

Im Westen nichts Neues

All Quiet on the Western Front (Milestone, 1930)

Curated by Tony Kaes

This dossier focuses on the divisive German reception of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Lewis Milestone's 1930 film adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* published in 1929. The semi-autobiographical story of a group of young German soldiers waking up to the horrors of war sold an unprecedented one million copies in the first year and appeared in 16 languages. Carl Laemmle's Universal Studios secured the rights and turned *All Quiet on the Western Front* into a blockbuster and the quintessential anti-war film to this day. The film employed the full force of the new sound technology for the first time. Sound enabled the accurate reproduction not only of voices and regional accents but also of howling sirens, exploding grenades, and screams of the wounded, often emanating from off-screen. Immersive sound guaranteed the hyper-realism associated with war movies to this day.

Directed by Lewis Milestone (with uncredited help from Karl Freund), the film opened in New York in May 1930 and soon won international acclaim, except in Germany and Austria, where it ran into fierce resistance. The dubbed, shortened, and censored German version of the Hollywood film premiered under Remarque's original title, "Im Westen nichts Neues," on December 4, 1930. The American film about Germany's senseless war and defeat ignited a violent nationalist protest that became a major flashpoint of German cinema in the Weimar Republic. Goebbels used the film to rally the masses around the grievance of an allegedly anti-German film with the aim to have it banned nationwide. The Nazis accused the movie of defaming the honor of the German soldier and insulting the German nation. Emboldened by their big wins in the national elections in September 1930, Nazis interrupted the film screenings and organized nightly protest marches of more than 40,000 people. Within a week, the government closed the film down as a disturbance to public order. The "scandal" illustrated the outsized role of cinema as a weapon in the culture wars of the dying Republic. The present dossier assembles selected reviews of the film and the controversies surrounding it between December 4 and 16, 1930; it also includes excerpts from Joseph Goebbels' diaries that show to what extent he considered this manufactured crisis a victory of the National-socialist "politics of the street."

See also Edward Berger's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, the 2022 German adaptation of Remarque's novel, which is currently available for viewing with subtitles on Netflix. The

film is also Germany's 2023 Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film. In November 2022, German-based Capelight Pictures released "Im Westen nichts Neues," a 6-disc "Ultimate Edition" in a Blu-ray edition that includes "All Quiet on the Western Front" in its original long version (141 min) as well as its international standard version (133 min), plus plenty of historical materials. This edition also features the censored German version from 1930 (103 min.).

Sources

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