses faced by youth to issues affecting military personnel. For example, instead of reporting on harm to apprentices, the journal highlighted cases like a solider from the 72nd Schwyzer Battalion who was court-martialed and sentenced to two months' imprisonment for being six minutes late to his post.[111] The SJO also altered its rhetoric, blending Swiss national symbols such as William Tell and the Rütli Oath with working-class slogans to appeal to soldiers. These references reminded soldiers that their allegiance should be to the Swiss people, not imperialists or capitalists.[112] By mid-1916, the SJO's inner circle embraced Lenin's strategy of revolutionizing the military for a class-based civil war. Upon returning from his own military service in late spring, Trostel published an article in the *Freie Jugend* advocating for revolutionizing the army and arming the people.[113] As Böhny observed, "over time, a purely pacifist attitude became less and less evident. The aim now was to win over the soldiers to the aspirations of the working class."[114] In late August 1916, the Federal Council became alarmed after an SJO pamphlet circulated urging soldiers: "But you, comrades in the trenches, hear our calls and those of the imprisoned Liebknecht: 'Return home from the trenches. Lower your weapons and turn them against the enemy in your own country, who is robbing you of light and sun!'"[115]

The SJO's shift toward anti-militarist, revolutionary ideology gained a transnational platform through Münzenberg and the International Youth Bureau's new journal, *Jugend-Internationale.* Although intended as an international publication, its early issues actually revealed a clear German orientation with content centered on mobilizing action based on the

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[110] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 173-174.
[111] *Freie Jugend,* no. 7, March 26, 1917.
[112] SoArc, Ar 150.20.1, Sozialdemokratische Jugendorganisation der Schweiz, *Laßt hören als alter Zeit* ([N.D.]).
[113] *Freie Jugend,* no. 16 (July 29, 1916).
[114] Böhny, *Die Sozialistische Jugendbewegung des Ersten Weltkrieges als politischer Faktor,* 7-9.
[115] SFA, E21#1000/131#9782, *Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des Schweizerischen Bundesrates* (August 29, 1916).

Spartacist platform. Modeled after *Freie Jugend*, *Jugend-Internationale* combined original anti-militarist essays with contributions from revolutionary allies, primarily Spartacist and Leninist writers. It also featured news and events, creating a communication network for youth associations across Europe. As a result, *Jugend-Internationale* became the SJO's key tool for promoting anti-war agitation in Germany from its base in Switzerland.

This agitation against Germany relied heavily on ensuring that copies of *Jugend-Internationale* and other publications reached German youth. Despite tight surveillance of printed materials crossing the border by German and Swiss authorities, Münzenberg revived a prewar transnational network to smuggle revolutionary socialist content. However, as a German citizen, Münzenberg could not personally transport the material due to the risk of conscription. Instead, he relied on SJO youth, who maintained freedom of interstate travel as Swiss citizens. Emil Arnold and Herzog were among the first to undertake this mission, traveling to Berlin between December 1915 and April 1916 to establish contact with the Spartacists. Although they managed to deliver only small quantities of materials, their efforts paved the way for larger operations to come.[116] Münzenberg recounts in his wartime memoir several of their inventive smuggling tactics.[117] Swiss youth couriers hid publications stitched inside their clothes and suitcases. Others mailed papers concealed in jars labeled as jams and jellies. In another method, the SJO inserted their publications into tightly bound volumes of the *Berliner Illustierte Zeitung,* one of the illustrated papers circulated in Switzerland for pro-German propaganda, and sent them back into Germany. The SJO also received updates from Germany through an intricate network of young female workers who exchanged letters between the two countries:

> For example, a girl was informed by her friend in Leipzig that the youth militia had once again gone on a well-attended outing, with many participants, and that despite the

[116] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 47-48.
[117] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 192-196.

> agitators in the country who still refused to understand how necessary patriotic training was, the old battle song "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" were heard and that […] the 'toys' sent had arrived safely and had been enthusiastically received by the 'children everywhere. The military censorship, of course, saw no reason to stop such cards; on the contrary, they hoped to use them to spread good patriotic propaganda abroad. But to us, the card told us something completely different. We translated them according to the agreed key and learned that a Young Socialist demonstration had taken place in Leipzig with a large number of participants, that the police had intervened […], and that several demonstrators had been arrested and were in prison.[118]

Münzenberg also noted instances where packages containing wooden toy horses were used to smuggle articles by Liebknecht and other Spartacists. These reports and writings were incorporated into the *Jugend-Internationale,* allowing German youth to stay informed about events in their own country while fueling further agitation efforts.

The most influential of these efforts occurred during an expedition orchestrated around the same time as Arnold and Herzog's first mission. Rather than crossing the German-Swiss border directly, the materials were first sent to the Netherlands, where they were concealed behind paintings of Kaiser Wilhelm II. These packages were then forwarded to Bremen and retrieved by their German Zimmerwald ally Paul Frölich. Frölich delivered them to German youth in Leipzig, who distributed the content throughout Germany while reserving some copies for duplication in printing shops located in Saxony and Hof, Bavaria.[119] In essence, the SJO ran a clandestine and revolutionary printing press that channeled a steady flow of agitation, including Bolshevik materials, into Germany.

The prominence of Spartacist material was evident from the first edition of *Jugend-Internationale*.[120] Its central articles included Edwin Hoernle's "Die Internationale is Tot! Es lebe die Internationale," an anti-patriotic socialist call for peace, and Rühle's "Klassenkampf-Massenkampf," which urged mass proletarian demonstrations against the capitalist war.

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[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 204-207.
[120] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 1 (September 1, 1915).

However, this inaugural issue also showed early signs of Leninist influence, featuring contributions by Karl Radek and Alexandra Kollontai. Notably, the first serialized piece to span multiple issues was not Liebknecht's *Militarism and Anti-Militarism,* but Maxim Gorky's *Danko's Burning Heart*. By late 1916, *Jugend-Internationale* began including pieces from youth contributors rather than focusing solely on writings by intellectual allies. A major development was the inclusion of letters from "in the trenches," which provided firsthand accounts of the suffering internationally experienced by young soldiers at the frontlines. These accounts aligned with the SJO's growing emphasis on antimilitarist agitation within military ranks.[121]

Liebknecht's arrest after an anti-war demonstration in Berlin on May Day 1916, which carried the slogan "Bread, Freedom, Peace," prompted *Jugend-Internationale* to dedicate its June edition to him, with the front-page article written by Karl Radek.[122] The SJO further amplified their agitation efforts by publishing a separate pamphlet protesting Liebknecht's arrest and releasing an edition of *Freie Jugend* dedicated to "our Liebknecht."[123] Later that summer, *Jugend-Internationale* reported on protests by German youth in response to Liebknecht's imprisonment, especially demonstrations in Berlin and Stuttgart that drew a response by German military authorities.[124] In March 1917, the SJO obtained and reprinted Liebknecht's official response to treason charges added to his sentencing.[125] This letter emphasized his call for social revolution of the working class in Germany as a means to counter the capitalist-driven war. Liebknecht's message also aligned closely with Münzenberg's belief that Germany was the key

[121] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 6 (December 1, 1916).
[122] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 4 (June 1, 1916); for his arrest, see Carsten, *War against War,* 83.
[123] SoArc, Ar 150.20.2, Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz, Liebknecht verhaftet und wegen Landesverat angeklagt!*,* May 21, [1916]; *Freie Jugend,* no. 14 (July 8, 1916).
[124] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 5 (September 1, 1916).
[125] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 7 (March 1, 1917).

starting point for a continental revolution and reflected Lenin's growing influence on transforming the war into a civil war between classes.

Despite the imprisonment of Liebknecht and other Spartacists in 1916, the SJO continued to print and circulate their material within Switzerland and across its borders.[126] While some works were reprinted in *Jugend-Internationale,* the SJO also spread original writings banned in Germany. For instance, Luxemburg's *Junius Pamphlet*, which criticized the SPD's war support, was printed in Swiss youth circles and smuggled into Germany.[127] Between 1916 and 1918, Swiss authorities identified several German anti-war periodicals originating from Switzerland via youth networks, which included periodicals such as *Die Feldpost, Der Kampf,* and *Kriegsblätter für das Deutsche Volk.*[128] Through these efforts, the SJO ensured that Spartacist agitation persisted despite repression in Germany.

Alongside documenting the convictions of their ideological leaders, *Jugend-Internationale* highlighted the everyday persecution faced by socialist youths in Germany. The journal mockingly reprinted threatening letters from German military police that warned against "any participation in assemblies, meetings, or gatherings of minors as well as any organizational, literary, or oratory activity for working-class youth, and any related postal correspondence both at home and abroad."[129] These letters underscored the destabilizing influence of socialist agitation. Many arrests targeted youths caught with copies of *Jugend-Internationale* or *Freie Jugend*. It was common for young people, particularly in Leipzig, to face imprisonment for twelve to eighteen months after being caught distributing SJO materials. Those near military age often faced forced conscription as part of their punishment. One of the most provocative articles

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[126] Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War,* 114.
[127] Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I,* 178.
[128] SFA, E27#1000/721#13895, [N.A.], *Deutsche Sozialisten und Demokraten: Propaganda gegen die dt. Regierung und den Kaiser* (1916-1918).
[129] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 4 (June 1, 1916).

appeared in both *Jugend-Internationale* and *Freie Jugend,* detailing the imprisonment and forced conscription of Leipzig youth leader Max Borsdorf.[130] The publications chronicled Borsdorf's transformation from a radical follower of Liebknecht at age fourteen to his role as a key figure in the SJO's communication network in Leipzig by 1916. Arrested with agitation materials, including copies of *Jugend-Internationale,* Borsdorf was conscripted into military service on the Western Front, where he was killed on January 3, 1917. The SJO memorialized his life as that of a heroic martyr and role model for working-class youth.

The *Jugend-Internationale* also reported unfavorable home front news from within Germany as part of its agitation tactics. The paper particularly reported on the worsening economic conditions and the public's reaction. Initially based on eyewitness accounts from SJO couriers traveling across the border, these reports later included direct submissions from German youths.[131] The September 1916 edition detailed a hunger strike in Leipzig from May 13 to 16, which the German military suppressed using artillery fire against civilians.[132] Another report covered a youth-led strike in Braunschweig protesting austerity measures imposed by the 10th Army Corps, which reduced wages and food rations. Approximately 1,200 youths clashed with the military, escalating into a city-wide "potato riot." This unrest ultimately forced authorities to retract the measures on May 5. Additionally, the paper began publishing leaked statistics on German war casualties during the summer of 1916, aiming to shatter the illusion of military success on the home front.

The SJO used *Jugend-Internationale* to organize simultaneous international demonstrations, the largest of which was the yearly antimilitarist protest known as International

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[130] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 7 (March 1, 1917); *Freie Jugend,* no. 3 (January 29, 1917).
[131] *Jugend-Internatioanle,* no. 3 (March 1, 1916).
[132] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 6 (September 1, 1916); also, see Feldner, *Deutsche Jugend und Weltkrieg,* 7-22.

Youth Day. The first event took place on October 3, 1915, following the publication of *Jugend-Internationale*'s inaugural issue. In Switzerland, 40 SJO leaders attended 70 rallies across the country, drawing an estimated 25,000 participants. Thousands of copies of *Freie Jugend, Jugend-Internationale,* and other agitation materials were sold. The events led to the founding of new sections, recruitment of new members, and the collection of 800 Swiss francs for the Liebknecht Fund. In Germany, youths disguised their rallies as "Hindenburg Celebrations" to evade the military police. While exact details of their successes were omitted in reports to *Jugend-Internationale,* one large gathering dedicated to Liebknecht in a "Central German city," was described as an expression of German youth's antimilitary energy.[133]

The second International Youth Day, held on September 3, 1916, faced greater challenges, especially in Switzerland. By then, Swiss military officials actively suppressed SJO antimilitarist agitation. The Federal Council preemptively banned all public gatherings.[134] Colonel Sprecher placed the military on alert and General Wille mobilized an army division to lock down Basel due to its proximity to the border.[135] Despite these measures, the SJO adapted by holding private but open meetings.[136] In Zurich, Marti and Mimiola led a gathering of over 2,000 participants dedicated to Liebknecht while two cavalry squadrons stood waiting. Their speeches focused on antimilitarism and recent scandals exposing Swiss military biases toward the Central Powers and violations of neutrality. To circumvent the ban on public demonstrations, participants pinned cards reading "down with militarism" to their clothing as they walked

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[133] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 2 (December 1, 1915).

[134] SFA, E21#1000/131#9782, Decoppet to the Kantonsregierungen, August 20, 1916.

[135] SFA, E21#1000/131#9783, Sprecher, *Allgemeine Instruktion für die Vertreter dem Armeekommandos,* (September 1, 1916); General Wille to the Kommandeten der 4 Division, August 29, 1916; Kommando 4. Div. *Für Samstag & Sonntag, den 2 & 3 September 1916* (September 4, 1916).

[136] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, W. Münzenberg to unsere Sektionen!, September 1, 1916; Münzenberg, *Aus der Geschichte der sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz,* 43-44.

home.[137] Overall, the SJO estimated that over 40,000 individuals participated in 139 meetings across Switzerland. The day's achievements included founding 37 new sections, recruiting 1000 new members, selling 10,000 copies of both *Freie Jugend* and *Jugend-Internationale*, and raising over 1,000 Swiss francs for the Liebknecht Fund.[138] Despite the fact that meetings stayed within legal boundaries, authorities retaliated by arresting foreign SJO youths.[139] The Federal Council instructed cantons to identify foreign SJO members and threatened expulsion.[140] However, they lacked legality for such actions against those protected by asylum rights.[141]

At the Bern Conference, the Youth International represented eight countries with a total membership of 40,000. By the end of 1916, this had grown to 14 countries and over 120,000 members. Germany alone accounted for 15,000 members, tied with Italy, and far outpaced the SJO's 5,000 local members. Within a year, the International Youth Office in Zurich distributed 150,000 copies of *Jugend-Internationale* abroad. Münzenberg estimated that hundreds of thousands of leaflets, pamphlets, and other materials were disseminated through their international network.[142] "Upward and forward in the Spirit of Karl Liebknecht" remained the SJO's central slogan; however, Lenin's influence was increasingly evident in their agitation.[143] Swiss investigators monitoring the SJO confirmed that by the end of 1916, Lenin had secured their publications as a platform for his agitation in Switzerland and beyond.[144] His guidance also shaped their ideological direction, emphasizing direct confrontations with the military and

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[137] SFA, E21#1000/131#9785, Steiner to Titl. Polizeikommando, September 4, 1916.

[138] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 6 (December 1, 1916); Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 182-188.

[139] SoArc, Ar 150.20.2, W. Trostel to Genossen, September 4, 1916.

[140] For example, see SFA, E21#1000/131#9791, Polizei- und Militär- Department des Kantons St. Gallen to the Tit. Bezirksamt Untertoggenburg, September 11, 1916.

[141] SFA, E21#1000/131#9788, Direktion der Justiz und Polizei des Kantons Zurich to the Schweizerische Bundesanwaltschaft, September 14, 1916.

[142] Münzenberg, *Aus der Geschichte der sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz,* 41-42.

[143] *Freie Jugend*, no. 25 (December 2, 1916).

[144] [A. Brunner], *Bericht des Ersten Staatsanwaltes A. Brunner an den Regierungsrat des Kantons Zürich über die Strafuntersuchung wegen des Aufruhrs in Zürich im November 1917* (Zürich: Buchdruckerei zur Alten Universität, 1919)*,* 33-34.

transforming the war into a civil war. One edition of *Freie Jugend* stated: "our feeling, our entire lives and actions must have only this single, all-encompassing goal in mind: the enlightenment of the proletariat, its organization, and the eradication of the concepts of 'fatherland' and 'defense of the fatherland' from the minds of the workers."[145] The SJO thus positioned itself as a revolutionary and international youth movement against social patriots and bourgeois militarists alike, drawing inspiration from both Lenin and Liebknecht.[146]

6.4.1: Switzerland and the Russian Revolution of 1917

The SJO greeted the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in March 1917 with electrifying enthusiasm. News of the demonstrations in St. Petersburg from March 9 to 13 was quickly published in the March edition of *Freie Jugend.*[147] Through their Russian contacts in Zurich, they received updates directly from the Central Committee of Russian Social Democracy to include in the journal. *Freie Jugend* particularly emphasized reports of soldiers abandoning their posts to join the workers, a fulfillment of the antimilitarist fantasies the SJO had dreamed of for Switzerland and Germany. Shortly after publishing this issue, the SJO's inner circle shifted from reporting on the revolution to actively influencing its outcome. Their wartime relationship with Lenin and the Bolsheviks thrust the Swiss youth into a pivotal role in facilitating the return of Russian revolutionary exiles from Switzerland. The SJO's international agitation network proved crucial to the success of these efforts.

In Zurich, Russian political refugees formed a central committee to plan their return. They quickly ruled out traveling through France and England, as the Entente powers viewed their return as a potential threat to Russia's military stability and adherence to the Entente. Negotiating with Germany became their only viable option, though many were hesitant due to

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[145] *Freie Jugend,* no. 8 (April 8, 1916).
[146] *Freie Jugend,* no. 8 (April 8, 1916).
[147] *Freie Jugend,* no. 7 (March 26, 1917).

fears of being labeled as German agents. Zimmerwald centrists enlisted Grimm as an intermediary for negotiations. The initial plan involved Grimm submitting a proposal to Hoffmann at the Political Department, with the Swiss government facilitating the journey through the German embassy. However, Hoffmann refused, fearing such actions might compromise Swiss neutrality.[148] Despite this, Hoffmann, sympathetic to German's recent peace proposals, recognized that a weakened Russia resulting from returning revolutionaries could pressure the Entente powers into pursuing a general peace. He privately recommended Grimm to Ambassador von Romberg, and the two reached a preliminary arrangement: Russian revolutionaries would be transferred in exchange for German prisoners of war held in Russia. Despite these successful talks with von Romberg, the Zurich committee hesitated to act when Grimm presented the proposal. The group remained divided between those concerned about being perceived as German agents and those determined to return at any cost.[149] Grimm's own cautious disposition further contributed to the deadlock, leaving their plans stalled.

In his wartime memoirs, Münzenberg recounted being summoned to a meeting in early April with Lenin, Radek, and Platten at the Eintracht restaurant in the Neumarkt neighborhood:

> It was the only time I ever saw Lenin in a state of serious excitement and anger. He paced the small room, speaking in fierce, short sentences. Lenin briefly informed us about the status of the negotiations between the Russians and Grimm with the German embassy. We unanimously concluded that Grimm was deliberately trying to prevent the Bolshevik group from returning home quickly, while simultaneously conducting shady political dealings on his own.[150]

The group's distrust of Grimm extended beyond their differences with him in the Zimmerwald movement. Throughout 1916 and early 1917, the SJO and the *Kegelklub* repeatedly clashed with Grimm over his social-patriotic tendencies and obstruction of their antimilitarist agitation. A

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[148] SoArc, Ar 1.250.8, Grimm to Ador, July 15, 1917.

[149] The Minister in Bern [von Romberg] to the Foreign Ministry, April 3, 1917, reprinted in Zeman, *Germany and the Revolution in Russia,* 34; Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War,* 147-148.

[150] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 234-240.

major split occurred in the summer of 1916 when Grimm blocked the SJO's attempt to push the Swiss Social Democrats toward adopting an antimilitarist platform. This incident led to denunciatory articles about Grimm appearing in youth publications.[151] *Kegelklub* members also contributed critical pieces that reflected the growing animosity toward Grimm within Zurich's socialist circles. For example, Karl Radek published an article under his pseudonym Arnold Struthahn in *Freie Jugend,* accusing Grimm of orchestrating Zimmerwald's reluctance to adopt a radical stance on militarism.[152] The SJO further articulated their grievances in *Jugend-Internationale* just days before the Russian Revolution, blaming Grimm for limiting their voice in Zimmerwald and for defeating Platten's motion within the Social Democratic Party to adopt a preemptive anti-war credit platform.[153] The SJO's prewar relationship with Grimm had disintegrated over their ideological shift toward a blend of Liebknecht's antimilitarism and Lenin's revolutionary doctrine. By now, their inclusion in the *Kegelklub* had solidified among Russian revolutionaries a shared mistrust of Grimm, leaving him sidelined from critical negotiations regarding their return to Russia via Germany.

Münzenberg, Lenin, Radek, and Platten carefully debated their next steps. They agreed that someone within their inner circle, other than Grimm, needed to approach the German embassy. Münzenberg was their first choice, but he quickly declined.[154] As a German citizen, he feared arrest by German authorities if he escorted the group through Germany. His concerns were heightened by a medical exam he had undergone at the German consulate in Zurich in October 1916, which placed him on a deferred list as "employable" for military service.[155] Platten emerged as the next best choice. His Swiss citizenship, role as secretary of the Social

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[151] *Freie Jugend,* no. 17 (August 12, 1916).
[152] *Freie Jugend,* no. 25 (December 2, 1916).
[153] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 7 (March 1, 1917).
[154] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 57-59.
[155] McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire,* 47.

Democratic Party, and status as a prominent local politician in Zurich provided him with an official neutrality that shielded him from German authorities. His political stature also gave him additional leverage in negotiations with the German embassy. On April 2, Platten acquiesced and departed for Bern with a stipulations list to present to Ambassador von Romberg.

The German Foreign Office had identified the SJO's international agitation network as a potential tool for destabilizing their enemies well before Platten arrived in Bern on April 3. By early 1916, German agents in Switzerland had informed Berlin about the SJO's distribution routes up into Scandinavia, emphasizing their potential for smuggling revolutionary material into Russia.[156] The Foreign Office was already exploring ways to recruit revolutionaries to weaken Russia internally before Grimm approached the German Embassy in Bern. One such effort involved Alexander Parvus attempting to contact Lenin directly. However, Lenin and the *Kegelklub* distrusted Parvus due to his pro-German stance at the start of the war, which they viewed as no better than social patriotism. Grimm's delays further hampered these plans, making Platten's arrival at von Romberg's office on April 4 a crucial opportunity. Platten presented von Romberg with a list of demands, including Lenin's insistence on a sealed train carriage to avoid public scrutiny and accusations of being a German agent.[157] Von Romberg agreed to the conditions and vouched for Platten's character in communications with Berlin. He emphasized that cooperation with the Zurich group was vital to Germany's strategy for destabilizing Russia. Berlin approved the plan on April 7, allowing von Romberg and Platten to finalize the details.[158]

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[156] Herr Steinwachs to Minister Bergen, Berlin, January 18, 1916, reprinted in Zeman, *Germany and the Revolution in Russia,* 11-13.

[157] The Minister in Bern [von Romberg] to the Foreign Ministry, April 5, 1917, reprinted in Zeman, *Germany and the Revolution in Russia*, 38-39.

[158] The Under State Secretary to the Minister in Bern [von Romberg], April 7, 1917, reprinted in Zeman, *Germany and the Revolution in Russia*, 40-41.

In the days leading up to Lenin's departure, he and Münzenberg worked closely together. Lenin provided him with materials for further agitation and articles to be published in *Jugend-Internationale* after the group reached Russia. However, Münzenberg remained skeptical about the possibility to ignite a broader revolution. He expressed his doubts to Lenin: "I was deeply shocked by the arrest of Liebknecht, his conviction and the complete passivity of the large masses of workers made me so pessimistic that no argument, no matter how well-founded Lenin's opinions, could have any effect on me, and we concluded the discussion with the remark: 'We will see who's right.'"[159] On April 9, Lenin departed Zurich with around 30 other Russian revolutionaries. Radek accompanied him, while Platten acted as their neutral escort through Germany and Sweden. Münzenberg and his circle of youth stayed behind, along with Bronksi, who would not join Lenin in Russia until July. The SJO gathered at the train station to celebrate the departure. Lenin handed Münzenberg a "Farewell Letter to the Swiss Workers," which was later published in *Jugend-Internationale,* cementing the SJO's revolutionary authority: "We think of the brave youthful vanguard, which, grouped around the "Free Youth," is fighting with revolutionary zeal against all the infirmities that weaken and incapacitate Swiss Social Democracy, no less than any other European Social Democratic party."[160] With most foreign revolutionaries leaving for Russia and Grimm's downfall, the SJO emerged as the leaders of the Zimmerwald movement in Switzerland, surpassing even the Social Democrats.[161]

6.4.2: The Grimm-Hoffmann Affair and Transnational Civil Strife, 1917

Lenin's departure did not mark the end of Switzerland's involvement with the Russian revolutionaries. Several remained in Zurich, and both the Russian committee there and von

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[159] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 234-240.
[160] Jugend-Internationale, no. 8 (May 1, 1917).
[161] This was also the opinion of Swiss police authorities, see [Brunner], *Bericht des Ersten Staatsanwalts A. Brunner*, 41-48.

Romberg continued working on plans for their return. Von Romberg made a second attempt to recruit Münzenberg for this task, but Münzenberg declined again for the same reasons as before.[162] The Russian committee then turned to Grimm, assigning him to relaunch efforts by traveling to Petrograd to negotiate their entry into Russia.[163] Grimm left Switzerland on April 17, informing both the Social Democratic Party and the Swiss Political Department of his trip.[164] After traveling through Germany and facing delays in Sweden, he arrived in Petrograd on May 22. While negotiating, Grimm reconnected with Zimmerwald members, three of whom were now part of the new government. Still viewing Zimmerwald as a "peace movement" rather than a revolutionary one, Grimm seized the opportunity to advocate for its agenda.[165] On May 27, without consulting his Russian allies, Grimm secretly sent a telegram to Hoffmann at the Swiss Political Department via Édouard Odier, the Swiss envoy in Russia. He sought information on what potential terms for peace with Russia the Central Powers might raise. Hoffmann, still intent on mediating peace, replied via an encrypted telegram on June 3:

> From repeated discussions with prominent figures, I am convinced that Germany and Russia strive for a mutually honorable peace, with future close trade and economic relations and financial support for Russia's reconstruction. Non-Interference in Russia's internal affairs, friendly understanding regarding Poland, Lithuania, and Courland, taking into account their national characteristics, and the return of occupied territory in exchange for the return of territory occupied to Austria Hungary. I am convinced that Germany and its allies would immediately enter into peace negotiations at the request of Russia's allies.[166]

Before Grimm could act on this information, newspapers across Europe published the contents of Hoffmann's message after it was intercepted by Entente intelligence monitoring Swiss

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[162] The Minister in Bern [von Romberg] to the Foreign Ministry, April 12, 1917, reprinted in Zeman, *Germany and the Revolution in Russia,* 51-52.

[163] SoArc, Ar 1.250.8, S. Semkowsky to Russisiche Gesandschaft, Bern, [N.D.].

[164] SoArc, Ar 1.250.8, Grimm to Geschäftsleitung der socialdemokratischen Partei der Schweiz, Bern, April 17, 1917; Grimm to Ador, Bern, July 15, 1917.

[165] SoArc, Ar 1.250.8, Grimm to Ador, Bern, July 15, 1917.

[166] SFA, J1.6#1000/1355#296*, Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des schweizerischen Bundesrates* (June 18, 1917).

communications channels.[167] The revelation aimed to sabotage any potential separate peace between Russia and Germany. When the news reached Petrograd on June 9, Zimmerwald members faced accusations of being German agents.[168] On June 16, the Petrograd Soviet expelled Grimm after he refused to sign a statement condemning the German government and accusing Switzerland of subservience to German imperialism. Grimm fled to Stockholm but faced further scrutiny during an investigation there by the Zimmerwald Central Committee. He defended his actions as personal initiatives consistent with past Swiss Political Department peace mediation efforts and denied collusion with Germany.[169] However, Karl Radek, sent to chair the trial, accused Grimm of being "passively complacent in German schemes" and on June 20 Radek ordered Grimm's removal from Zimmerwald leadership.[170] This outcome eliminated a major obstacle for the Zimmerwald Left, granting them greater control over the movement.

In Switzerland, the Grimm-Hoffmann Affair escalated into an existential crisis. The Entente accused Hoffmann of violating Swiss neutrality, sparking pro-French outrage in the western half of the country. The French-Swiss press criticized Hoffmann, claim his peace efforts between belligerents were both hostile to the Entente and a breach of international law.[171] Demonstrations grew so heated that German officials requested heightened security for their consulates. In German-speaking Switzerland, reactions were divided. The *NZZ* defended Hoffmann, describing him as "a casualty of a true, neutral Swiss towards peace" and calling for unity reminiscent of appeals made at the start of the war.[172] The DSG published pamphlets and

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[167] SFA, J1.6#1000/1355#296, Carlin [Swiss Minister in London] to Department Affaires Entrangers, London, June 16, 1917.

[168] Balabanoff, *Zimmerwalder Bewegung,* 60-62.

[169] *Berner Tagwacht,* no. 159, June 29, 1917; SoArc, AR. 1.250.8, Grimm to Ador, Bern, July 15,1917.

[170] SoArc, Ar 1.250.8, Karl Radek to Untersuchungskommission der Schweizer Sozialdemokratie in der Angelegenheit der Gen. R. Grimm, Stockholm, August 14, 1917.

[171] *Journal de Genève*, no. 168, 2 ed., June 20, 1917.

[172] *NZZ*, no.1108, 1 ed. June 19, 1917.

held public discussions in his defense, framing the incident as an "Entente-influence" scheme.[173] However, divisions extended to the Federal Assembly, where some officials went so far as to label Hoffmann a German agent.[174] To safeguard Swiss neutrality and maintain civil peace, Hoffmann resigned as head of the Political Department on June 19.

The Federal Council sought a replacement for Hoffmann who could appease the Entente and French-Swiss factions without alienating the Central Powers. On June 26, 1917, they appointed Gustave Ador.[175] As the French-Swiss president of the ICRC, Ador's reputation earned international respect from both sides of the conflict.[176] The Entente welcomed his appointment, while Germany, recognizing Switzerland's importance and the ICRC's role, accepted it without objection. Ador's selection received widespread approval from major Swiss newspapers.[177] The ICRC praised it as a reflection of Switzerland's humanitarianism and "national conscience and spirit."[178] Even the SAC's Central Committee in Geneva sent Ador a formal letter of congratulations.[179] However, not all Swiss civic associations supported the decision. Pan-Germans in the DSG were furious, circulating a pamphlet titled "Appeal to the Swiss People!" accusing Ador of being an Entente agent with illegal ties to France. They cited his acceptance of the French Legion of Honor in 1900, which made him an honorary officer in the French military, as grounds to bar him from office: "We protest against the election of Mr. Ador! We protest against the move away from our previous neutrality and to make ourselves subservient to their

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[173] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 1, *Protokoll der Brugg Tagung der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft* (September 23, 1917).

[174] *NZZ*, no. 1173, 7 ed., June 27, 1917.

[175] SFA, J1.6#1000/1355#296, *Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des schweizerischen Bundesrats* (June 26, 1917).

[176] Durand, "Gustave Ador: Fondateur et Patron de l'Agence des Guerre," 69-70.

[177] *NZZ*, no. 1136, 7 ed., June 22, 1917.

[178] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* 48, no. 192 (October 1917), 353-355.

[179] BBB, GA SAC 44, "*27eme Séance,* July 3, 1917" in in *Procès Verbal du Comité Central: Siégeant a Geneve, Pour les Années 1917 à 1919.*

ideas! We want to keep the white cross of our flag pure and remain Swiss!"[180] In an unusual alliance, Social Democrats echoed these pro-French accusations.[181] The DSG appealed to the Federal Assembly to block Ador's appointment.[182] Although their motion was defeated, Fritz Fick claimed credit for securing 50 minority votes, a coalition of pro-Germans and Social Democrats.[183]

Münzenberg also faced accusations of being a pro-German agent. The 1917 International Youth Congress was scheduled for May 19-20 in Stockholm rather than Switzerland. In late April, Münzenberg applied to von Romberg for special permission to travel through Germany to attend the conference. They allowed him to travel by train under military escort, with strict instructions prohibiting him from interacting with the German public. The congress produced no significant breakthroughs for either the SJO or the German Foreign Office, but Münzenberg's socialist rivals and the bourgeois press accused him of being a German agent, pointing to his ability to travel through Germany unimpeded and without being conscripted into military service.[184] Unlike Grimm, Münzenberg received strong support from his allies within the *Kegelklub,* who defended his ideological integrity.[185] In June and again in September 1917, the German military issued call-up orders to Münzenberg. He publicly refused both times, even reprinting his personal letter to the German consulate to demonstrate his defiance and reinforce the SJO's commitment to antimilitarist agitation. His letter stated:

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[180] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 3, Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft, Bern, *Aufruf an das Schweizervolk!* (June 25, 1917); also reprinted in a lengthier protest in *Mitteilungen des Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft,* no. 8 (July 1917), 30-32.

[181] *Berner Tagwacht,* no. 148, June 27, 1917.

[182] AfZ NL Eduard Blocher 2, Hans Bauer, Hans Böniger, Wolfgang Börlin, Sauerbeck, [No Title] (June 23, 1917).

[183] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 1, *Protokoll der Brugg Tagung der Deutschschweizerischen Gesellschaft* (September 23, 1917).

[184] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 62-63.

[185] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 9 (September 1, 1917).

> Isn't it a mockery of all the democratization and peace rhetoric that the very people who, like Liebknecht and Luxembourg, have advocated for international reconciliation since the beginning of the war, are sitting behind prison walls? […] For a revolutionary socialist, there can only be a relentless struggle against the ruling class in Germany today. If I had hope of being able to conduct propaganda within the army, I would readily respond to the call-up and try to promote my ideas within it. But that is completely out of the question today. So, I am left with only one means of effective anti-war and anti-militarist propaganda, and that is the clear and strict refusal to obey the call up order.[186]

In 1917, the *Freie Jugend* directed its antimilitarist agitation squarely towards soldiers by encouraging its readers to share their copies with friends in military service in their first yearly issue in January.[187] To appeal to a soldierly audience, both the *Freie Jugend* and *Jugend-Internationale* expanded their coverage of abuses within the military, focusing on youths punished for socialist or antimilitary activities. They also increased reporting on trials and imprisonment of conscientious objectors, particularly those refusing service extensions due to worsening economic hardships at home. For instance, a youth comrade named Walter Sturzenegger was sentenced to five months of imprisonment for declining extended military service under such circumstances.[188] Another notable case involved Karl Boßhard, the former president of Section Neuhausen, who was arrested and placed in solitary confinement for making socialist-revolutionary remarks to an officer:

> Lieutenant (in front of the entire platoon): "You are a fine defender of the fatherland!"
> Boßhard: "I have no fatherland, and therefore none to defend."
> Lieutenant: "But you have a little patriotism, don't you?"
> Boßhard: "Not a drop, we workers have no fatherland at all."[189]

By mid-1917, the *Freie Jugend* introduced a "Letters from the Field" section that highlighted the growing spread of antimilitarist sentiment within the ranks. A September 1917 letter from the French sections recounted one youth's observation: "A recently published defense speech of the

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[186] Wilhelm Münzenberg, "Ein Brief*"* (September 15, 1917), reprinted in *Volksrecht,* September 28, 1917; *Freie Jugend,* no. 22, (October 22, 1917).
[187] *Freie Jugend,* no. 1 (January 1, 1917).
[188] *Freie Jugend,* no. 19 (September 10, 1917).
[189] *Freie Jugend,* no. 7 (March 26, 1917).

conscientious objector Lieutenant Kleiber is being passed around; this is certainly necessary to show my comrades the reality [of the situation]. For two evenings, we have been having endless discussions. The defense speech is circulating continuously and is arousing strong interest. The army is ripe for antimilitarism."[190]

The SJO's most influential antimilitarist agitation during the war was a pamphlet published in June 1917 titled *The Appeal of Gottfreid Stutz to the Swiss Army (Aufruf des Gottfried Stutz an die Schweizer Armee)*.[191] Written from the perspective of a disillusioned Swiss soldier under the pseudonym Gottfried Stutz, the pamphlet criticized the Prussianism and decadence of the Swiss military. The author portrayed contemporary revolutionaries as modern-day William Tells and likened the Swiss officer corps to Austrians. Notably, it used colloquial Swiss-German rather than High German to resonate with the masses. The pamphlet called for the "democratization" of the army and the overthrow of "Wille von Bismarck." Its release enraged Swiss military leadership, prompting an immediate crackdown. Soldiers found with copies were arrested. The *Freie Jugend* capitalized on these events for further propaganda, publishing an article about the arrest of SJO member Robert Imholz, of Battalion 46, who was caught with copies of the pamphlet as well as issues of *Freie Jugend* and *Jugend-Internationale*.[192] Zurich police launched a full investigation into the SJO in order to uncover the pamphlet's true author, Fritz Brupbacher. The SJO's central offices and bookstore were raided, meeting minutes confiscated, and Trostel was arrested and interrogated in an attempt to extract information.[193] Despite this harassment, the SJO celebrated the pamphlet's popularity and impact. The episode marked a turning point for the SJO. By late summer Münzenberg's inner

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[190] *Freie Jugend,* no. 19 (September 10, 1917).
[191] SoArc, Ar. 150.20.1, [Anonymous], *Aufruf des Gottfried Stutz an die Schweizer Armee* [1917].
[192] *Freie Jugend,* no. 20 (September 24, 1917).
[193] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 174; *Freie Jugend,* no. 18 (August 27, 1917).

circle had shifted far from his original vision of antimilitarist agitation and open discussions supporting revolution within the military became increasingly common.[194]

The SJO's revolutionary agitation in Germany during 1917 followed a similar pattern to that of 1916, but now incorporated propaganda from Russian revolutionaries alongside material focused on Liebknecht and the Spartacus group. The *Jugend-Internationale* emphasized rallying German youth to extend the revolution into Germany, dedicating its May Day edition to writings left behind by the Russians before their departure in early April.[195] This issue included Lenin's "Farewell to the Swiss Workers," along with contributions by Radek and other Bolsheviks. Although centered on the Russian Revolution, these writings were directed at Germany. For instance, Lenin endorsed German revolutionary youth as the torchbearers of socialism: "The future of German socialism belongs to the movement that Karl Liebknecht brought forth, that form the 'Spartacus group.' […] The German proletariat is the most loyal and confident ally of the Russian and international proletarian revolution." Münzenberg used this issue as a direct rallying cry for a German revolution:

> With breathless anticipation, we social-revolutionary socialists of the small states look upon the workers of the Central Powers, above all upon the German workers. You, German proletariat! The decision now rests with you! […] You have sorely disappointed us, but we have not lost out trust in you. Now you can make amends, take back the place that is yours. If we could still pray, how we would pray that you would rise up now, German proletariat![196]

He concluded by echoing Liebknecht's call to German soldiers: "Return home from the trenches and turn your weapons against those who rob you of light and air!" Throughout 1917, the *Jugend-Internationale* continued distributing Russian revolutionary propaganda. In September, Lenin sent his blueprint for expanding the revolution in "The Military Program of the Proletarian

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[194] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, Willi Trostel and Willi Münzenberg, *Zentralvorstandssitzung* (July 25, 1917).
[195] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 8 (May 1, 1917).
[196] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 8 (May 1, 1917).

Revolution."[197] By encouraging the Bolshevik Revolution through the SJO's network, German authorities inadvertently provided an effective tool for mobilizing working-class youth in Germany against themselves.

The SJO's interstate call to revolutionary action clearly affected Germany, as evidenced by the response from German police and military authorities. The *Jugend-Internationale's* section on German news frequently reported incidents involving police arresting increasingly younger individuals for distributing agitation materials. One issue detailed the arrest of three young boys in Stuttgart who were charged under the State of Siege Act and sentenced to two months' imprisonment for distributing pamphlets about Liebknecht's imprisonment in July 1917.[198] Another report covered the three-and-a-half month imprisonment of two teenage female workers in Berlin for attending an anti-war meeting. Additionally, it highlighted the case of a boy from Eberfeld who was removed from his parents and placed in a child welfare institution for "moral deficiencies" after being caught attending a meeting of international socialist youth. Despite these crackdowns, such repression only fueled agitation efforts.

During the summer of 1917, the International Youth Bureau organized the third International Youth Day on September 2 and 3, with an added focus on German youth:

> As in recent years, the proletarian youth will take to the streets for one day and numerous cities and towns around the world will at the same time show that the rising waves of chauvinism have not been able to loosen the chains of international solidarity, but have only entwined them more tightly and intimately around us all. The workers in Austria and Germany will not lag behind their youth and will join the revolutionary offensive already brewing in France and Italy.[199]

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[197] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 9 (September 1, 1917).
[198] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 9 (September 1, 1917).
[199] SoArc, Ar 150.20.2, Das Bureau der internationalen Verbindung sozialistischer Jugendorganisation, "An die sozialistische Jugend aller Länder!," Separat-Abdruck aus der *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 9 (August 1917).

Large demonstrations took place across Germany, resulting in hundreds of young men and women being imprisoned by German military authorities.[200] German police infiltrated youth organizations and preemptively shut down many events under the Siege Act. Military authorities issued proclamations warning the public against participation, claiming foreign enemy agents were behind these movements. One statement from the Deputy General Command of the 8th Army Corps in Koblenz declared:

> Attempts have recently been made from abroad to instill discord into the ranks of the Home Army through word and writing. Inciting leaflets are intended to entice young people in particular to rallies and work stoppages, which are strongly condemned. German working youth, do not allow yourselves to be incited by the paid agents of the Entente. Therefore, we urgently warn against participating in any youth day or demonstration strike staged by our enemies. The authorities entrusted with maintaining peace and order in the country will make full use of their powers and take the strongest possible action against this treasonous intrigue.[201]

Another proclamation from the 4th Army Corps in Magdeburg specifically condemned agitation "instigated in Zurich, one of the main centers of enemy intelligence, and which aims to induce German youth to commit acts of war and treason."[202] Despite these warnings, several major cities held demonstrations, with Dresden and Hamburg seeing the largest turnouts, each attracting several hundred youth participants.[203] These events embarrassed authorities and led to a wave of post-protest arrests, including 38 youth leaders in Dresden and 29 in Hamburg. However, such suppressions only intensified international youth agitation.

In Switzerland, military forces closely monitored SJO efforts to hold International Youth Day events in Zurich, enforcing a ban on public gatherings. To evade suppression, Münzenberg, Trostel, Morf and other SJO leaders decentralized their efforts by organizing smaller rallies

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[200] SoArc, Ar 150.20.2, Ernst Marti, *Die Jugendinternationale nach dem Krieg,* 1918, reprinted in *Protokoll des Nationalkongress der Sozialdem. Jugendorganisation der Schweiz* (March 13 – April 1, 1918).

[201] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 10 (October 1, 1917).

[202] *Jugend-Internationale*, no. 10 (October 1, 1917).

[203] *Freie Jugend,* no. 19 (September 10, 1917).

across Switzerland. Over two days, they held events in 127 German-speaking and 20 French-speaking towns and cities. For example, Marti addressed a crowd of "over 2,000 people, including many military personnel," in Basel, urging them to organize against militarism. Münzenberg traveled to Bettlach near Solothurn, while Brupbacher spoke in Gelterkinden near Basel.[204] Mimiola held a rally in Adliswil just outside Zurich to mislead authorities. Meanwhile, Paul Ruegg led a significant closed gathering in Zurich that drew 5,000-6,000 youths over the two-day period. Münzenberg hailed this decentralized strategy as a major success. The effort distributed substantial amounts of agitation materials: 10,000 copies of *Freie Jugend*, 7,000 copies of *Jugend-Internationale*, 3,000 miscellaneous brochures, 15,000 "Down with Militarism" placards, and raised several hundred Swiss francs for the Liebknecht Fund.[205]

6.4.3: November 1917 Riots in Zurich and Willi Münzenberg's Imprisonment, 1917-1918

Switzerland's volatility deepened during the winter of 1917-1918. Protests and strikes continued to rattle Zurich, including a particularly violent brawl between striking woodworkers and strikebreakers in early October.[206] Local and federal officials grew increasingly alarmed as caches of explosives, firearms, ammunition, chemical weapons (such as potassium cyanide), and bacterial cultures for animal and human diseases were discovered in the region surrounding the city.[207] While these materials were being funneled by Germany to Italian anarchists to destabilize Italy, Swiss investigators feared they could be repurposed for attacks within Switzerland. Adding to their concerns was the presence of an estimated 5,000 German military deserters in Zurich, who authorities feared could form a foreign, revolutionary force. Tensions peaked when news of

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[204] *Volksrecht,* September 3, 1917; *Freie Jugend,* no. 19 (September 10, 1917).
[205] *Freie Jugend,* no.19 (September 10, 1917).
[206] *NZZ*, no. 1899, 1 ed., (October 12, 1917).
[207] [Brunner], *Bericht des Ersten Staatsanwalts A. Brunner*, 94-96; US embassy in Bern believed this was specifically orchestrated out of the German consulate office in Zurich, see Stovall, *Switzerland and the World War,* 232-233.

the Bolsheviks' success in the October Revolution reached the city in mid-November. Without guidance from Social Democratic leaders, working-class masses spontaneously took to the streets to celebrate over several days. The situation escalated on November 15, when a group of political activists led by radical pacifist preacher Max Dätwyler attempted to storm Zurich's munitions factories.[208] Believing that shutting down these factories would cripple the Western Front by cutting off ammunition supplies, Dätwyler's group acted optimistically but naively. Government authorities, however, interpreted this action as an attempt to incite a proletarian uprising in the city.

Riots erupted over the next two days, with violent clashes between workers and riot police. The youth played only a nominal role in the events, as the SJO made no organized efforts beyond openly celebrating the Russian Revolution. Once the riots escalated and mass arrests began, Dätwyler and others approached Münzenberg at his home to seek his leadership, but he refused.[209] Even after the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, Münzenberg maintained his belief that a revolution in Germany would signal the appropriate time for action in Switzerland. On November 17, other SJO leaders organized a rally of approximately 1,000 youths at the Helvetiaplatz. Trostel, Marti, and Bucher delivered speeches to the crowd while Münzenberg and Platten stood among the attendees. The group then marched through Zurich, stopping to demonstrate outside the *NZZ's* office building. While most participants dispersed afterward, an agitated faction continued marching and gathered outside Zurich's District 4 police station, where many arrested rioters from previous days were being held. The protestors besieged the station and tried to force entry. Police fired warning shots to disperse them but were met with return fire from some demonstrators. The situation escalated into a street firefight as barricades

[208] SoArc, Ar 150.20.1, *Flugblatt der internationalen Verbindung sozialist. Jugendorganisation* (March 8, 1918).

[209] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 63.

were erected. The standoff lasted into the early hours of November 18, when law enforcement reinforcements finally secured the area. By then, three workers and one police officer were killed, dozens were hospitalized with serious injuries, and over 100 sustained minor injuries.[210] The incident proved to be a breaking point for federal authorities. In response, the military deployed three infantry battalions and one cavalry unit to occupy Zurich. A State of Siege was declared, suspending traditional freedoms such as public assembly.

Although the crowd dispersed that evening, the police held the SJO responsible for the entire incident, using it as justification to finally crack down on the youth movement. On November 19, authorities arrested Trostel, Marti, and Bucher for delivering speeches at the rally.[211] Münzenberg was also imprisoned, despite only being present and not speaking at the gathering. In total, seven members of the SJO's central committee were arrested, along with around 100 rank-and-file members.[212] Police searched their homes, raided the central office, and confiscated propaganda materials and club documents.[213] They also occupied the organization's bookstore and began arresting anyone who entered starting on November 20.[214]

Government officials concentrated their efforts on building a case against Münzenberg, accusing his agitation of creating the underlying conditions that led to the unrest in Zurich: "Through this education, they had been transformed from an occasionally mutinous, but harmless, youth into the revolutionary vanguard of the workers and awaited the beginning of the struggle even more impatiently than the masses."[215] The Federal Council demanded

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[210] [Brunner], *Bericht des Ersten Staatsanwalts A. Brunner*, 122-141.

[211] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9*, Zirkularschreiben der internationalen Verbindung sozialistischer Jugendorganisation*, no. 1 (March 15, 1918).

[212] *Freie Jugend,* no. 25 (December 3, 1917); Brupbacher, *Zürich während Krieg und Landestreik,* 82-85.

[213] SoARc, Ar 150.20.1, *Flugblatt der internationalen Verbindung sozialist. Jugendorganisation* (March 8, 1918).

[214] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, *Zirkularschreiben der internationalen Verbindung sozialistischer Jugendorganisation,* no. 1 (March 15, 1918).

[215] [Brunner], *Bericht des Ersten Staatsanwalts A. Brunner*, 70-71.

Münzenberg's expulsion but struggled to procure sufficient evidence to justify such action. Chief investigator A. Brunner concluded that charges of treason and rebellion related to the November riots could not be brought, despite Münzenberg's publically known association with Lenin, who openly advocated for the destruction of the Swiss state through a proletarian dictatorship.[216] All available evidence indicated that Münzenberg attempted to calm the crowd and restrain more aggressive agitators. Another angle explored was Münzenberg's status as a foreign resident engaging in antimilitarist agitation. Bombs discovered outside Zurich police stations matched those confiscated from German-sourced anarchist depots, providing authorities with a pretext to link the riots to foreign agents.[217] Yet, these connections could not be directly tied to Münzenberg. Investigators also faced legal obstacles tied to Switzerland's asylum laws, which classified Münzenberg as a political refugee protected from expulsion because he would face persecution in Germany if deported. These legal complications did not apply to Trostel, Marti, and Bucher, Swiss citizens who were released at the start of 1918 due to insufficient evidence. In contrast, authorities decided to detain Münzenberg indefinitely until the war ended, at which point he could be returned to Germany.

Anger over Münzenberg's imprisonment nearly destabilized Switzerland's civil peace as much as his agitation had. Platten and the SJO organized protests and inundated officials with letters demanding his release. Emil Arnold circulated talking points for sympathy demonstrations to socialist allies nationwide, emphasizing that Münzenberg's pending expulsion violated Switzerland's tradition of asylum.[218] During the first weeks of 1918, demonstrations demanding Münzenberg's freedom took place in Zurich, Lucerne, Basel, and Bern, alongside international

[216] Ibid., 17-20;141-144;153-154.
[217] Ibid., 94-96.
[218] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, Arnold to Jugendgenosse, December 25, 1917.

protests in Berlin, Stockholm, Rome, and by Bolsheviks in Russia.[219] Platten and Trostel successfully persuaded the Social Democrats to pressure local and federal officials, even threatening to call a general strike.[220] By late March, prosecutors relented and agreed to release Münzenberg on bail on the condition that he cease all antimilitarist activities. However, mounting civil unrest across Switzerland led authorities to reimprison him as a precaution at the end of May.[221]

General Wille was determined to dismantle the SJO entirely. He urged the federal government to ban their publications, citing growing evidence that soldiers were forming committees influenced by the SJO's calls for democratization within the military.[222] The tipping point came on February 24, when a mutiny broke out among soldiers in Battalion 57 stationed in Kloten as part of Zurich's occupying force. Military police found SJO materials among the soldiers' personal belongings and attributed the rebellion to the SJO's influence.[223] In response, the Federal Council compiled evidence from the Swiss Justice Department dating back to 1915 through the November 1917 riots. On March 1, they issued an official ban on *Freie Jugend* and *Jugend-Internationale,* invoking the Federal Decree of August 3, 1914, which allowed "measures for the protection of the country and the maintenance of neutrality," and noted that violations would be tried in military courts rather than civil ones.[224] Throughout the entire war, the Swiss government tolerated political agitation, including pro-German and foreign sources. It was only

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[219] *Berner Tagwacht*, January 7, 1918; *Freie Jugend,* no. 2 (January 19, 1918).

[220] SFA, E21#1000/131#9931, P.S. Wayrauch to Polizeikommando, March 5, 1918.

[221] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 63-64.

[222] SFA, E21#1000/131#9931, General Wille to the hohen Bundesrat der Schweiz, Eidgenossenschaft, February 6, 1918.

[223] SFA, E21#1000/131#9931, Schweiz. Justiz- & Polizeidepartment to Schweizerischen Bundesrat, March 1, 1918; SFA, E21#1000/131#9932, Der General [Wille] to the Bundesanwaltschaft, March 19, 1918.

[224] SFA, E21#1000/131#9931, *Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des schweizerischen Bundesrates* (March 1, 1918).

when the SJO and the international youth movement threatened Switzerland's state security and military stability that a formal ban was enacted.

Platten managed the SJO's affairs and kept the association financially stable following Münzenberg's arrest.[225] However, he departed in early January to return to Russia, where he was wounded while protecting Lenin during an assassination attempt on January 14, 1918.[226] The SJO's central committee then appointed twenty-year-old Emil Arnold as its new leader. Many members welcomed Arnold's leadership, as it marked the first time in nearly a decade that the association had a native Swiss head. His citizenship also made him less vulnerable to police scrutiny, compared to Münzenberg.[227] Arnold proved adept at navigating the ban on SJO publications. He remained steadfast that, "if the ban on our newspaper was intended to make it impossible for us to speak to our comrades, than it must be said that it was a blow to the water."[228] He maintained communication through short, easily circulated bulletins.[229] For larger print publications, he used non-Zurich sectional papers and affiliated working-class presses. The Biel based *Arbeiter-Blatt* effectively replaced *Freie Jugend* after the ban.[230] The SJO adapted its agitation strategy by focusing on distributing small, inexpensive leaflets en masse.[231] Far from being deterred by government and military actions, the SJO intensified its antimilitarist stance, advocating for the complete dismantling of Switzerland's militia: "The old belief that our militia

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[225] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, Fritz Platten to Sektion der Soziald. Jugendorganisation, November 23, 1917.

[226] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 58.

[227] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, W. Ad Isler to Arnold, [1918]; E21#1000-131#9931, Emil Arnold, *Interview with the Polizeikommando des Kantons Zurich* (March 9, 1918).

[228] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, Arnold and Trostel to Jugendgenossen, March 7, 1918.

[229] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, *Zirkularschreiben der internationalen Verbindung sozialistischer Jugendorganisation,* no. 1 (March 15, 1918).

[230] For example, see: SFA, E21#1000/131#9933, *Arbeiter-Blatt*, no. 27 (March 14, 1918).

[231] SoArc, Ar. 150.20.2, Zentralvorstand der sozialdemokratischen Jugendorganisation, *Warum wurde die* "*Freie Jugend*" *verboten?* (1918).

exists to protect the rights of the people–which no longer exist–we must destroy."[232] On the ground, former *Kegelklub* members organized allied groups to prepare for revolution. Morf played a key role in coordinating with trade unions, women's organizations, and French societies, while Böhny led newly formed soldiers' committees in Zurich and served as a liaison to socialists on the University of Zurich's student council.[233]

After his release from prison, Trostel succeeded Münzenberg as secretary of the International Youth Bureau.[234] He also took over as editor for *Jugend-Internationale,* managing to publish several issues internationally before its ban in March. Undeterred, Trostel continued their publication efforts by releasing a special, illicit issue in May titled *Bread, Peace, Freedom*, echoing Liebknecht's and Lenin's revolutionary slogans.[235] The issue featured new contributions from Lenin and other Bolsheviks, unified by the theme of spreading revolution across Europe. It also reprinted key wartime articles from previous editions, including notable writings by Liebknecht. Widely popular during the war, over 10,000 copies were circulated internationally, primarily through underground networks.[236]

The escalating unrest in Zurich throughout 1918 showcased the socialist youths' potent agitation and social resilience. Beginning in March, the city experienced near-weekly strikes and protests.[237] That same month, the army fully occupied Zurich after discovering additional bomb depots. Despite this, youth and workers continued organizing and agitating. On May Day 1918, the SJO collaborated with the railway union to stage a day-long strike.[238] During the event,

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[232] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, Zentralvorstand der sozialdemokratischen Jugendorganisation, *Lieber Freund! Liebe Freundin!* ([1918]).

[233] Böhny, *Die sozialistische Jugendbewegung des Ersten Weltkrieges als politischer Faktor,* 11-13.

[234] SFA, E21#1000/131#9931, Willy Trostel, *Interview with the Polizeikommando des Kantons Zürich* (March 11, 1918); Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 253.

[235] *Brot, Frieden und Freiheit/Jugend-Internationale,* no.11 (May 1918).

[236] Gross, *Willi Münzenberg,* 80.

[237] Brupbacher, *Zürich während Krieg und Landesstreik,* 88-94.

[238] *Zuricher Post*, May 21, 1918.

Brupbacher delivered a speech, proclaiming an armed uprising as the imminent goal of Swiss workers.[239] By mid-June, military authorities admitted to General Wille that they were overwhelmed by the scale of organized protests and general disorder in Zurich.[240] In response, the Federal Council imposed restrictions on public assembly on July 12, banning all gatherings without special approval. However, this only fueled further demonstrations across Switzerland and nearly triggered a nationwide general strike. From August to October, strikes by food service workers, bank employees, theater staff, and others continued to disrupt Zurich.

Switzerland was not alone in experiencing domestic upheaval in 1918. Germany secured a separate peace with Russia through the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, signed with the Bolshevik government on March 3, 1918. However, socialist revolutionary agitation continued to infiltrate Germany via the SJO's international network. The SJO disseminated pamphlets urging revolutionary action through underground youth channels.[241] These materials leveraged the prolonged imprisonment of Liebknecht and other Spartacists as a rallying cry for recruitment. They also drew inspiration from the Russian Revolution and denounced German militarism, calling for mass strikes and protests, particularly around May Day 1918. What could not be printed in Switzerland was produced by presses established in Stockholm by the International Youth Bureau and Zimmerwalders.[242] These publications often targeted German soldiers directly, asking them to defy orders to suppress socialist revolutionaries at home or abroad. The German Foreign Office's temporary alliance with Lenin and the Bolsheviks soon unraveled as Russian efforts shifted toward fomenting revolution within Germany itself, utilizing the youth

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[239] Brupbacher, *Zürich während Krieg und Landesstreik,* 88-94.

[240] SFA, E21#1000/131#9938, Platzkommando Zurich to General Wille, June 15, 1918.

[241] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, Sekretariate der internationalen Verbindung sozialistischer Jugendorganisation, *An die sozialistische Jugend Deutschlands!* (April 15, 1918).

[242] SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, International sozialistischen Kommission, *Manifest der internationalen Sozialistischen Kommission in Stockholm an die Deutschen Brüder und Schwestern* (February 1918).

movement's transnational network.[243] Radek played a central role in this agitation from Swiss exile, using his pseudonym A. Struthahn, to publish materials urging Germans to join the Russian Revolution and overthrow the German state.[244] Exploiting Germany's worsening socioeconomic conditions, the combined efforts of the SJO and Bolshevik agitators provided a political blueprint for the discontented German masses.

The first revolutionary domino fell when German sailors in Kiel mutinied from October 29 to November 4, raising Lenin's slogan of Bread and Peace. Workers' and soldiers' councils rapidly seized control of several major German cities, aiming to establish a socialist republic. By November 9, the imperial government was in disarray, forcing Kaiser Wilhelm II to abdicate the throne. From his captivity in Switzerland, Münzenberg received news of Germany's long-awaited revolution. On November 10, he informed Federal officials of his intent to renounce his political asylum and return to Germany. The next morning, Platten and police escorts drove Münzenberg to the German border, where he was released to join his Spartacist comrades.[245]

Münzenberg played a critical role in keeping Liebknecht's revolutionary ideals alive during the war. While the Spartacists faced suppression and imprisonment in Germany, Switzerland served as a sanctuary for their agitation to reach an international audience. However, Münzenberg did not act alone. The SJO's inner social circle, including Mimiola, Trostel, and Morf, managed much of the groundwork, particularly during Münzenberg's detention in 1918. This activity was made possible by the "alternative culture" fostered within the youth association before the war. Münzenberg described this as the SJO's culture of revolution, contrasting it with what he called the reformist "dunghill culture" of the major socialist parties that aligned with

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[243] Merridale, *Lenin on the Train,* 271-272.

[244] A. Struthahn [Karl Radek], *Was bedeutet die Ablehnung der Vaterlandsverteidigung!* (Zürich: Sozialdemokratische Jugendorganisation der Schweiz, 1917).

[245] Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front,* 262-263.

national interests over those of the worldwide working class in August 1914.[246] The SJO's organizational culture also clashed sharply with broader Swiss civil society. Its antagonism toward the Swiss nation-state led to one of the few crackdowns on a civic association during the war, a repression so severe that it compelled the Federal Council and military to suspend civil rights.

During his wartime exile, Lenin found the Swiss socialist youth to be natural allies, one of the few organized movements that met his strict ideological standards. The Swiss youth provided a ready-made, international network for revolutionary agitation. At the same time, they deeply admired Lenin, seeing him as one of the few, major revolutionaries to take them serious, and they eagerly participated in his Zurich *Kegelklub.* It was through the initiatives of the *Kegelklub* that the German Foreign Office succeeded in facilitating the return of the Zimmerwald Left to Russia, aiming to destabilize the country further. However, Germany's prewar sociocultural influence over the revolutionary youth movement had been completely eroded by the SPD's support for war credits and its repression of Spartacists and working-class youth groups. Even attempts to leverage Swiss social democrats and Zimmerwald leaders like Robert Grimm proved unsuccessful by March-April 1917. Ultimately, it was Lenin's trust in the relationships he established with the SJO's inner circle in Zurich that enabled his journey to the Finland Station. While this maneuver brought Germany short-term advantages during the war, it also strengthened the revolutionary youth movement's already potent anti-German and antimilitarist sentiments. In the long term, leveraging the SJO's international agitation network heightened Germany's internal instability and significantly contributed to its governmental collapse in October-November 1918 and eventual defeat in the war.

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[246] *Jugend-Internationale,* no. 2 (December 1, 1915).

Conclusion: The General Strike of November 1918 and Swiss National Identity

7.1: Münzenberg's Expulsion and the Outbreak of Revolution in Central Europe

In the early hours of November 11, 1918, Swiss police escorted Willi Münzenberg to the German-Swiss border near Stein am Rhein. There were no German officials present to perform the handoff. Hours before the signing of the armistice ending the First World War, Germany was already seized with revolutionary uncertainty. Between soldiers self-demobilizing and civilians joining the internal fighting, military governance, especially along the Swiss-Bavarian border, had broken down. Dumped across the Rhine, Münzenberg stumbled on foot toward Singen but was found by German soldiers in a ditch, covered in mud.[1] Unaware of his identity, they arrested him and he was held overnight until they confirmed his identity through recent newspapers. The Swiss government and military establishment had expelled Münzenberg, hoping to end his influence in Switzerland. However, rather than marking the conclusion of his agitation's impact, the end of the war signaled its climax.

While the Entente and other neutral states celebrated the signing of the armistice on November 11, Switzerland shared in the revolutionary upheaval of its collapsing imperial neighbors in Central Europe. Years of economic and social strife culminated in a nationwide general strike, inspired by socialist victories in Germany, Bavaria, and Austria.[2] Although Switzerland avoided the extreme home front scarcities experienced by Germany, the cost of essential goods like milk had risen by 50% by early 1918. Meanwhile industrial leaders profited significantly, while wages for workers remained stagnant. This imbalance fueled public discontent, with many blaming food shortages on the prioritization of war material production for warring nations. Throughout 1918, Switzerland experienced widespread strikes and food

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[1] Green, *Willi Münzenberg*, 50-51.

[2] On the economic deterioration of wartime Switzerland, see Rudolf Pfenninger, *Die Handelsbeziehungen zwischen der Schweiz und Deutschland während des Krieges 1914-1918* (Zürich: Gutzwiller, 1928).

riots. The unrest was further exacerbated by competing civic associations and their agitation, which fractured the cohesion of Swiss national identity. These divisions created space for alternative definitions of imagined community to challenge the Confederacy.

The outbreak of social unrest across Central Europe inspired the formation of the Olten Action Committee in early 1918, led by a politically rehabilitated Robert Grimm. This socialist faction united the Socialist Democratic Party, labor unions, and other working class interest groups and demanded a complete reorganization of the Swiss Confederacy under socialist leadership. Meanwhile, some members of the SJO, influenced by the recently released Karl Liebknecht and Germany's Independent Socialists, sought to emulate the Russian October Revolution in Switzerland. Years of Münzenberg's efforts among working-class youth made Zurich a hotbed of unrest, with violent clashes between protestors and soldiers. Youth demonstrators led workers to strike across most major industries in the city and they attacked public institutions representing their bourgeois rivals, especially major newspapers like the *NZZ*. Yet, the Federal Council under Gustave Ador and military leaders like General Ulrich Wille and Colonel Theophil Sprecher von Bernegg remained resolute in resisting the strike.

In response to the Zurich unrest of November 1917, the Federal Council and Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg convened a meeting on January 31, 1918, to address potential future uprisings kindled by the SJO and other radical socialists.[3] Vice President Eduard Müller and Sprecher von Bernegg supported the majority opinion favoring a military response, and Ador advocated for a "strong deployment" to demonstrate the government's resolve against potential revolutionary challenges. Of the voices in favor of this plan, Giuseppe Motta further argued that using military force to suppress nationwide revolutionary movements was essential for maintaining Swiss neutrality. He emphasized that internal peace and security were critical to

[3] SFA, E1004.1#1000/9#11204, *Sitzung des Schweizerischen Bundesrates* (January 31, 1918).

Switzerland's international stability and survival. Thus, nearly a year before the general strike of November 1918, the government had already identified such large-scale unrest as an existential threat to the Swiss Confederation.

The military response during the general strike did not go as smoothly as planned. The original protocol relied on railways to transport troops from the countryside into cities, but the railway unions' participation in the strike disrupted train services, severely limiting military mobility. Additionally, the Spanish Flu reduced the availability of healthy troops for deployment. Despite these obstacles, the military presence was bolstered by spontaneous volunteers from civil society. Diverse civic associations, which had previously competed over public opinion and wartime resources, united against the protestors, whom they labeled as socialist revolutionaries and foreign infiltrators. These groups included the Pan-Germans, the New Helvetic Society, the Swiss Alpine Club, and the International Red Cross. While many of these factions had favored one side or another in the global conflict, they came together under the shared goal of defending what they perceived as Swiss national identity. This collaboration momentarily crystallized a definition of Swiss national identity by deciding who was considered part of the nation and who was excluded.

7.2.1: Organizations before the General Strike, 1917-1918

Middle-class civic associations, much like the military, grew increasingly alarmed by socialist and antimilitarist agitation in Switzerland between 1917 and 1918. Among the Swiss Pan-Germans, Fritz Fick and Hektor Ammann discussed reorienting the focus of the DSG from countering pro-Entente propaganda to addressing antimilitarist agitation as early as December 1916.[4] By 1918, they identified working-class youth as a primary source of social corruption. This led to Fritz Fick spearheading a DSG campaign to remove Leonhard Ragaz and other

[4] AfZ, NL Hektor Ammann 15, Fritz Fick to Hektor Ammann, December 18, 1916.

socialist educators from Zurich's school system "who publicly pursue subversive goals and in their office turn the youth into enemies of the state."[5] Meanwhile, Hans Oehler, a Pan-German connected to the humanitarian *Deutschen Hilfsverein,* blamed foreign intellectual defectors from the Central Powers for fomenting unrest. He accused these individuals of damaging Swiss interests by "poisoning the friendly relationship between Switzerland and their home state with violence or in thwarting a friendlier rapprochement through their agitation is to abuse the right of asylum in its original meaning."[6]

The NHG took a more constructive approach to counter antimilitarist and socialist agitation. Early in the war, the NHG collaborated with the military press office to establish focus groups within its chapters, which analyzed discontent among soldiers.[7] They found antimilitarist agitation was indeed having an effect on troop morale. Rather than merely engaging in counter-agitation, the NHG sought practical solutions to improve soldiers' conditions.[8] This included lobbying the Federal government to raise military pay and benefits in spring 1918, as well as organizing recreational evenings and entertainment lectures for the troops.[9] However, Gonzague de Reynold pointed to the SJO as the primary culprit for antimilitarist agitation.[10] To diminish socialism's appeal among working-class youth, de Reynold championed educational reform. In

[5] AfZ, NL Eduard Blocher 10, Fritz Fick to the Deutschschweizerische Gesellschaft Ortsgruppe Zürich, January 11, 1918

[6] *Der Hilfsbund*, no. 6, August 1918; also, see NL Dr. Hans Oehler, Hans Oehler, "Ruckblick," *Züricher Post,* May 25, 1918.

[7] SNL, NHG B 59, NHG Gruppe Chur, *Prinzipieller Standpunkt d. Referenten der Ortsgruppe Chur,* (March 3, 1918); NHG Montreux, *Commissions des questions militaire* (March 13, 1918).

[8] SNL, NHG B 59, [N.A.], *Thèses du rapporteur Dr. A. Bolle sur la question du mécontentement dans l'Armee et les moyens d'y remédier* ([1918]).

[9] SNL, NHG B 59, M. Baudat and H. Schoop to membres de l'Assemblée fédérale, March 1, 1918; Léopold Gautier to the Commissions de neutralité du Conseil national et du Conseil des Etats, April 18, 1918.

[10] SNL, NHG A 2, O. Bosshardt, *Rapport betr. Antimilitärische tendenzen in der schweizerischen Press* (December 27, 1915).

1918, he proposed a new national curriculum centered on Swiss civics, with an involved role for the NHG.[11]

By 1916, the alliance between international pacifists and socialists, which had existed at the start of the war, had disintegrated. Following street protests in late 1915, Franz Bucher-Heller's Swiss Peace Society severed ties with socialists and their affiliated associations.[12] The society justified this decision by emphasizing its ideological differences: it was not anti-democratic, supported the existing Swiss government, and was not anti-military. The final blow came in late 1918 when international socialists caused a significant setback for the Swiss Peace Party and the International Peace Bureau in Bern. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson initially favored Geneva as the site for end-of-war peace conference, but decided on Versailles instead. He cited revolutionary fervor as the reason for switching the location, with Switzerland seemingly being "saturated with every poisonous element and open to every hostile influence in Europe."[13] By 1918, various civic associations that had focused on wartime agitation began aligning their interests against the growing influence of the SJO and revolutionary socialism. These groups widely characterized socialist agitation as anti-military, anti-democratic, and driven by foreign actors seeking to undermine the Swiss state.

Anxiety over foreign infiltration heightened with the arrival of Russian Red Cross representatives in 1918, ostensibly to assist with the repatriation of Russian internees. The organization was in an ambiguous state, even more so than the Soviet diplomatic mission. Previously seen as a bureaucratic haven for the wealthy to avoid military duties, the Russian Red Cross limped through 1917 under "democratization" until the Soviets began dismantling it after

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[11] SNL, NHG B 8, *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 29 (February-March 1918).

[12] *La Revue,* October 6, 1915.

[13] Wilson to House, November 7, 1918, in *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the U.S., 1919: Paris Peace Conference,* vol. I (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), 119-121; also, see Meier, *Friendship under Stress,* 106-108.

the October revolution.[14] On January 6, 1918, the Council of People's Commissars confiscated its remaining assets and disbanded its central administrative committee.[15] Russian members of the central committee were arrested and several were immediately assassinated, including those heading its POW commission.[16] The Russian Red Cross was then reorganized, but it had become a shadow of its former self, fragmented by the internal divisions of the former Russian Empire. Humanitarian coordination persisted only due to Éduard Frick, a Swiss ICRC delegate stationed in Russia at the time of the revolution.[17] In August 1918, Serge Bagotsky's Russian Red Cross group was allowed into Switzerland. However, the Swiss consulate in Moscow warned that "it could not be ruled out that he was hiding behind the 'mission of the Russian Red Cross' in order to more easily gain access to hospitable Swiss soil, where, in addition to fulfilling his mission, he could find ample time to engage in propaganda and agitation."[18] The Swiss Red Cross and ICRC were aware of these suspicions but permitted his entry due to international norms requiring unhindered movement for individuals under the Red Cross symbol.[19]

The Olten Action Committee was the final addition to the socialist faction behind Switzerland's general strike. It emerged in response to a Federal Council proposal during the winter of 1917-1918, which aimed to address the country's wartime socioeconomic challenges by conscripting civilians for infrastructure projects and agricultural labor.[20] Robert Grimm, who had regained some influence within international socialism through his support of Russian

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[14] *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge,* no. 193 (January 1918), 157-166.

[15] SFA, E2001B#1000/1503#1537, ICRC, *Rapport de M. Ed. Frick, Représentant du Comité International en Russie* (November 13, 1918).

[16] SFA, E2001A#1000/45#714, Schweizerische Gesandtschaft to Affaires Etrangers, February 1, 1918; *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge,* no. 194 (April 1918), 298.

[17] "Appeal of the International Committee on behalf of the Russian Red Cross, May 6, 1918" in *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge,* no. 195, (July 1915), 446-448.

[18] SFA, E21#1000/131#10509, Consulat de Suisse à Moscou to the Schweizerische Politische Departement, July 29, 1918 ; Paravicini to the Ministère Public de la Confédération, August 21, 1918.

[19] SFA, E21#1000/131#10509, Colonel Bohny to Naville, August 21, 1918.

[20] Willi Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1968), 86-97; Meier, *Friendship under Stress,* 108.

revolutionaries and Lenin, organized the committee's first meeting on February 4, 1918.[21] The group included leaders from the Social Democratic Party and trade unions, including Platten and Nobs, despite their previous history with Grimm. While the Olten Action Committee was not inherently radical or revolutionary, tensions arose over leadership decisions. Many members opposed Platten's election to a leadership position in March 1918 due to his ties to the SJO and Russian revolutionaries.[22] Throughout 1918, Platten frequently considered resigning, particularly in April and May, when he and Nobs suspected that Grimm was using the committee for personal political gain. During a May 4 debate about rising milk prices, Platten rejected the suggestion of threatening the government with a "limited" general strike unless demands were met: "I refuse to participate in a competition of petitions with a maximum of demands. We must leave the formulation of demands to each individual union, allowing them to do what they deem as necessary."[23] Platten believed that only an organic, bottom-up movement could ensure the success of their socialist reforms.

After this, the Olten Action Committee remained largely inactive during its first six months. During this period, youth-led protests dominated the response to food shortages, inflation, and wage stagnation. Zurich faced significant unrest in June and July following the arrest of Münzenberg's former International Youth secretary, Jakob Herzog. On June 18-19, a confrontation outside troop barracks in Zurich turned violent, and another clash in Biel on July 8 prompted the mobilization of a mountainous brigade.[24] These instances led the Federal Council to impose a ban on public assemblies on July 12, granting cantons authority to deploy police and

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[21] For example, see *Berner Tagwacht,* no. 54, March 6, 1918.

[22] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 98-127.

[23] SFA, E21#1000/131#9909. *Protokoll der 8. Sitzung des Oltener Aktionskommitees* (May 4, 1918).

[24] SFA, E21#1000/131#9911, Viel unabhängige revolutionäre Sozialisten und Kommunisten, "An das proletarische Volk von Biel," reprinted in *Rapport du Commandant de Place de Biel au Commandant de l'Armee,* Cdt. Br. Mont. 3, (July 26, 1918); also, see Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 127-130.

military auxiliaries to maintain peace.[25] Additionally, the government restricted entry of foreign deserters at the border. These restrictions by the Federal Goverments spurred the Olten Action Committee into action. Grimm and Platten were convinced that the public outcry over the government's infringement on the traditional freedom of assembly could be used to prepare a general strike for their political platforms.[26] A workers' congress was set for July 27-29 in Basel to discuss demands and plan further action. The SJO wanted to be involved in the congress, but Grimm refused.[27] He also denied Platten's request to invite representatives from the Soviet embassy, emphasizing the need to maintain a "Swiss character" for the movement. Before the congress began, the Federal Council directly refused the Olten Action Committee's demand to revoke its July 12 decree: "The Federal Council believes that, given the current dangerous situation in the country amidst belligerent states, this decree was necessary."[28] Following the congress, Platten discreetly organized strike committees in several cities using the "Instructions for Conducting the General Strike," which the committee approved on August 5. Momentum stalled when Grimm reached an agreement with the Federal Council that allowed socialist leaders to chair a newly created Federal Food Office in early August, effectively halting further plans for a general strike.[29]

Platten viewed the Federal Council's agreement with the Olten Action Committee as a betrayal of the Zimmerwald movement and stepped back from his leadership role in September 1918.[30] The Olten Action Committee became largely inactive through October, validating

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[25] SFA, E1004.1#1000/9#11276, *Protokoll der Sitzung des Bundesrates* (July 12, 1918).

[26] SoArc, Ar 1.250.5, *Protokoll der gemeinsamen Sitzung des Aktionskomitees mit dem Bundeskomitee des Gewerkshaftsbundes und der Geschäftsleitung der Sozial. Dem. Partei* (July 15, [1918]).

[27] SFA, E21#1000/131#9918, *Protokoll der 10. Sitzung des Aktionskomitee* (July 20, 1918).

[28] SFA, E21#1000/131#9919, Kanzler der Eidgenossenschaft to the Oltener Aktionskomitee, July 26, 1918; also reported in *NZZ*, no. 989, 1 ed., July 28, 1918.

[29] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 134-149.

[30] SoArc, Ar 1.250.5, Karl Dürr to Geschäftsleitung der Socialdemokratischen Partei der Schweiz, September 19, 1918.

historian Willi Gautschi's assertion that the committee functioned more as a group of political figureheads capitalizing on the tumultuous energy of a working class strained by wartime deprivations.[31] Instead, revolutionary activity was driven by working-class youth and Bolshevik-Liebknecht aligned foreign figures. These groups emerged as the primary opposition to bourgeois civic associations, both nationalist and internationalist. By November 1918, earlier divisions over pro-German or pro-French agitation had diminished. Former rivals, like the Pan-Germans and the NHG, united around a shared goal of combating revolutionary socialism, which they deemed an existential threat to Switzerland.

7.2.2: Prelude to the General Strike: October-November 1918.

After the Basel Worker's Congress in late July 1918, Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg and the Swiss General Staff office concluded that a general strike's "primary purpose is to signal the outbreak of the European Revolution," one which would plunge Switzerland into a "civil war."[32] They agreed that any outbreak of a general strike warranted a decisive military response, even if it required harsh measures. Yet, the immediate danger of a general strike led by the Olten Action Committee diminished by August, as no sign of a broader European revolution materialized within Switzerland. Instead, the collapse of the German Empire in October acted as the catalyst, triggering revolutionary movements in Switzerland and across Central Europe.

The German government's promise of democratization in wartime came too late to prevent revolutionary unrest by October 1918. On October 23, as part of Prince Max von Baden's sweeping amnesties, Liebknecht was released from prison and quickly assumed leadership of the Independent Socialists, who had split with the Social Democratic Party in

[31] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 155-156.
[32] Unterstabschef to the Generalstabschef, July 31, 1918, cited by Gautschi, *Landesstreik,* 182-183.

1917.[33] Liebknecht wasted no time pursuing revolutionary goals. The Kiel Mutiny on November 3 triggered revolution in Germany.[34] Protests erupted nationwide, with particularly intense activity around the Swiss border. In Bavaria, revolutionary socialist Kurt Eisner overthrew the government and declared a new socialist republic on November 7. In Berlin, a coalition of independents and the moderates formed a socialist government on November 9, with Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicating and fleeing to the Netherlands on November 10.[35] As the armistice was signed on November 11, the Russian Red Army launched an offensive in its western borderlands, while revolutions in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and Budapest encouraged Lenin to expand the Bolshevik revolution westward.[36]

On October 1, 1918, Zurich experienced a major strike by bank workers, supported by trade unions and youth revolutionaries across the city. Both government officials and socialist factions viewed the strike as a precursor to a more serious revolutionary movement, mirroring similar unrest in Central Europe. Although Switzerland did not officially recognize the Soviet state, it permitted the mission to establish an office in Bern to ensure the reciprocal safety of the Swiss diplomatic office in St. Petersburg and thousands of Swiss citizens stranded in Russia after the October Revolution. This permission was made contingent upon the Russian delegation refraining from any "direct or indirect propaganda."[37] Yet, the Soviet office did engage in propaganda activities. Lenin and Radek viewed Switzerland as their "window to the rest of Europe" and vital for spreading revolution into Central Europe and Entente states.[38] Their main operation involved disseminating information from Russia to Western presses, with Fritz Platten

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[33] Carsten, *War against War,* 215.
[34] Gerwarth, November 1918, 78-89; 140-157.
[35] Ibid., 91-120.
[36] Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 228.
[37] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 156-157.
[38] Schweizerisches Konsulat in Moskau to the Politische Departement, [undated], cited by Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 158-159.

acting as a liaison. Swiss intelligence monitored him as a frequent visitor to the Soviet office throughout 1918.[39] Recognizing the imminent situation, Lenin directly instructed the Soviet office in Bern to incite civil unrest in Switzerland. In letters dated October 14 and 16, he urged the Soviets in Switzerland to connect with the Germans and Zurich workers, appoint agents among them, and finance agitation efforts.[40] On October 17, Platten proposed to Zurich's local Social Democratic group a plan to escalate the situation following the banking strike: "Already the approaching revolution is reddening the sky over Central Europe. The redeeming fire will engulf the entire rotten, blood-soaked edifice of the capitalist world."[41] His proposal was approved on October 28 at a party meeting, with Nobs casting the deciding vote. Subsequently, the *Volksrecht*, edited by Nobs, issued repeat calls for mass action in Zurich's streets from late October into early November.[42] Reports of bomb caches intended for attacks on police stations and military barracks near Zurich heightened concerns that the city might soon become the epicenter of revolutionary upheaval comparable to events unfolding in Germany.[43]

On November 3, 1918, a week before the general strike, General Wille returned to his family estate in Meilen. There, he considered the current situation in Switzerland in the same halls German cultural and intellectual elite of the nineteenth century once visited. Reflecting on the unrest in Zurich, Wille concluded that a military mobilization was essential to protect Switzerland's internal security. He specifically recommended deploying trusted cavalry units and rural troops, who were less susceptible to Bolshevik sympathies. Despite acknowledging the risks of moving troops into the city, especially because of the flu epidemic, he considered "the

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[39] SFA, E21#1000/131#10375, *Bericht Det. Gerber betr. Erhebungen über die Sowjetmission, June 26 1918 – July 13, 1918;* also, see Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge*, 87-88.

[40] Lenin to Berzin, August 14, 1918, in *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive,* ed. Richard Pipes (New Haven, CT: Yale Universtiy Press, 1996), 53.

[41] "Protokoll der Geschäftsleitung der SPS," October 17, 1918, cited by Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 154-155.

[42] For example, see *Volksrecht,* November 5, 1918.

[43] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 226-230.

salvation of the fatherland" to be at stake. On November 4, Wille personally delivered his drafted orders to the Military Department, which subsequently forwarded them to the Federal Council on November 5.[44]

7.3: General Strike of November 11-15, 1918

After the banking strike, the Olten Action Committee met in Bern on November 5, 1918, to discuss their next steps.[45] Discussions revolved around whether to maintain a focus on economic demands or pivot toward seeking greater political power within the federal government. Participants acknowledged that a Russian-style revolution was improbable due to Switzerland's decentralized cantonal system, which effectively prevented a straightforward takeover of the Federal Council or National Assembly. The majority did agree that socialist movements gaining traction across Central Europe were also present in Switzerland and could potentially be leveraged to secure broader electoral support. However, there was no plan for a general strike or coup in Zurich or elsewhere. Instead, they viewed achieving a socialist majority as a gradual and reformist process by directing social unrest towards the upcoming Swiss elections in 1919.

Despite the Olten Action Committee's intentions, the escalating tensions in Zurich sparked a chain reaction that involved virtually all aspects of Switzerland's state and civil society in a national struggle. Years of strikes, protests, and SJO agitation culminated in heightened fears following revolutionary activity in Germany. The *Volksrecht* was particularly boisterous in its reporting on socialist uprisings in Germany, spreading either fear or hope that it would soon

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[44] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 202-206.

[45] Oltener Aktionskomitee, *Die Novemberstreiks 1918 in der Schweiz: Situationsbericht über den Proteststreik vom 9. November und den Landesstreik vom 12., 13., und 14. November* (Bern: Unionsdruckerei Bern, 1918), 3-4.

cross over into Switzerland.[46] On November 7, local socialist leaders in Zurich, many aligned with the SJO, organized a large public demonstration to commemorate both the anniversary of the October Revolution and the November Strike of 1917.[47] This event alarmed local authorities, who feared Zurich might follow Bavaria's example. Whether these fears were grounded in reality or exaggerated, they prompted the cantonal government to request military intervention from the Federal Council in accordance to General Wille's preparations.[48]

The Federal Council's decision to mobilize troops in Zurich triggered an emergency meeting of the Olten Action Committee on the same day. This meeting included leaders from major Swiss trade unions, such as Howard Eugster-Züst, a prominent figure in the textile workers' union and brother of Arthur Eugster. A socialist preacher in Appenzell, Eugster-Züst adhered firmly to the reformist branch of international socialism, opposing anti-militarist views within the Social Democratic Party.[49] During this meeting, the Olten Action Committee and trade unions condemned the mobilization of troops as unjustified. They declared a 24-hour limited general strike that focused on urban areas and excluded workers from in critical sectors, particularly railway unions.[50]

With the situation in Zurich escalating and the Olten Action Committee scheduling a 24-hour strike for November 9, the Federal Council issued a public address on November 8, 1918. The statement emphasized Switzerland's wartime achievements, particularly in humanitarian efforts, and acknowledging the socio-economic hardships caused by the country's encirclement by belligerents. However, the Council maintained that these difficulties did not justify compromising national security or democratic stability:

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[46] SoArc, KS 331/260, Das Oltener Aktionskomitee, *Bulletin des* "*Volksrecht"* (November 8, 1918).
[47] *NZZ*, no. 1484, 1 ed., November 7, 1918.
[48] *NZZ*, no. 1486, 2 ed., November 7, 1918.
[49] *Berner Tagwacht,* August 24, 1917; *Berner Tagwacht,* August 25, 1917.
[50] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 247-249.

> The very moment we were planning a rapid, albeit gradual, demobilization with the army command, we became aware that growing unease had taken hold in certain parts of the country, and especially in the city of Zurich. The Zurich government urgently requested that we call up new troops to calm to population and prevent unrest. Openly or covertly, certain groups and publications threaten to transplant to Switzerland the revolutionary and anarchist experiments that are bloodily plaguing Russia. Dubious, mostly foreign elements sow hatred, exploit the difficulties in our national economy, which are beyond our power to resolve, and stir up the most dangerous passions. Such people shrink from violence nor crime. There is no place for them in the hospitable Swiss home, open to the Spirit of freedom. These activities and their consequences pose the greatest threat to the security and integrity of our country. […] We invite everyone–workers, farmers, and all other citizens, the parties and their leaders–to work together harmoniously with us and help us lead our country from war to peace without unrest or violent upheaval. No sensible Swiss citizen will offer militant services to the enemies of our democracy.[51]

This firm stance drew a clear line against revolutionary activity and foreign interference, signaling the state's readiness to use force to defend its system. However, the call for public solidary inadvertently triggered unforeseen consequences that tested Switzerland's monopoly on power during this critical period of unrest.

The actual strike on November 9, 1918, unfolded with far less intensity than the Federal Council and military had anticipated. In many cities, such as Geneva, Lausanne and St. Gallen, participation was minimal or nonexistent. Zurich once again became the focal point of unrest for the country. Groups of youth confronted the military and police forces stationed throughout the city. One notable incident involved a youth named Josef Bruggmann throwing firecrackers at cavalry officers' horses to provoke chaos, which led to localized crackdowns.[52] That evening, news of the Bavarian Socialist Republic's proclamation and Kaiser Wilhelm II's abdication reached Zurich, energizing local socialist leaders. Trade unionists and youth supporters declared that the strike would continue indefinitely, defying the original orders of the Olten Action Committee. They issued demands for reinstating freedom of assembly, releasing political prisoners (which at the time still included Willi Münzenberg), and officially recognizing the

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[51] SFA, E2001B#1000/1501#269, Calonder and Schatzmann, *An das Schweizervolk!* (November 8, 1918).
[52] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik,* 251-260.

Soviet state and its diplomatic delegation.[53] Fritz Brupbacher recounted that news from Germany made even "the most doubtful among us hopeful and seized with the belief that the days of the old Swiss Confederation were numbered, that its crumbling edifice was on the verge of collapse that the long awaited revolution was at hand."[54] Meanwhile, Platten shuttled back and forth between Zurich and the Russian delegation in Bern, transporting agitation materials to Nobs to prepare for escalating the strike further in Zurich.[55]

On the morning of November 10, 1918, representatives from the Olten Action Committee attempted to persuade Zurich strikers to end the strike, but were unsuccessful.[56] Forced into a difficult position, the committee convened in Bern that evening with leaders from major trade unions and the Social Democratic Party. Prior to the meeting, Grimm met with the Federal Council and requested the withdrawal of troops from Zurich, but his appeal was firmly denied.[57] During the Olten Action Committee's meeting, influential figures, including Grimm, advocated joining forces with the Zurich strikers. Their argument was grounded in the belief that Switzerland had become part of Central Europe's revolutionary "battle zone." Historian Willi Gautschi asserts that Grimm's vote was decisive, as he sought to maintain his recently regained political leadership and avoid losing it to radical factions in Zurich.[58] Consequently, in the early hours of November 11, the Olten Action Committee, trade unions, and Social Democratic Party collectively issued a call for a nationwide, indefinite general strike to begin that same day.

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[53] Extra edition of the *Volksrecht,* November 10, 1918.

[54] Brupbacher, *Zürich während Krieg und Landesstreik,* 134.

[55] SFA, E21#1000/131#10385, Eidg. Untersuchungsrichter für die deutsche und italienische Schweiz, *Verbal,* April 30, 1919; SFA, E21#1000/131#10386, P.S. Meyerhofer to Polizeikommando, Zürich, December 23, 1918.

[56] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 257-260.

[57] Oltener Aktionskomitee, *Die November Streiks 1918,* 7-8.

[58] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 277-280.

Grimm, Eugster-Züst, Platten, and Nobs all signed.[59] The strike orders included participation from soldiers and railway workers, aiming to paralyze the country's infrastructure and undermine the state's ability to suppress demonstrations.[60] Additionally, a nine-point list of demands was published, advocating for significant reforms such as proportional representation in Federal Council elections, women's suffrage, reorganizing the military into a "People's Army," and establishing state monopolies on import and export industries.[61] The major Swiss socialist papers included a call to arms and signed off with the rallying cry: "You must fight for your interests with firmness and fear no sacrifice as there is no other way to succeed!"[62]

General Wille's initial military strategy for Zurich during the general strike involved deploying only a few brigades of infantry and cavalry. By November 12, 1918, troop numbers in Zurich had grown to 20,000 out of the 95,000 soldiers mobilized nationwide. Despite this increase, many troops were still required to secure Switzerland's borders and the army selectively utilized rural troops for street-level operations in order to safeguard against the potential of urban soldiers defecting to the side of the revolutionaries.[63] Wille entrusted Colonel Emil Sonderegger with command over the forces in Zurich. Sonderegger was considered a model soldier, exhibiting a disciplined Prussian demeanor that mirrored Wille's own principles. Both men shared the view that Zurich's agitators represented anti-state factions and were willing to take any measures necessary to restore public order. Additionally, Wille placed his Pan-German son, Major Ulrich Wille Jr., on Sonderegger's command staff.

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[59] SoArc, Ar 1.250.5, Der Oltener Aktionskomitee, Geschäftsleitung der Sozialdem. Partei der Schweiz, et al., *An das arbeitende Volk der Schweiz!* ([November 11, 1918]).

[60] SoArc, Ar 1.250.5, Cartel des Cheminots suisses, *Appel à tous les Cheminots!* ([November 1918]); SoArc, KS 331/260, Die Vorstand der Artbeiterunion Zürich, der Soz. Parei Schweiz, et al., *Soldaten!* ([November 1918]).

[61] SoArc, Ar 1.250.5, Der Oltener Aktionskomitee, Geschäftsleitung der Sozialdem. Partei der Schweiz, et al. *An das arbeitende Volk der Schweiz!* ([November 11, 1918]).

[62] SoArc, Ar 1.250.5, *Le Droit du Peuple,* no. 45, November 10, 1918.

[63] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 235-245.

On November 10, 1918, Sonderegger had already banned all public gatherings, including an event organized by Paul Rüegg and the SJO to commemorate the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Despite this prohibition, approximately 7,000 people gathered at Münsterplatz, defying the order. Military forces immediately confronted the crowd, firing warning shots into the air in an attempt to disperse them. During the confrontation, a soldier was killed by retaliatory gunfire from an unidentified assailant.[64] A full crackdown resulted, which Sonderegger used as justification to further militarize Zurich. The next day, coinciding with the start of the general strike, Sonderegger supplied troops in Zurich with live ammunition, including automatic machine guns and grenades. He issued warnings to strike leaders that soldiers were authorized to use grenades to clear windows and basements if necessary, essentially admitting that they would use deadly force to stop the revolutionaries.[65]

Because of the short notice, the general strike on November 11, 1918, remained largely confined to Zurich, not spreading to the rest of the country until November 12. The Federal Council issued a final appeal to counter the Olten Action Committee's demands, reaffirming its commitment to social reform but rejecting revolutionary methods: "In our first proclamation, we have positioned ourselves on the ground of social reform. Nothing will make us abandon this determination, but we reject any reform movement that seeks to achieve it through revolutionary means, that is to say, outside of constitutional and legal channels. We oppose all violence; we will prevent it at every opportunity."[66] Despite this declaration, the strike escalated further. By November 12, approximately 250,000 workers demonstrated across the country, including

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[64] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 877-881.

[65] SoArc, Ar 1.250.5, Oberstdivisionär Sonderegger to the Präsidium der Arbeiterunion, November 11, 1918.

[66] SFA, E2001B#1000/1501/269, Calonder and Schatzmann, *Au peuple suisse* (November 11, 1918).

railway workers.[67] While mostly peaceful, strikers occupied strategic urban positions to paralyze a coordinated response from authorities. One key target was the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung'*s office building in Zurich, halting the publication of one of Switzerland's largest newspapers. With Sonderegger's assistance, *NZZ* editors established the impromptu paper, *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs.* It was operated by a volunteer force of around 700 University of Zurich students and 400 students from Zurich's Technical School. Since regular distribution channels were blocked by striker pickets and railway disruptions, students used bicycles to deliver the paper across rural areas and cities in Eastern Switzerland. Between November 11 and 14, around 52,000 copies were distributed this way, ensuring that communities outside strike zones remained informed about the government's actions against the unrest.[68]

On the ground, the SJO actively sought to agitate among soldiers, urging them to abandon their orders or join the strike. Annalise Rüegg, a member of the SJO, had recently returned from the United States where she connected with Trotsky's socialists there and Bolshevik networks in Europe. Rüegg used her background as a humanitarian nurse working on the Spanish Flu to gain access to military personnel. Donning an American Red Cross uniform, she infiltrated Swiss military lines during the strike, engaging soldiers both on duty and during meals in an attempt to incite mutiny.[69] Yet, the mobilization of soldiers from rural areas proved effective in mitigating antimilitarist agitation.

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[67] Bernhard Degen, "Landesstreik (Switzerland)," *1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War,* eds. Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer D. Keene, Alan Kramer and Bill Nasson (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2019), https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/landesstreik-switzerland/ (Accessed January 12, 2026).

[68] SoArc, KS 331/260, Aktionskomitee der Studentenschaft, *Aktion der Studentenschaft von Zürich zur Aufrechterhaltung der öffentlichen Ordnung: Sicherheit und Ruhe während des Generalstreiks im November 1918* ([N.D.]).

[69] SFA, E21#1000/131#10677, Bundesanwaltschaft, *Bericht der Gewährsperson in Zürich betrifft Mitteilungen des Jungburschen Trostel, Willy über Platten und Münzenberg* (February 21, 1919).

On the other hand, the bourgeois also rallied against the strikers in defense of Swiss democracy. On November 3-4, 1918, a meeting of the SAC, led by the central committee in Geneva, took place in the town of Gingens. Witnessing the growing unrest in Switzerland and Central Europe, SAC members united against "the harmful activity deployed in our country by foreign elements, revolutionaries enlightened or in the pay of causes in absolute contradiction with our democracy."[70] They agreed to call a meeting of all patriotic societies, alpinists, gymnasts, and marksmen, into a national bloc of civic associations to defend the Confederation. On November 7, a congress convened in Geneva, chaired by the president of the SAC. It included leaders of 70 national associations, including the NHG represented by the Geneva chapter.[71] The representatives blamed foreigners for Switzerland's internal crisis: "Who threatens this country? Foreigners. Foreigners who have come to carry out the instructions of Lenin and Trotsky here, for their own gain, for our ruin. Their emissaries are sometimes envoys from the Russian Soviets, sometimes Germans, consular officials, to say the least. […] The case of Zurich has already revealed that this city is surreptitiously transforming itself into a revolutionary arsenal."[72] They agreed on a joint plan of action. If signs of a Bolshevik revolution emerged in Switzerland, they would come together to fight against the revolutionaries as a civilian militia, even risking bloodshed.

Only four days later, the SAC central committee saw the signs necessary for them to act. The Geneva section met at their headquarters in the morning before besetting against the striking demonstrators in the streets.[73] Before leaving the building, news had already reached them of

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[70] BBB, GA SAC 44, "85eme Séance, November 4, 1918," in *Procès Verbal du Comité Central: Siégeant a Geneve, Pour les Années 1917 à 1919.*

[71] SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, Comité Central du Club Alpin Suisse, *Exposé de Motifs et programme préliminaire* (November 1918).

[72] Ibid.

[73] BBB, GA SAC 44, "86eme Séance, November 11, 1918, " in *Procès Verbal du Comité Central: Siégeant a Geneve, Pour les Années 1917 à 1919.*

SAC sections as far as Interlaken in the interior planning on doing the same. With this knowledge, the Geneva section also drafted a declaration, to be sent across the country inquiring over the formation of a tentatively titled "Swiss National Defense Union."

NHG sections across the country self-mobilized and joined the SAC. NHG Geneva joined the SAC on the afternoon of November 11 to swell their countermarch against the general strike and called on other civic associations to join them.[74] On the other side of the country, NHG Zurich also supported mobilizing a civilian militia. Even though some members empathized with the economic plight of the workers, they would not allow a "dictatorship of the proletariat" to cause the downfall of their democratic institutions.[75] As a result, the *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs* issued a call on November 12 to form a city militia that was shared with the eastern half of the country.[76]

Divisions over responses to the general strike revealed fractures within civic associations. On November 12, 1918, the Bern NHG board publicly expressed support for the general strike in Grimm's *Berner Tagwacht.*[77] They pleaded for calm and non-violence while arguing that "new men are needed to give our country a new constitution. We must act quickly. It must become a new Switzerland." This stance sparked an internal struggle within the organization. Members and the NHG's management committee strongly opposed the NHG Bern boards' appeal. On November 15, the section members convened a meeting where they unanimously condemned the strike and ousted its board.[78] This event demonstrated that organizational cultures were not always strong enough to dictate individual members' actions or sympathies.

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[74] SoArc, Ar 1.250.5, Union Helvetique, *Citoyens Suisse!* (November 11, 1918).

[75] SoArc, KS 331/260, Ortsgruppe Zürich der NHG, [Untitled] (November 14, 1918).

[76] *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 2, ed. 2, November 12, 1918; *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 3, 1 ed., November 13, 1918.

[77] *Berner Tagwacht,* November 12, 1918.

[78] AfZ, NL Emil Bänziger 3, Der Zentralvorstand to the Gruppen der NHG, November 18, 1918; also, see Gaunzini, "*Kritischer Patriotismus,*" 68-70.

The confrontation between bourgeois civic associations, socialist-backed strikers, and the Swiss military culminated in the Federal Council expelling the Soviet Embassy on November 12, 1918. This decision stemmed from discussions held between November 7 and 10, during which sufficient evidence was presented suggesting Soviet involvement in revolutionary agitation. The general strike further solidified the Council's decision.[79] On November 10, Russian diplomats were given notice to leave the country under Swiss armed escort the following morning.[80]The Russians were granted a short extension to leave Switzerland until the morning of November 12, 1918.[81] The Russian diplomats were escorted to Bern's train station under heavy military protection, including cavalry and machine gun mounted trucks, but several were still physically assaulted by counter-demonstrators.[82] Meanwhile, a young man attempted to charge the armed escorts with a revolver but was swiftly subdued by Lt. Colonel von Diesbach, commander of the 7th Infantry Regiment responsible for ensuring the Russians reached the border.[83] The railway union's strike disrupted train operations, forcing the military to use automobiles to transport the Russians. Although they reached the Swiss border at Konstanz, unrest in Germany delayed their passage across until November 15.[84] During this period, Switzerland completely closed its borders with Germany and Austria, isolating itself from neighboring German-speaking countries for the first time since the beginning of the war.[85]

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[79] SFA, E21#1000/131#10392, *Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des schweizerischen Bundesrates* (November 7, 1918); SFA, E21#1000/131#10398, *Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des schweizerischen Bundesrates* (November 10, 1918).

[80] SFA, E21#1000/131#10399, [N.A.], *Gespräch mit Hernn Schkolosky* (November 10, 1918); SFA, E21#1000/131#10394, Auswärtiges [Amt], *Telegramm nach Petrograd* (November 11, 1918).

[81] SFA, E21#1000/131#10404, W. Thurnheer, *Abreise der Sovietmission* (November 14, 1918).

[82] Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel,* 195-197.

[83] SFA, E21#1000/131#10403, Commandant Regiment d'Infanterie 7 to the Commandant de IIème Corps d'Armee, *Rapport* (November 12, 1918); SFA, E21#1000/131#10405, Oblt. Bracher, Dragoner-Squadron 9, *Bericht betreffend Abreise der bolschevistischen Gesandtschaft aus Bern* (November 18, 1918).

[84] SFA, E21#1000/131#10404, *Bericht über die Abreise der russische Sovietmission nach Deutschland* (November 20, 1918).

[85] SFA, E2001B#1000/1501#269, Auswärtiges Amt, *Telegramm nach Paris, London, Washington D.C., etc,* (November 13, 1918).

The establishment of bourgeois militias supplemented the Swiss military's presense and offered civilian counterbalance to the strikers. In Zurich, 17 makeshift registration centers for civilian militias opened throughout the city on the morning of November 12, accompanied by a call to arms through the *NZZ*'s *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs*:

> A 'Zurich city militia' has been established. […] In light of the increasingly threatening activities of subversive organizations operating on the Russian model, it aims to unite and, at the same time, mobilize the bourgeois elements determined to offer the strongest resistance. For far too long we have watched as brazen emissaries from the East openly call for rebellion and preach civil war. Now we abandon our restraint and take to the field. [...] Therefore, we now intend to revive the old, rough Swiss way and punch back anyone who attacks us, instead of just keeping quiet. Away with all timidity! [86]

While the military established strategic positions and maneuvered around striking crowds, civilian militias took a leading role in direct confrontations. A notable clash occurred at Bellevue Plaza when strikers attacked university students distributing copies of *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs* by bicycle. Militia members intervened, fought off the attackers, and detained them until the military arrived to make arrests.[87] Anti-strikers unable to participate in the streets donated material aid for soldiers and volunteers ill with the Spanish flu. By evening, patriotic song-filled crowds reclaimed public spaces across Zurich, weakening the strike's momentum.

By November 13, the *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs* observed a decline in the strikers' enthusiasm, highlighting the noticeable absence of "those typical groups of boys and girls who are invariably present at every Zurich street demonstration."[88] Sonderegger made suppressing the SJO a military priority. Böhny's account of the general strike recalls how the military targeted the SJO's office and bookstore on Bäckerstrasse.[89] Receiving short notice of the impending military approach, Böhny and a few others hastily gathered address books from the office.

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[86] *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 3, November 13, 1918.
[87] *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 2, November 12, 1918.
[88] *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 3, November 13, 1918.
[89] Böhny, *Die Sozialistische Jugendbewegung des Ersten Weltkrieges als politischer Faktor,* 11-13.

However, they noticed machine guns positioned across the street from both the front and back entrances. With no viable escape route, they jumped from a kitchen window to evade capture just before the military stormed the building and confiscated their records.

By November 14, 1918, the momentum in the streets had shifted to the counter-demonstrators across Switzerland. In Zurich, the civilian militia grew to 2,000 men strong while in Basel, Switzerland's second Pan-German stronghold during the war, mobilized 6,000 armed volunteers.[90] Basel also had particularly violent clashes between protestors and militia members. Despite these confrontations, most businesses reopened for work. In rural towns, militias ensured the general strike did not extend beyond city centers. Reports from Geneva to Basel indicated that the remaining strikers were inconsequential, with most factories resuming operation and the pickets dispersed by anti-socialist civic associations.[91]

While the battle in the streets brewed, the Federal Council dealt with the Olten Action Committee, which continued to act as the strikers' leadership. During negotiations on November 10, Grimm warned the Federal Council that momentum was against the Swiss state. He stressed that the collapse of the German empire had clearly spilled into Switzerland, making it impossible to control the masses without implementing reforms. Despite this, the Federal Council rejected the Olten Action Committee's demands again on November 11, even as the strike unfolded. Rather than relying solely on a unilateral refusal, the Federal Council called an emergency congress of the National Assembly to allow democratically elected representatives to vote on the matter. The assembly met on November 12, where most members echoed the Federal Council's opposition to the strike. Scherrer-Fülleman led a faction that supported the adoption of proportional representation, but they criticized the Olten Action Committee's tactics of using

[90] *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 5, November 15, 1918; *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 3, November 13, 1918.

[91] *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 3, November 13, 1918.

mass, social disruption as leverage. Ultimately, 120 representatives voted against the Olten Action Committee, with only fourteen social democrats supporting it.[92]

On November 13, 1918, the National Assembly reconvened to address the strike and its implications. Grimm, attempting to regain influence, delivered a direct appeal to the assembly. He warned of a growing wave of political revolutions surging from Eastern Europe into Switzerland and cautioned that defiance by the Swiss politic elite could lead to the Confederacy's downfall alongside other old systems of Europe. During the session, George Bovet of the International Peace Bureau observed a tense exchange between Grimm and Ador. Grimm argued that an ultimatum would provoke civil war, but Ador countered, asserting that the military and broader public sentiment were not on Grimm's side, despite support from the working class.[93] Grimm's warnings failed to sway the assembly, which once again voted overwhelmingly against his position. Before the third and final vote was held, Eugster-Züst spoke.[94] He pleaded with religious tones for the federal government to implement reforms as a means to prevent further escalation of tensions into civil war.[95] The last vote upheld the previous positions. President Felix Calonder concluded with a declaration to the Social Democrats: "If you threaten us with civil war, be aware that we will take up the fight and, in the name of state authority, wage it to the very end."[96]

After the National Assembly's clear rebuttal, the Federal Council issued an ultimatum on November 14, 1918, demanding the immediate end of the strike by midnight. The announcement emphasized "the many assemblies, associations, and citizens who have shown us so much patriotic solidarity in recent days," and acknowledged them with a toast in the National

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[92] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 305-310.
[93] George Bovet, *Chemin faisant, trente ans de souvenirs,* (Genève: Éditions du Cheval ailé, 1945), 185.
[94] *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 4, November 14, 1918.
[95] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik, 1918,* 310-313.
[96] *Stenographisches Bulletin des Nationalrates 1918,* 476, cited in Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 312.

Assembly.[97] Despite Grimm's earlier threats, the shift in public sentiment and civil society's support decisively turned the tide against the strike. Faced with dwindling momentum and mounting pressure, the Olten Action Committee had little choice but to accept the government's ultimatum, ending the strike on November 15.[98] However, resistance persisted among youth activists in Zurich. The SJO and strike leaders refused to accept the Olten Action Committee's capitulation, continuing to hang posters and distribute red leaflets in an attempt to continue the strike. By then, though, most workers had returned to work. Without a crowd on their side, authorities simply arrested these youths.

7.4: Swiss Civil Society and Post-War Violence

On November 24-25, 1918, just ten days after the general strike ended, an assembly took place in Aargau, marking a symbolic end to revolutionary attempts in Switzerland. The demonstration was organized by the Aargau Patriotic Association, a civilian militia formed during the strike under the auspices of the canton's SAC. The event was widely publicized through local and national newspapers, with endorsements from the SAC's Central Committee.[99] On November 24, approximately 12,000 citizens gathered in Aargau, waving flags and singing patriotic songs. The crowd was led by Eugen Bircher, a medical doctor and former Swiss military major who headed the Aargau militia.[100] On November 25, Bircher marched the assembly to the Vindonissa amphitheater. Like the Rütli field in Uri, Vindonissa was a significant site in Swiss national mythology. While Rütli field commemorates the medieval founding of the

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[97] *Der Bund,* no. 487, November 14, 1918; *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 4, November 14, 1918.

[98] *Bürgerliche Presse Zürichs,* no. 5, November 15, 1918; also, see Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 880-881.

[99] *Neue Aargauer Zeitung,* November 23, 1918; *NZZ*, no. 1540, ed. 1, November 23, 1918; BBB, GA SAC 44, "87ème Séance, November 19, 1918" in *Procès Verbal du Comité Central: Siégeant a Geneve, Pour les Années 1917 à 1919.*

[100] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 366-368.

Swiss Confederation, Vindonissa represents Switzerland's time as part of the Roman Empire.[101] The site served as a Roman fort that overlooked the confluence of the Aare and Rhine rivers and served as a defense against eastern barbarians. At Vindonissa's amphitheater, Bircher delivered a stirring speech pledging loyalty to Swiss democracy. However, he also called for "strict action against all instigators and all unclean foreign elements in Switzerland" referring to perceived Bolshevik threats.[102] After the rally, Bircher proposed forming and arming a nationwide civilian militia for "combating Bolshevism," leading to the creation of the *Schweizerische Vaterländische Verband* (SVV) at the start of 1919.[103]

Eugen Bircher embodied the Swiss national identity during the pivotal moments of the general strike. Born in Aarau, Bircher was a surgeon and served as a major in the Swiss army at just 32 years old.[104] He played a key role in fortifying Mount Vully, a critical defensive position for Switzerland during the war, guarding against potential French invasion through the Jura region between Bielersee and Lake Neuchâtel. Additionally, he participated in the NHG lecture circuit to boost morale among active-duty soldiers. Seeking respite in late 1915, Bircher requested temporary leave and volunteered for humanitarian service with the Central Powers, directly inspired by the work done near the Western Front by Pan-German Dr. Sauerbruch of Zurich.[105] Approved for this mission, he worked as a medical liaison officer in Bulgaria for several months in 1916 after its entry into the war. Though not formally part of the German-Swiss Society, Bircher unapologetically supported Germany's war effort, gaining recognition for

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[101] Jürgen Trumm, "Vindonissa," *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland* (April 22, 2015) https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/012287/2015-04-22/ (Accessed January 19, 2026).

[102] AfZ, NL Eugen Bircher 14.3.1, [Eugen Bircher], *10 Jahre nachher,* [1928?]; *NZZ*, no. 1551, 3 ed., November 25, 1918.

[103] Schweizerischer Vaterländischer Verband to the Politisches Departement, January 19, 1919, cited by Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 368.

[104] Daniel Heller, *Eugen Bircher: Artzt, Militär und Politiker* (Zürich: NZZ Verlag, 1988).

[105] AfZ, NL Eugen Bircher 3.1, [Bircher] to the Direction des Innern des Kantons Aargau, November 21, 1915.

his Pan-German stance alongside Major Wille Jr., as noted by U.S. Ambassador Stovall.[106] Bircher's most controversial work, "The Walk to Canossa," appeared in the press in August 1916.[107] Here, Bircher disparaged French-Swiss pro-Entente sympathies and accused them of undermining Swiss neutrality. Like the German-Swiss Society's articles on the same topic, Bircher's views sparked outrage among the French-speaking press. It became a true scandal when Colonel de Loys of the Swiss army's 2nd Division publicly endorsed the article, forcing General Wille to reprimand the Colonel while Bircher faced no punishment. Bircher even engaged with the Swiss Peace Society in the press, who agreed with him on Switzerland's lost independence during the war, but disagreed with his extreme militarist solutions for cracking down on foreign agitation.[108] It is no surprise then that Bircher, along with his leadership of the SVV, became a contributor to the Pan-German *Schweizerische Monatshefte für Politik und Kultur* in the interwar years and, along with Hektor Ammann, later became a primary social link between Nazi Germany and Switzerland.[109] However, during the general strike and post-war period, Bircher's vision of the Swiss nation reflected a blend of ethnic, civic, and democratic ideals. He articulated this vision through his statement:

> The political concept of the fatherland, like everything else on earth, may be subject to change and that is also the reason why we have to deal with our state in the situation it's in today, […] And yet our state has been privileged, for centuries, as long as Swiss history exists, to maintain the idea that is now to be implemented practically everywhere; the idea of the democratic republic, of the old Germanic people's freedom against oligarchic influences from any quarter.[110]

By the beginning of 1919, civilian militias consisting of thousands of volunteers had firmly established themselves across the country. Bircher's initiative, along with efforts by the

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[106] Stovall, *Switzerland and the World War,* 36-37.
[107] Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg,* 782.
[108] Rudolf Geering-Christ, "Militarismus in der Schweiz?," *Der Friede,* no. 9 (September 20, 1916), 69.
[109] Eugen Bircher, "Zur Rassenfrage in der Schweiz," *Schweizerische Monatshefte für Politk und Kultur* 5, no. 12 (April 1925-March 1926), 671-677; also, see Elsig, *Les Shrapnels du Mensonge,* 523-525.
[110] AfZ, NL Eugen Bircher 23.2, Eugen Bircher, *Die wirtschaftliche und politische Lage der Schweiz: Referat, gehalten an der Stifungsversammlung der Alt-Helvetia* (December 21, 1918).

SAC and NHG, played a key role in institutionalizing these militias following the general strike. Most SAC sections organized as part of their proposed national defense league, with some like Rorschach and Ticino, collaborating directly with local NHG members.[111] Basel led in militia numbers with their 6,000 members, while other areas such as Bern and Fribourg reported over 3,000, many armed with military-grade equipment.[112] Legally, civilian militias faced minimal obstacles in gaining approval from cantonal and federal authorities. The Swiss military had already endorsed their use as early as October 1914, deeming them essential for national survival during wartime, but did not yet see them as necessary when the SAC asked to form them (see Chapter 3).[113] This stance was reaffirmed by General Wille, Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg, and the Federal Council immediately following the general strike in November 1918.[114] Legal counsel from the army and the Federal Justice Department further solidified their legitimacy.[115] Vigilante militias could even be supplied arms by the military if deemed necessary for state security.[116] While concerns persisted over the arming of antimilitarist socialist groups during the war, the government readily shared its monopoly on violence by normalizing and militarizing bourgeois civilian militias within Swiss civil society.

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[111] BBB, GA SAC 44, "Séances, November 19, 1918 to December 17, 1918" in *Procès Verbal du Comité Central: Siégeant a Geneve, Pour les Années 1917 à 1919.*

[112] SFA, E21#1000/131#12045, Polizeidepartement des Kantons Basel-Stadt to the Schweiz. Militärdepartement, February 19, 1919; SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, *Bulletin der Bürgerwehr der Stadt Bern*, no. 2 (March 15, 1919); SFA, E21#131#12043, Le Conseiller d'Etat [Fribourg] to the Départment militaire fédérale, April 2, 1919.

[113] SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, [N.A.] to the Schweizerische Militärdepartement, October 23, 1914.

[114] SFA, E27#1000/721/13456, Wille to Decoppet, November 20, 1918; SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, Sprecher to Decoppet, December 1, 1918; SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, *Auszug dem Protokoll der Sitzung des schweizerischen Bundesrates* (November 20, 1918).

[115] SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, Colonel Borel to the Chef de l'Etat-major de l'Armee, *Rapport sur la situation juridique des Gardes civiques* (November 29, 1918); SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, Justiz-abeteilung, *Aufzeichnung zu handen des Herrn Departementsvorstehers betreffend Fragen, die mit dem Generalstreik zusammenhängen* (January 30, 1919).

[116] SFA, E21#1000/131#12046, Schweiz. Militärdepartement to the Militar- & Polizeidepartement des Kantons Luzern, April 23, 1919.

The end of the general strike resulted in the collapse of international socialism in Switzerland. Local police investigators infiltrated a workers' congress in Bern held on December 22 and 23, 1918, revealing deep divisions among the working class following the strike's failure, effectively eliminating any capacity for organizing another strike.[117] This fragmentation was further evident during an international socialist conference held in Bern in February 1919, which attempted to reform the Second International but ultimately succumbed to internal conflicts, highlighting socialism's weakened position in Switzerland. In the summer of 1919, Switzerland held its first National Assembly elections under proportional representation.[118] The system followed what Scherrer-Füllemann had outlined before the general strike and the Olten Action Committee had declaredas part of their strike agenda. Instead of creating a socialist majority as intended though, the elections underscored socialism's defeat by the bourgouis, civil coalitions formed in the wake of the general strike. The total number of seats in the assembly doubled, but the Social Democrats failed to gain even one additional seat. In Zurich, historically a stronghold for working-class socialism, local elections of 1919 showed a sharp decrease in votes for Social Democrats, who lost six seats. Adding to these challenges was factionalism within the socialist movement. The SJO accused the Olten Action Committee, particularly Grimm and Eugster-Züst, of betraying the revolutionary cause during the strike.[119] This internal strife led Münzenberg's successors, such as Trostel and Herzog, to shift their focus toward establishing the Swiss Communist Party, which materialized in 1920.[120]

The public and authorities accused the youth movement of attempting to use the strike as a Bolshevik coup against the Swiss confederacy, leading to widespread persecution of the SJO

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[117] SFA, E21#1000/131#10533, Rüedi, Polizeikorps des Kantons Bern, to the Kommando des Kantl. Polizeikorps in Bern, January 4, 1919.

[118] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 349.

[119] SFA, E21#1000/131#10677, Paul Rüegg to Dr. Bickel, December 28, 1919.

[120] Jost, *Linksradikalismus in der deutschen Schweiz, 1914-1918.*

and its revolutionary allies.[121] On November 15, 1918, the military immediately occupied and dismantled all SJO club offices in Zurich.[122] The government created lists of SJO members, identifying individuals with direct ties to international Bolshevism or foreign origins.[123] Among those targeted were Julius Mimiola, Emil Arnold, Willi Trostel, Agnes Seifritz and Fritz Platten. As a member of the Olten Action Committee and an associate of the Soviet embassy, Platten faced criminal charges for his involvement, but fled to Russia before an arrest could be made.[124] The SJO's bookstore manager and leadership member, Agnes Seifritz was among those arrested following the strike's conclusion.[125] Although she had lived most of her life in Zurich, she was born in Baden, Germany in 1900 to German parents. Her German origins allowed authorities to classify her as a foreign agent, resulting in her expulsion from Switzerland in January 1919.[126]

Throughout Switzerland, authorities targeted foreigners as key figures in Bolshevik activity. In Geneva, investigators focused on individuals with ties to Germany, whether through private relationships or consulate offices.[127] While German agitation had been tolerated and even supported by some civic circles during the war, it was now deemed as subversive nationwide because of its current connotation with socialist uprisings in Central Europe. For example, German citizens in Bern convened on January 9, 1919, intending to establish a new "civic

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[121] *Der Bund,* no. 487, November 14, 1918.

[122] SFA, E21#1000/131#10677, Polizeikommando des Kantons Zürich to schweizerische Bundesanwaltschaft, November 15, 1918; SoArc, Ar 5.10.9, Ernst Marti to Unsere Sektionen, November 19, 1918.

[123] SFA, E21#1000/131#10533, Der eidg. a. o. Untersuchungsrichter to the Polizeikommando Zürich, December 2, 1918.

[124] He returned to Switzerland in 1920 and was summarily sentenced to six months in prison. *Der Bund*, no. 11, 2 ed., January 9, 1919; also, see Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 341-359.

[125] SFA, E21#1000/131#10683, Polizeikommando des Kantons Zürich to the schweizerische Bundesanwaltschaft, November 15, 1918; SFA, E21#1000/131#10683, Die schweizerische Bundesanwaltschaft to the Schweiz. Justiz- & Poliziedepartement, December 18, 1918.

[126] SFA, E21#131#10683, Direktion der Polizei des Kantons Zürich to the Eidgen. Justiz- & Polizeidepartement, January 9, 1919.

[127] See the collection of investigative report fragments in SFA, E21#131#10533.

association of Germans in Switzerland."[128] Investigators closely monitored the meeting and scrutinized its organizers. Only after the group explicitly renounced Bolshevism and pledged "to contribute to the maintenance and promotion of good relations between the old Swiss democracy and the new democratic Germany" did authorities cease their investigation. Intimidation such as this toward a German nationalist group was unprecedented before the war. The revolutionary upheaval in Germany and the Swiss general strike drastically altered the transnational and socio-cultural dynamics between the two countries. Germany's new association with the revolutionary wave approaching from the east overshadowed its pre-war familial ties with Switzerland.

Before 1918, Switzerland had tolerated vibrant political refugee communities under its liberal asylum traditions. This tolerance abruptly ended after the strike, with authorities implementing stricter refugee and immigration controls, expelling foreigners, and intensifying surveillance measures, akin to a police state. Swiss civic associations, alongside the government, held foreigners responsible for the general strike, intensifying efforts to restrict immigration and asylum policies.[129] In the spring of 1919, the NHG petitioned the federal government to revive a national study on the "Foreigner Question" originally proposed by Gustav Thurnherr in 1915.[130] While Thurnherr had advocated for measures to combat anti-neutral sympathies and promote internal tolerance, the renewed study focused on targeting groups suspected of supporting Bolshevism. From 1919 to 1922, a joint committee of government officials, NHG leaders, and Bircher's SVV developed proposals for stricter naturalization laws and rules for expelling

[128] SFA, E21#1000/131#10533, Rüedi, Polizeikorps des Kantons Bern, to the Kantl. Polizeikorps in Bern, January 10, 1919.

[129] For an NHG example, see AfZ, NL Emil Bänziger 3, Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft Gruppe Oberthurgau, *Liebe Eidgenossen* ([N.D.]); also, see Kury, Über Fremde reden, 12-15.

[130] SNL NHG B 8,"An den Bundesrat," *Monatliche Mitteilungen,* no. 35 (March-April 1919); SNL, NHG B 44, Thurnherr to NHG Zentralsekretariat, April 3, 1915; For more of the Zurich NHG's wartime study on the Foreigner Question, see SNL, NHG A 31.

"politically undesirable foreigners."[131] Internally, Swiss civic associations began excluding foreign members who had previously been welcomed into their transnational membership. The SAC published an *Alpina* article in 1919 warning that the "SAC is in great danger of losing its character under the influence of the impending catastrophic foreign infiltration of Switzerland."[132] Subsequently, proposals were made to revise statues so no section could have more than ten percent foreign members.[133] This gatekeeping extended to Social Democrats accused of sympathizing with revolutionaries during the general strike. For example, between 1920 and 1921, the ledership of SAC's Section Brugg sought to expel a member, Gottlieb Schaffner, citing that his support for proletarian dictatorship "cannot be considered to be standing on legitimate patriotic Swiss soil."[134] These actions reflected a paradigm shift in Swiss political identity, abandoning the relaxed asylum policies of the nineteenth century for a more rigid and exclusionary stance. Swiss distrust of foreigners led to a marked decline in their population during the interwar period. In 1910, a third of Zurich's population was made up of foreign nationals; by 1930 this had dropped to just one-tenth.[135]

Despite the Swiss state and civic associations' stringent measures to block political agitation from the east, the transnational flow of political agitation between Germany and Switzerland continued into the interwar years. Münzenberg's expulsion did not end his influence; by early 1919, he had established a base in Stuttgart to organize youth and Spartacist groups for

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[131] Kury, *Über Fremde reden,* 112-114.

[132] E.M. (SAC Tödi), "Zur Überfremdung im SAC," *Alpina* 27, no. 13 (December 15, 1919), 173-174.

[133] BBB, GA SAC 44, "113ème Séance, August 19, 1919," in *Procès Verbal du Comité Central: Siégeant a Geneve, Pour les Années 1917 à 1919.*

[134] BBB, GA SAC 256, Subsection Brugg to Zentralkomitee des Schweizer Alpenclub, January 18, 1921; Gottlieb Schaffner to Zentralpräsident des SAC, Herr Dr. A. Tschopp, January 21, [1921]; Prasident der C.C. des SAC to Gottlieb Schaffner, March 1, 1921; Section Lägern des SAC to C.C. des SAC Aarau, March 2, 1921.

[135] Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Statistik und Volkswirtschaft für Statistik und Volkswirtschaft, *Handbuch der schweizerischen Volkswirtschaft,* vol. 1 (Bern: Verlag Benteli A.G., 1939), 265-267, quoted in Kury, *Über Fremde reden*, 35-36.

revolutionary agitation in both countries.[136] Swiss authorities responded by intensifying postal surveillance on SJO leaders like Marti, Trostel, and Meier.[137] Border guards, especially in Schaffhausen, were provided lists of individuals associated with the SJO and instructed to detain anyone crossing the border.[138] Despite these measures, Münzenberg employed creative methods to bypass censorship. He printed messages on binding twine used to wrap junk material that censors overlooked and relied on couriers to transport information across the border.[139] Many couriers were arrested and expelled from Switzerland. For instance, Max Barthel, who worked as a courier for the youth movement between Germany and Switzerland during the war, was arrested in December 1918 while carrying a significant quantity of Münzenberg's materials intended for SJO contacts in Zurich.[140] Anny Morf proved somewhat more effective at evading detection after her expulsion to Germany. Operating near the Swiss border at Konstanz, she utilized middlemen with no known ties to the SJO to exchange materials between there and Kreuzlingen. However, even this network was eventually uncovered by Swiss authorities in February 1919.[141]

Swiss authorities were deeply troubled by the possibility of revolutionary violence spilling over their borders from Germany, particularly in early 1919. This concern intensified during the January uprising led by Liebknecht's Independent Socialists, who attempted to overthrow the moderate socialist German government established after the war. The revolt ended

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[136] SFA, E21#1000/131#10555, [N.A.], *Spartakus-Bund Stuttgart* (January 9, 1919); SFA, E21#1000/131#10533, Kdo. Grenzdetatchment Nord-Ost-Schweiz to the Armeestab Nachrichtensektionen, January 20, 1919.

[137] SFA, E21#1000/131#10682, Polizeikommando des Kantons Zürich to the schweizerische Bundesanwaltschaft, December 5, 1918.

[138] SFA, E21#1000/131#10533, [Der eidg. a. o. Untersuchungsrichter] to the Kommando der Heerspolizei in Bern, December 20, 1918.

[139] SFA, E21#1000/131#10555, [N.A.], *Spartacus-Bund Stuttgart,* January 9, 1919.

[140] SFA, E21#1000/131#10682, Edy Meyer to Polizeikommando des Kantons Zürich, December 7, 1918; Die schweizerische Bundesanwaltschaft to the schweizerische Justiz- und Polizeidepartement, December 18, 1918; Direktion der Polizei des Kantons Zürich to the Eidgen. Justiz. & Polizeidepartement, January 9, 1919.

[141] SFA, E21#1000/131#10533, Stadtpolizei Zürich to the eidgen. Untersuchungsrichter Dr. Bickel, January 4, 1919; E21#1000/131#10555, Anny Morf to the Sektor Commando der Heerespolizei, February 21, 1919.

with the deaths of both Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg at the hands of counter-revolutionary paramilitary forces known as the *Freikorps,* units that resembled Switzerland's recently formed civilian militias. The *Freikorps* also crushed the socialist republic in Bavaria later that spring. Throughout early 1919, Swiss authorities maintained heightened vigilance to prevent Spartacists from smuggling weapons into Switzerland.[142] Despite these efforts, violence was not confined to one direction across the border. In January 1919, a volunteer militia company of 150 Swiss army veterans crossed into Germany and stationed themselves in Singen.[143] Armed with weapons, including two automatic machine guns, they claimed to Swiss border guards that their goal was "to ensure absolute security and peace at the border."

Switzerland's general strike and its aftermath positioned the country within the broader post-war civil conflicts that engulfed Central and Eastern Europe. The perceived threat of a Bolshevik revolution at the end of the war emerged as an existential challenge for Switzerland.[144] Their response aligns with historian Robert Gerwarth's framework of post-war violence, which identifies the Great War as a catalyst for widespread social and national revolutions across Europe. The failed November 1918 attempt by the SJO and their Bolshevik allies sparked a counter-revolutionary movement in Switzerland. This response reflected both social and national upheaval, as Swiss civic associations from diverse ideological backgrounds, despite their differing wartime visions of Swiss identity, mobilized against a shared enemy.[145] For

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[142] SFA, E21#1000/131#10544, Bezirksanwaltschaft Zürich to the Generalstabchef der Schweiz Armee, March 25, 1919.

[143] SFA, E21#1000/131#10533, Kdo. Grenzdetachtement Nord-Ost-Schweiz to the Armeestab Nachrichtensektionen, January 20, 1919.

[144] Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War failed to End* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2016), 1-18.

[145] On anti-Bolshevik self-mobilization after the war among the belligerents, see Robert Gerwarth, "Post-Wars and Violence: Europe between 1918 and the Later 1940s," in *A World At War,1911-1949,* eds. Catriona Pennell and Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 229-233; Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, "Bolshevism as Fantasy: Fear of Revolution and Counter-Revolutionary Violence, 1917-1923," in *War in Peace:*

Switzerland, this moment resembled a delayed "Spirit of 1914," where disparate factions united in a rare show of national solidarity to protect the confederacy from perceived threats.

The general strike fostered a spirit of national and social unity among Swiss civic associations, culminating in the formation of militias dedicated to preserving the Confederacy. These militias align with Gerwarth and Horne's definition of post-war paramilitary groups: "quasi-military organizations and practices that either expanded or replaced the activities of conventional military formations."[146] Functioning as adjuncts to state power, they complicated the government's monopoly on violence, with the SVV serving as a prime example. Swiss militias were also deeply involved in transnational interactions with the German-speaking world. They emerged shortly before Germany's *Freikorps,* led by Gustav Noske, which responded to the Spartacist uprising in January 1919.[147] Both groups viewed revolutionary socialist movements as a common enemy, fostering a transnational alliance. The paramilitary operations and organizational culture of both militias reflected ongoing pre-war and wartime exchanges within Central Europe. By late 1919, Bircher formalized ties between the SVV and *Freikorps*, establishing a study group to share tactics and strategies.[148] This collaboration evolved further by 1920 into a coordinated intelligence-sharing operation. Both militias exchanged investigative reports, news and other materials related to Bolshevik activities in Switzerland and Germany.[149]

Switzerland's experience during and after the general strike of November 1918 highlights its unique position in post-war violence, shaped by transnational socio-cultural relationships and

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Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War, eds. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 40-51.

[146] Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, "Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War: An Introduction," in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, eds. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-2.

[147] Gerwarth, *The Vanquished,* 118-152.

[148] SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, K. Lindt, *Rapport über die Sicherheitswehr in Berlin* (December 19, 1919), attached to K. Lindt to Oberstdivisionär Sonderegger, December 20, 1919.

[149] SFA, E21#1000/131#12043, E. Bircher to Dr. Thurnheer, January 19, 1920.

foreign agitation. Historians Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz situate the epicenter of post-war violence in the Central and Eastern European "Shatterzones," the former border regions of the disintegrated European land empires such as the Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman empires.[150] Switzerland, despite its neutrality, operated as a socio-cultural shatterzone due to its transnational relationships, participating in the broader post-war turmoil experienced by the defeated powers. The collapse of the German Empire at the end of the war and subsequent rise of revolutionary agitation had dynamic consequences on Swiss society. This agitation fostered fears of a potential, impending Bolshevik revolution among major circles of bourgeois civil society, who interpreted it as an existential threat to the Swiss Confederacy. Switzerland saw a normalization of the threat of paramilitary violence aimed at suppressing international socialism, paralleling developments in Germany. While Swiss militias, particularly the SVV, did not match the extreme physical violence of Germany's *Freikorps* in 1919, they both constituted an armed, civil force aimed against challenges to the established state and social-class order. Switzerland, despite being an established democracy with a conservative majority and a culture of victory among French-Swiss citizens, embraced paramilitary practices through a broad mobilization of bourgeois civic associations across linguistic and ideological divides.

7.5. Conclusion

It is fitting to conclude this study by revisiting Edgar Bonjour's authoritative perspective on Swiss neutrality. At its core, this investigation into German agitation in Swiss civil society during the First World War revives Bonjour's foundational understanding of neutrality laid out eighty years ago in the immediate aftermath of World War II. He established that neutrality, as practiced by the Swiss, was a legal and diplomatic standard upheld by the Swiss state to protect

[150] Omer Bartov and Eric D. Wietz, "Introduction," in *Shatterzones of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands,* eds. by Omer Bartoc and Eric D. Wietz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1-20.

the Confederacy and its citizens. However, "in the moral domain the Swiss know no neutrality. He has to decide between good and evil, right and wrong. Any man refusing to take sides in that conflict and striving to achieve a so-called neutral attitude would prove himself guilty of a lack of logical discrimination."[151] German agitation exploited this private, moral sphere as a means to fulfill wartime goals and needs. Because the Swiss state adhered to political neutrality, Germany leveraged its normalized, pre-war sociocultural networks through transnational civic associations in order to connect to the Swiss public. Civic associations operated freely, supporting various sides of the conflict, limited only by competition from other associations also seeking to influence public opinion within Swiss society. This dynamic was evident in the rivalry between the NHG and the pro-German language associations, which allowed space for German influence, but prevented any single group from dominating Swiss public sentiment entirely. Thus, by operating through transnational civic associations, German agitation complicated division between neutrals and belligerents during the First World War.

Germany also relied on its own civic associations, which were linked to their Swiss counterparts through pre-war social relationships and shared organizational cultures.[152] The ICRC's network of national organizations tied to the central hub office in Geneva captures this interconnected web of civic activity.[153] The German Red Cross leveraged these connections to secure resources and influence the ICRC's policies in Geneva. Beyond formal organizational ties, cultural and ideological bonds facilitated collaboration between German and Swiss groups, even those with a specifically national focus. This was evident in the rapport between the mountaineers of SAC and the DÖAV. These two created socio-cultural bonds through their common alpine activities and joint social interactions, forming a shared imagined community

[151] Bonjour, *Swiss Neutrality,* 125
[152] See Irye, *Global and Transnational History,* 79.
[153] Dromi, *Above the Fray,* 86.

centered on the transnational geography of the Alps. Germany and Switzerland's shared German-speaking population was another major common denominator for collaboration between German and Swiss civic associations, especially among Pan-German ethnic nationalists. Members of these groups self-mobilized to support Germany's war effort, aligning their activities with German government initiatives or working alongside allied German associations. Notably, many SAC members volunteered for the German war effort, motivated by a shared commitment to protect the Alpine landscape from foreign invaders, especially after Italy's entry into the war in 1915. The German-Swiss Society acted as a mouthpiece for German propaganda while countering pro-French sentiment within Switzerland. Therefore, these established relationships provided Germany with a ready-made network to disseminate propaganda and pursue wartime objectives in Switzerland.

However, German agitation in Switzerland was not a one-way street nor was it solely a pro-German activity. Swiss civil society also served as a haven for dissenting German voices. These individuals used Switzerland to broadcast their opposition to the German war effort and pursue their own political goals. German officials initially exploited these groups, making use of organizations like the International Peace Bureau and the Swiss Peace Society due to their social connections and shared sympathies with their ideological comrades in Germany. During the early stages of the war, some German pacifists supported the imperial government's war effort, influenced by promises of democratizing reforms, self-determination for national minorities in Eastern Europe, and commitments to post-war international law. Germany achieved notable success in influencing international pacifist movements, particularly by complicating neutral perspectives on Belgium's violated neutrality and fostering ambiguity over who was responsible for initiating the war. However, this coordination unraveled as disagreements arose over the issue

of annexation-free peace treaties. The imperial government responded with harsh crackdowns on domestic pacifist organizations. Despite these setbacks, German pacifists sought refuge in Switzerland, where they continued their activities through Swiss associations. Their ideas filtered back into Germany despite strict censorship, shaping public discourse and forcing the government to modify its war aims to align with pacifist rhetoric of "durable peace." The impact of their activism was evident in Bethmann Hollweg's peace proposal during the winter of 1916-1917 and Erzberger's Peace Resolution in July 1917.

Germany's last-ditch efforts to secure a separate peace through the destabilization of Russia contributed to its own internal collapse at the end of the war. By approaching Lenin through the international youth movement, a transnational network formed across Central and Eastern Europe for the socialist revolutionaries to promote social unrest via their own agitation. Zurich became the center of these activities, led by German exile Willi Münzenberg and the SJO. The SJO provided a sanctuary for radical international socialists who opposed their nations' wartime policies, including Swiss youth, German deserters, and Russian political émigrés. From this mix of revolutionaries in Zurich, a faction called the *Kegelklub* emerged, combining the leadership of the SJO and Lenin's Zimmerwald Left. Unlike pacifist groups, the international youth movement shared no prewar rapport with the German government. Their networks were inspired by Karl Liebknecht's 1914 opposition to war, leading the SJO to adopt the Spartacist platform by 1915. With Lenin's circle integrated into their efforts, Zurich became a revolutionary hub for Europe during the war, benefiting from Switzerland's neutrality. In 1917, as the Russian Revolution unfolded, German officials viewed the return of political exiles to Russia as essential for destabilizing the country and achieving a separate peace. When initial plans involving Zimmerwald leader Robert Grimm failed to produce results, Germany turned to the SJO's

network. While they succeeded in facilitating the Bolsheviks' return to Russian and securing peace in the east, agitation from international youth groups began spilling into Germany itself. This contributed to destabilization on Germany's Home Front, evidenced by an increase in youth driven protests throughout the country during the war's latter half.

During the war, Switzerland openly supported transnational civic association activities, which were often praised by the state. The ICRC gained widespread recognition for its humanitarian work, bolstering Ador's appointment as head of the Political Department in 1917 following the Grimm-Hoffmann Affair. Whether pro-German or anti-German, foreign agitation was largely tolerated by the Swiss government, aside from extreme political propaganda. Instead of direct intervention, the government allowed civic associations to self-regulate public discourse. For example, while the NHG influenced censorship offices, it was grassroots efforts that curbed illustrated Sunday supplements rather than an official ban. German propaganda, recruitment of military volunteers, and wartime resource acquisition did not raise any serious concern among Swiss officials. However, tensions escalated in the latter half of the war between the Swiss state and the international youth movement as the country was engulfed riots and other forms of social unrest despite being a nonbelligerent. This culminated in the revolutionary potential of the November 1918 general strike. Unlike pacifists, who aligned their post-war vision with Switzerland's neutrality and militarism, the working-class youth posed a direct existential challenge to the Confederacy. Pacifist agitation never disrupted the Swiss political status quo, even incorporating the confederacy's neutrality and unique brand of militarism into their post-war world vision. In contrast, the socialist youth challenged it fundamentally. In response, the Swiss government and military launched a severe crackdown on the SJO. They suspended freedoms of speech and assembly while also supporting the mobilization of militias

formed by a coalition of civic associations in order to exorcise youth activists from both civil society and public discourse entirely.

Swiss historian Jakob Tanner aptly described the First World War as a "social laboratory" for Switzerland and Europe, highlighting how the war catalyzed the mobilization and transformation of societal mechanisms established during the nineteenth century.[154] The pressures of wartime exposed vulnerabilities in key social institutions, forcing civil society and the public sphere to adapt and evolve. Tanner emphasized that these tensions were particularly evident in Switzerland following the general strike of 1918. Civic associations played a pivotal role in this social laboratory due to their unique ability to transcend political boundaries, even amidst war. These organizations served as critical platforms for fostering collaboration and connection, empowering individuals to organize and form relationships within expansive networks. This facilitated the creation of imagined or "fictive kinships," which extended well beyond local communities, demonstrating the far-reaching impact of civic associations on social cohesion.[155] In line with Tanner's observation, this transnational study on wartime agitation illuminates the three ways civic associations functioned as essential components of civil society.

First, civic associations' transnational activities and social networks enabled Swiss citizens to participate in everyday foreign policy, despite the state's adherence to political neutrality. These associations allowed individuals to connect across state lines and to access resources, social capital, and tools that could be used to achieve their ideological goals.[156] Humanitarian organizations like the ICRC exemplified these capabilities. The ICRC's

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[154] Tanner, "La Suisse dans la Grande Guerre: Plaidoyer pour une histoire transnationale," 27.

[155] I borrow the term "fictive kinship" from Jay Winter and his usage of it while investigating how groups of individuals formed bonds over grief, memorialization, and memory after the end of the First World War. For an example of this, see Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the 20th Century*, 136-150.

[156] Jackson and Mulligan, "The Great War and the Political Conditions of Internationalism," 23.

international, normative authority allowed figures such as Arthur Eugster to persuade France to send food aid to Germany during active hostilities on the Western Front. Similarly, international pacifist movements played a subtler role in shaping foreign policy. Through congresses and consistent agitation led by figures like Bucher-Heller, they fostered an imagined post-war vision centered on international law, national self-determination, and democratic reform. This vision influenced global discourse, shaping frameworks like Wilson's Fourteen Points and compelling German officials to align their war goals with public expectations for peace. Additionally, Pan-German agitation by Fick and Blocher demonstrated how Swiss individuals could act as informal agents of foreign powers through their own self-mobilization.

Second, the First World War blurred the lines between the state and the public sphere, especially through the activities of civic associations. The concept of "total war" led nearly all countries, including neutral ones like Switzerland, to expand centralized authority via emergency powers between 1914 and 1918.[157] However, organizations like the ICRC operated as quasi-governmental institutions, assuming roles traditionally reserved for states. Domestically, the NHG cooperated with Swiss authorities, particularly in the military censorship office, making it difficult to distinguish between state functions and those of civic associations. This entanglement stemmed from two crucial factors. First, even neutral states like Switzerland struggled to meet wartime demands alone. Civic associations provided vital resources and support from the public, which Germany leveraged for its agitation efforts in Switzerland. Second, these associations could influence state policies "from below." The confusion also arose from individuals who operated within bpth civic associations and governmental roles. Figures such as Ludwig Quidde, Gustav Ador, Arthur Eugster, Ulrich Wille Jr, and Fritz Platten simultaneously held positions in

[157] Pierre Pursiegle, "Beyond and Below the Nations: Towards a Comparative History of Local Communities at War," in *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies,* eds. Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (Leiden: Brill 2004)*,* 120-121.

influential civic associations and government institutions. Their dual roles exemplified how private citizens navigated between civil society and state functions, further complicating any clear distinction between the two spheres.

Third, Germany's success in leveraging Swiss civic associations for agitation relied heavily on pre-war sociocultural relationships with these groups. German officials and their own civic associations established legitimacy by aligning with organizational cultures, which served as the foundation of how these associations operated transnationally. Shared norms, behaviors, and semiotic systems created common ground that transcended political boundaries, enabling collaboration. For instance, the SAC supported the German war effort due to its pre-war relationship with the DÖAV. Similarly, at the war's outset the German Red Cross's cooperation with the German military exemplified the international humanitarian system promoted by the ICRC. However, these relationships deteriorated as Germany increasingly violated established humanitarian norms and international laws, especially in the latter half of the war. This loss of legitimacy damaged Germany's standing with the ICRC, which publicly condemned its actions in international bulletins highlighting German military atrocities. Despite organizational cultural ties, individual members' beliefs and actions were not entirely dictated by their associations. The SAC itself was divided along linguistic lines, mirroring Switzerland's broader internal wartime divisions. Gustav Thurnherr's break with NHG leadership highlights how individuals within associations could challenge political choices while maintaining allegiance to their organization's core cultural principles. Civic associations acted as mediums through which individuals pursued their own wartime goals and needs. Ultimately, agency resided with individual members rather than the civic associations themselves.

Discussions of Swiss national identity throughout this study highlight the complexity of defining such an identity and its role in facilitating German agitation in Switzerland during the First World War. These case studies of civic associations and their members reveal no universally accepted definition of Swiss national identity. As Oliver Zimmer's research shows, while certain national symbols were widely recognized by 1914, their meanings were fluid.[158] The Rütli Field, for instance, was used as a site of pilgrimage by associations during the war in order to invoke the values of confederacy's founding. Yet, the site clearly symbolized something different for the NHG and the SJO. The former saw it as a site of national unity while the later used it as support for the rebellion against authority. This multiplicity of interpretations of national identity also extended to mutual geographical features like the Alps, which were seen as emblematic of Switzerland and its neighbors in Germany and Austria. The Alps were a natural monument for Switzerland, but also for Germans, Austrians, and Italians living along their states' political borderlands. The SAC members, especially those from Germany-speaking chapters, identified with a broader Germanic mountain community, fostering pro-German sympathies through their relationship with the DÖAV. Moreover, Swiss national identity was not imposed from above by the government.[159] The NHG's vision of Swiss national identity most closely aligns with the Swiss ideal of civic nationalism, but other fundamental aspects of national identity remained contested throughout the war. Many individuals, along with the ideological, common denominators of the civic associations, leaned toward ethnic nationalism rooted in German cultural ties, challenging the ideal of Switzerland's distinctively democratic civic nationalism. The interplay between Switzerland's longstanding democratic institutions and ethnic nationalist tendencies underscores that Swiss national identity was never a static or monolithic construct nor

[158] Zimmer, *A Contested Nation.*
[159] Anderson, *Imagined Communities;* Zimmer, *A Contested Nation,* xvi.

did it fit easily in the idealized and mutually exclusive dichotomy between civic and ethnic nationalism. Instead, it represented a dynamic and multifaceted dialogue within the public sphere, shaped by competing ideologies and transnational influences during a period of profound societal stress.

Swiss national identity was not the sole imagined community embraced by individuals during the war. Many Swiss citizens identified with both their national identity and larger transnational communities simultaneously, particularly through their involvement in international organizations.[160] Figures like Bucher-Heller reconciled Swiss national independence and militaristic traditions with the vision of a broader international league of nations. Humanitarian activists like Eugster and Ador also balanced Swiss identities with a commitment to universal human welfare. The prominence of the ICRC further embedded humanitarianism into Swiss national identity, reflecting how international and national values intermingled during this period. German agitation benefited from the existence of Swiss elites who considered themselves part of both Swiss and German imagined communities. These individuals reconciled their Swiss identity with a sense of belonging to a larger Central European Germandom, rooted in the nineteenth century *Großdeutschland/Kleindeutschland* debate. For them, there was no conflict in identifying as Swiss while at the same time feeling connected to Germany's cultural and political sphere.

Throughout the war, Swiss national identity remained fluid, but civic associations still sought to establish clear boundaries on who could fully participate in Swiss civil society. This was seen in who was excluded from having fully-accepted participation in Swiss civil society. Women, working-class youth, and, at the end of the war, foreigners, were marginalized and

[160] Zimmer, *A Contested Nation,* 243-244; also, see Young S. Kim, "Constructing a Global Identity: The Role of Esperanto," in *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875,* eds. John Boli and George M. Thomas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 131-132.

categorized into Lidtke's category of "alternative culture."[161] These excluded groups often gravitated toward the SJO, whose revolutionary socialist ideology directly challenged Switzerland's sociocultural status quo. This perceived threat prompted aggressive responses from the military and voluntary militia groups. Despite internal debates over the nature of Swiss national identity during the war, civic associations were united in their opposition to revolutionary socialism. By November 1918, a coalition of civic associations formed to confront the general strike, which they saw as an existential Bolshevik threat to the Confederacy's survival.[162] While ideologically aligned with Germany, pro-German factions did not challenge Swiss sovereignty like the SJO did. By the war's end, a common denominator for Swiss national identity had emerged: a commitment to a militaristic, bourgeois-led Confederacy.

Can it still be said that Switzerland was a neutral country during the First World War? Politically, yes. Switzerland never officially sided with any belligerents despite controversies such as Swiss military cooperation with the Central Powers. However, Swiss society itself was far from neutral. The diverse sympathies within the Swiss public and their competing wartime priorities prevented the country from aligning fully with one side but created enough space for Germany to conduct successful agitation campaigns that bolstered its war effort.[163] This research highlights the need for further research into the role of neutral states during the First World War. Switzerland's case demonstrates that neutrality did not equate to passivity or mere detachment. Through transnational sociocultural networks, civic associations provided everyday Swiss individuals avenues actively to engage in wartime activities, driven by their varied personal

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[161] Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture,* 50; on the exclusionary role of national identity and imaginary communities, see Kury, *Über Fremde reden,* 21-22; Róisín Healy, "Religion and Civil Society: Catholics, Jesuits, and Protestants in Imperial Germany," in *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern Germany and British History,* ed. Frank Trentmann (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 246-247.

[162] Gautschi, *Der Landesstreik 1918,* 381-384.

[163] Zimmer comes to a similar conclusion on the mediating effects of civic pluralism in Switzerland while investigating the failure of fascism in Switzerland during World War II in Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe,* 92; also, see Trentmann, "Introducion: Paradoxes of Civil Society," 21-23.

sympathies. These associations acted as intermediaries, enabling actions that aligned with various factions' interest while operating within the framework of official neutrality.[164] Germany capitalized on this active neutrality, using Swiss civic associations to channel its agitation to local actors in a way that blurred the division between neutrals and belligerents. Yet, this openness also worked against Germany.[165] Revolutionary activity flowed back into Germany through the same networks, contributing significantly to the collapse of the German homefront. Switzerland's experience underscores how neutral states can serve as dynamic arenas for wartime influence and agitation, shaping both local and international outcomes.

[164] For a similar conclusion in the context of nineteenth century Belgian neutrality, see Maarten van Ginderachter, "An Urban Civilization: The Case of Municipal Autonomy in Belgian History, 1830-1914," in *Nationalism and the Reshaping of Urban Communities in Europe, 1848-1914,* eds. William Whyte and Oliver Zimmer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 122.

[165] On Active versus Passive Neutrality, see Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals,* 246.

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