

The masses' tastes must be developed and guided. By demanding ever-increasing recognition in the second decade of the Republic, film and movie theaters will be able to do their part to achieve a better future and a brighter *present* through comprehensive efforts for mass edification [Massenbildung] and popular education. The anonymous *Volk* will not allow its entertainment—whether the latter is called a Kintopp or a movie palace—to be falsified or spoiled. The spiritual-artistic powers in the film industry are responsible for making sure that taking pleasure in the cinema has an *inner* justification.

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SIEGFRIED KRACAUER

All Quiet on the Western Front: On the Remarque Sound Film

First published as "Im Westen nichts Neues: Zum Remarque-Tonfilm" in *Frankfurter Zeitung* (December 7, 1930). Translated by Jon Cho-Polizzi.

Adapted from Erich Maria Remarque's international bestseller *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929) and produced by Carl Laemmle's Universal Studios, *All Quiet on the Western Front* was first screened in the United States in April 1930 and went on to garner two Oscars, including Best Picture. Approved for release by Berlin's Filmprüfstelle (Film Censorship Office) on November 21, 1930, the German version, which was dubbed and voluntarily shortened by a full hour, premiered in Berlin's Mozartsaal on December 4, only to be banned by the Oberprüfstelle (Central Censorship Board) a week later, on December 11, in response to massive demonstrations by Nazi mobs that threatened public safety. Initially seized by the "spirit of 1914," Siegfried Kracauer himself had volunteered for military service and had published an early essay, "Vom Erleben des Kriegs" (On the experience of war, 1915), presenting war as a form of redemption from isolation and self-reflection. His novel *Ginster* (1928) was one of many books and films from the late Weimar years that addressed World War I, alongside Remarque's novel and Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (1930). In this article, Kracauer questions the genre of the antiwar film that shows realistic combat action but fails to expose the war's "root causes and true consequences."

The Remarque sound film from America, which has been shown almost everywhere abroad, already created ripples among the German public *before* the Berlin premiere, even evoking a difference of opinion between two of the high administrative bodies: the Auswärtiges Amt [Federal Foreign Office] and the Reichswehrministerium [Ministry of the Reichswehr]. Whereas one, upon questioning from the Film Censorship Office, expressed no objections to the film, the other claimed that the film posed a threat to the reputation of the German army and, with it, the general reputation of Germany.¹ An interpellation by the German National People's Party circulated in the Prussian Landtag [State Parliament], wishing to preemptively prevent the alleged calamity, declared outright that the film "ridicules our German youth and represents them in an effeminate manner. This tendency results in a disparagement of their willingness to sacrifice their lives for love of the Fatherland."²

Fortunately, the Filmprüfstelle nevertheless approved the film, which played before an emotional audience in the Mozartsaal. By its own means, the film refutes the absurd allegations made against it by a misconceived patriotism and by the needs of party politics.

The German release (a shortened version of the American one) neither diminishes the reputation of the old army nor ridicules the young German soldiers. But I can well understand that its screening is unpleasant for some people.³

For, even so, the film does not make the war palatable. It does this less through its images of horror than through its stringent evidence that heroism could not stand firm outside in the trenches. Heroism was thoroughly compromised. If the film has one merit, it is this: revealing the hollowness of the disgusting, idealistic nonsense with which the schoolteacher moved his students into the prescribed frenzy of enthusiasm. They set out as war volunteers and quickly realized that the reality of battle, hunger, and death differs from the bogus illusions that they had been led to believe in the hinterland. The heroism leaves them, the ideas that they had obediently believed now appear to them as ideologies, and a meaning is no longer to be grasped. If they nonetheless continue, it is out of self-defense and out of a herd instinct that enjoins the individual from dissociation.

Is the war defiled by this methodically executed demystification? It appears that the film wished to stir up sentiment against the war, but in reality it penetrates just as little as Remarque's book beyond sentiment to the core of the matter. The film's dialogue of course contains a few remarks with which the audience at the premiere loudly and approvingly concurred. In one exchange, a character says that two nations simply cannot affront one another, and another suggests that in the future, only the warmongers, the rulers and generals, should go to war. Yet what do such noncommittal empty phrases ultimately imply against the fact of the war? Rather than questioning its origins or getting at it with political and social arguments, both film and book remain bogged down in petit-bourgeois outbursts of discontent that cannot lend sufficient support to the images of horror. One of the young volunteers, Paul, is summoned during his furlough by the schoolteacher to appear before the class and kindle their enthusiasm through a short speech. He refuses to reinforce the teacher's heroic drivel, desperately asserting his inability to speak. This silence is characteristic of the highly questionable neutrality of the film (and also, of course, of the novel). It is inimical to insight. It raises the war into a mythical fate, which it is not, and *leaves* it with a sense of inevitability that it lacks. I fear that the film will not restrain the bellicose among our youth from embarking on new heroic deeds. And I reckon that the Reichswehrministerium has no reason at all to be so concerned.

This is not to say that the film leaves one feeling undisturbed. One is no less impacted by it than by *Westfront 1918*, the well-known war film directed by Pabst. Both works accord in their overall tenor, but the German one underlines more than the American the monotony of years in the trenches and takes, perhaps, a more emphatic stance against the insanity of war. On the other hand, the Remarque film presents the individual figures with incomparable distinctness, without thereby neglecting the broader course of events. Its central theme, the disillusionment of a small group of soldiers, is captured in a memorable scene. The young men stand in the military hospital around the bed of their comrade, and one of them plainly forgets the dying soldier out of voracity for his boots. Since he always has blisters on his feet, he simply takes the boots in view of the death. This is done without sentiment, and this rings true.

The film, under the direction of Lewis Milestone, was made with great equipment, admirable technical skill, and faithful realism. The outmoded thunder of battle is differentiated into a complex cacophony of the most disparate hellish noises, and all images of war from earlier times pale in comparison to the scenes of close combat that here close in on the viewer. The episodes proliferate a bit too abundantly, but among these embellishments is a beautiful one that sprouts like a small, sorrowful blossom. It is the one in which Paul pays a visit to the French woman: one does not see the two but only hears

them in the bedchamber, which is presented in touching, unvarnished poverty, as they discuss their fleeting time together and the misfortune of war. Unfortunately, the post-synchronized German dialogue is often poorly aligned with the movements of the Americans' mouths. (If sound film is to retain the internationality of silent film, one must either shift the emphasis from the dialogue back to the images and also to the noises, or shoot each film from the outset in every major language. The attempt to portray American speakers as German ones is absurd.)

What I wrote concerning the limited contemporary significance of *Westfront 1918* is also applicable to the Remarque film: "A generation has already come of age," as my report at the time stated, "that no longer knows those years from its own experience, but still must see, time and again, events to which it did not itself bear witness. That such observation should serve as a deterrent is unlikely, but the generation should at least know how things were. This is a matter of knowledge, not of its attendant purpose."⁴ Visual instruction is no doubt useful, but it seems to me that more useful still would be films that not only show us the horrors of war but also lay bare its root causes and true consequences.

Notes

1. The Federal Foreign Office shifted its stance in the appeals case, advocating a ban on the film after allegedly receiving reports from abroad that it would be detrimental to Germany's reputation.

2. Following this interpellation, the German National People's Party and the National Socialist Party would introduce a motion of no confidence in the Prussian Landtag against Prussian prime minister Otto Braun and Prussian interior minister Carl Severing on December 19, 1930, arguing that they had defended the film. This motion was ultimately rejected.

3. In the politically tense atmosphere of December 1930, following the electoral gains of the Nazi Party in September and the worsening economic crisis, it was undoubtedly "unpleasant for some people" to see Germany's traumatic defeat through the eyes of Hollywood. Goebbels, who forced the ban with his intolerant and physical "politics of the street," considered the outcome a triumph for the Nazi Party.

4. Kracauer here quotes from his review of *Westfront 1918* in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, May 27, 1930.

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KURT TUCHOLSKY

Against the Ban on the Remarque Film

First published as "Gegen das Remarque-Filmverbot," in *Die Menschenrechte* 4, no. 3 (March 20, 1931).
Translated by Tara Hottman.

After *All Quiet on the Western Front* was banned in December 1930, the fight over the film continued. Opposing the successful campaign against the film led by Joseph Goebbels, public figures including Herbert Jhering, Käthe Kollwitz, Heinrich Mann, Carl von Ossietzky, and Carl Zuckmayer campaigned for its re-release. The Reichstag declared the ban of the film unfounded on March 6, 1931, and the film was subsequently approved for limited audiences on June 8 and then for general audiences in a further-abridged version on September 2. With the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, both Remarque's novel and the American film version were banned. Kurt Tucholsky's text was published in *Die Menschenrechte*, a journal of the Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte (German League for Human Rights), which had been founded in 1914. Later that year, on August 4, 1931, Tucholsky would publish an article, "Der bewachte Kriegsschauplatz," in *Die Weltbühne* with the sentence "Soldiers are murderers," leading to the indictment of Carl von Ossietzky, the journal's editor, for alleged "defamation of the Reichswehr."

The Nordic bard Goebbels has repeatedly suggested in his rallies that the Remarque film is a "business." It is indeed a business—in contrast to the Fridericus products, which, under Gebühr, seem to be unduly [über Gebühr] ideal emanations of Baldur.¹

Films are products of an industry that is hindered by a form of censorship that operates in the interests of the ruling class. Nevertheless, there are good and bad films.

The Nationaille has led a dishonest protest against this film.² It is unfortunate that a pacifist like Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster spread confusion throughout the ranks of pacifism when he said: "The scenario depicts a tendentious selection on behalf of a kind of sentimental, even tearful, pacifism, in which the horrors of war do not come from the depths of moral human nature but instead from the nervous system, the stomach, and the need for sleep."³ From the nervous system! Only from the nervous system? We have often defended Foerster. In this case, we can only wish that the head of a small Catholic moral authority be put in the position of having to protest against the war *only* because of his nervous system—for example after an approximately forty-eight-hour-long barrage.

Even compared to the noblest militarism, the lowest pacifism is a thousand times more correct! We would shun no means of fighting the Moloch that is the insanity of war and the insanity of the state.

The deaths of ten million were senseless—they died for nothing.

The grieving mother, the grieving wife, advertising professionals gearing up for the next war must read some sort of belated meaning into the slaughter that even the pope referred to as "dishonorable"—as far as the survivors are concerned, they need this consolation (it is so difficult to continue living without it): Honor to those in mourning. War is dishonor!

We have no use for card tricks intended to convince us of a supposed meaning behind this madness.

And that is why we support every single film that demonstrates to mankind what war is like even in its base forms, precisely in its very basest forms. Mussolini shows his people only the flags and nothing more; Remarque shows us the flags and the rest: the tattered and the faltering, the bleeding and those shot to pieces. Whoever wishes to be inspired by that may do so.

The rest of us cry out against global shame: Down with war!

Notes

1. Tucholsky ironically alludes to Baldur, the god from Germanic mythology. He also plays on the name of Otto Gebühr, who starred as Frederick the Great in the nationalist and highly popular series of *Fridericus Rex* films. In German, the phrase *über Gebühr* means "unduly" or "excessively."

2. The word *Nationaille* is Tucholsky's satirical amalgamation of the words *National* and *Kanaille* (scoundrels, lowlifes, or mob).

3. Foerster was a German philosopher and pedagogue known for his pacifism and critical views of National Socialism. His statement on the film was published in the *Allgemeine Rundschau* (no. 2), January 10, 1931, and reprinted in the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* (morning edition), January 17, 1931.

Variety (May 7, 1930)

All Quiet on the Western Front

A harrowing, gruesome, morbid tale of war, so compelling in its realism, bigness and repulsiveness that Universal's "Western Front" becomes at once a money picture. For this is a war and what Shermann said goes double here.

Nothing passed up for the niceties; nothing glossed over for the women. Here exhibited is a war as it is, butchery.

And when the German boy, Back to the school which he left as a youthful scholar, as a hardened war veteran after three years' fighting the French at the front, said to those young boys raring to go where he had been, that "war is dirty, it is death," and the glory- to hell with the glory of country along with it, or something like that, no one in the audience could help but endorse that sentiment, for those before the screen had endured with the German soldiers all of their horrors, frights, amputations, privations and deaths.

It is this very thing in a very great talking picture that will draw the business and money to "All Quiet On the Western Front." If, as they say, all of this was also in the book, then it is understandable why a story of this worst side of war did become the best seller.

Acknowledging the unbounded credit that must go to Lewis Milestone for the superb direction of a most difficult subject all the way through, there is behind all of this Universal picture, something else again. It's quite true that U has turned out a talker picture that may live forever as a picture of the four-year war, and did so commercially, but to whom is due the rose for daring to make such a picture as this, with that commercialism in mind? If that person were young Carl Laemmle, who produced this film, then the kid is there with nerve, for he has done on that nerve perhaps something no other producer in the film industry would have cared or dared to chance.

Driving men and boys to their certain finish before those murderous machine guns, dodging all kinds of killing missiles from the air, living with the rats, starving while fighting, forgetting country and home, just becoming a fight machine on a routine, and probably shell-shocked into future oblivion if surviving all of these war years; that's the story and the picture you hear and see in "Western Front."

It's so real that despite the inner intent of the elder Laemmle to present a picture of the Germans in war, Universal has turned out a stern object lesson against war.

As Louis Wolheim said in his character:

"At the next war let all the Kaisers, Presidents, Generals and diplomats go into a big field and fight it out amongst themselves. That will satisfy us and keep us at home."

Or when Slim Summerville, likewise in character, of course, stated:

“Me and the Kaiser; we are both fighting, with the only difference the Kaiser isn’t here.”

Mr. Milestone left out nothing. Three or four deaths in sight of the audience; two hospital scenes; suggested amputations of legs so suggestively forced you can almost see them cut off; deaths by that war butchery on the field and a death by stabbing in the trenches, including the ghastly sight of a pair of bare hands only, for but a flash, hanging onto a barbwire fence.

And the shells come hurling over, the incessant noise, louder and hotter now and again, but always there; always war, and that running explosion of a ground set of torpedoes that blew everybody and everything to bits as it progressed. It’s all here and it’s all war.

Hard to throw comedy into the greatest tragedy the world has known or in this, the biggest and strongest drama ever screened, but they get it in, mostly through Slim Summerville as a hard boiled veteran, and another, the male lead role played by Wolheim.

Or again when three German soldiers swim, naked, across the river to the French shore, carrying bread and sausages to three French farm girls on the other side, and or of that other scene in the silhouette, of a bedroom shadowed on the wall with a bowl and pitcher on a table, and one of the German soldiers heard saying to a French girl, heard but not seen; “You are not like the other girls I have met,” and then the three German soldiers leaving the French home, after they come downstairs. That may be funny in Germany, but you can bet all of the hot dogs ever cooked it will never be shown in France.

And what a war picture, without an English or American soldier in it? And the best war picture ever filmed. Which is “Western Front.” Because it’s the real war, whether made in Hollywood or in what was the Western Front of the supreme holocaust.

This story in brief and taking in all that it does thereby, carries a group of school boys, enthused by their professor’s plea for fealty to country, from their training days through welfare to their deaths. According to this tale none of those German boys who broke up school one day to enlist ever returned, except one. And when that one went back, the old men of his home town were fighting over a map as to the best way for the Germans to reach Paris, and the professor was once again harranguing his scholars somewhat younger this time, not over 16, to fight for their Kaiser and country. This latter is one of the best scenes, without the air noise, that of the returned soldier permitting his real feelings about war to spill over, to be called a coward by those schoolroom boys who heard him tell the truth, but were just as eager to go as he had been three years before.

The returned soldier, tiring quickly of the false impression at home of the war, fighting and the front, went back to fight some more, and met his death from a French bullet as he was about to feed a little bird on the trunk of a tree. It ended the picture quietly and killingly, as that was war, too.

Every male in the world, from 14 years, up, should see this picture. Women will go in the main, although all may not, through the gruesomeness. Women like to cry and there’s plenty of cries in this, besides the thrills and also the knowledge of war that has and will be.

In performance one might say it's due to Mr. Milestone's direction and let it go at that. But there are standout performances, even in bits. Mr. Wolheim leads, closely seconded by Mr. Summerville, for those two must make them laugh as well, and they do; then John Wray in his fine character drawing of Himmelstoss, the post man who became sergeant and put the former pupils over the ropes as soldiers in training, with a laugh out of this when they turned the tables on the trainer. Raymond Griffith is the Frenchman stabbed and who died in the trench. He didn't have to talk for Griffith died as no one else has on the screen; Russell Gleason who made a short story out of a pair of boots; Lewis Ayres as a heroic youthful soldier figure; Beryl Mercer who seemed as uncertain mother as she welcomed her boy home, and the Sisters of Mercy, the nurses and the doctors of the hospitals.

Production and photography in keeping with the direction, which tells much briefly, while recording and projection at the Central the opening night without a blemish.

"All Quiet On the Western Front" cost Universal \$1,200,000. The League of Nations could make no better investment than to but the master print, reproduce it in every language for every nation to be shown every year until the word War shall have been taken out of the dictionaries.

1929/1930: Outstanding Production (Universal), Directing (Lewis Milestone)
Nominations: Cinematography, Writing

'ALL QUIET' BANNED BY REICH CENSORS

Remarque Film Is Withdrawn in
Berlin as Harmful to the
Nation's Prestige.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS MOVE

Gives Hitlerites Chance to Claim
Victory in Order to Terminate
Political Controversy.

By GUIDO ENDERIS.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

BERLIN, Dec. 11.—The American-made screen version of Erich Maria Remarque's German war novel, "All Quiet on the Western Front," was definitely withdrawn from the Nollendorfplatz film house tonight following a ban pronounced by the Supreme Film Censorship Board after an inquisition lasting five hours. A massive array of testimony was adduced which concurred in designating the film as prejudicial to German national prestige.

"This film," Dr. Seeger, the head censor, declared, "is not a war film but one depicting Germany's defeat, and I should like to see that nation which would tolerate a similar presentation of its downfall."

The board's decision, he added, had not been reached under the pressure of street mobs.

That the film would eventually be suppressed, however, had become evident as the Hitlerites' rioting in Western Berlin became more violent and the Nationalistic editorial barrages more insistent since the picture began to a capacity business a week ago.

Government Ordered Move.

Even after Berlin's Chief of Police yesterday prohibited further street assemblages and spectators were assured of the opportunity to witness "All Quiet" without being searched for arms and white mice, the issue continued to be a source of official vexation, and today's suppression for Berlin, and for that matter all Germany, was the direct result of word passed down from government headquarters.

The latter's obvious desire to avoid unnecessary political controversy

plainly left it indifferent to criticism on the ground of having surrendered to rampant nationalism and Adolf Hitler's young storm divisions.

It is recalled that storm signals had been set for this film when the first reports from Hollywood to reach Berlin from German sources there branded it as a libel on the German Army. No explanation was forthcoming today as to why the Remarque film was allowed to run the official gauntlet successfully here weeks ago in the face of these protests.

The Liberal press tonight emphasizes that Dr. Julius Curtius, the Foreign Minister, and Dr. Joseph Wirth, the Minister of the Interior, were fully cognizant that the film had been approved and interposed no objections, while the Prussian authorities likewise undertook no intervention.

The American version, which is more complete than that exhibited publicly here, was privately shown to the Prussian authorities today, and they unanimously agreed that even the original was free of baiting features.

Calls Film One-Sided.

The government's about-face came during the past thirty-six hours and resulted in an official communiqué from the Ministry of the Interior, which charged the film with being "a one-sided presentation of war experiences in that it touched only on the war's closing phase, which found the nation starved and exhausted, with fresh recruits made up of the youngest classes."

The film, it is further officially alleged, is not a picture of German war but of German defeat and therefore is bound to have a painful and depressing effect on the nation.

"This film is calculated to increase the psychic pressure under which the nation is suffering and also to quicken further existing political and economic conflicts, thereby making it a distinct menace to public order and safety," the communiqué declares.

It was largely this pronouncement by Dr. Wirth that brought about today's embargo, although the most violent opposition to the film's further showing came from Captain von Baumbach, spokesman for the Ministry of Defense, who charged that foreign film producers habitually proceeded to caricature the German soldier or to represent him as "pillaging castles, abusing civilians, ravishing women and eating and drinking swinishly."

Scores More Subtle Films.

The primitive type of war film grossly teeming with violent baiting and slander has now given way to a more subtle brand wherein the German soldier is made to look either ridiculous, cowardly or brutal. Captain von Baumbach charged, adding that the Ministry of Defense had a collection of the last forty-five such films and that it drew attention to the Remarque film last Spring when first reports of its contents were made known.

Dec 12,
1930

The version now offered for presentation in Germany, Captain von Baumbach charged, must be rejected by any service man who still thinks and feels as a soldier because many of the scenes it depicts constitute an insult to the German army. Such episodes, he added, were invariably reproduced in a more humane and kindly manner in American and British war films, and he demanded the suppression of "All Quiet on the Western Front" on the ground that it was injurious to the prestige of the Reichswehr and the nation.

Today's hearing was also attended by representatives of Saxony, Bavaria, Wuerttemberg, Thuringia and Brunswick, all of whom demanded that the film be suppressed if only on ethical grounds. Bavaria's representative charged that the film was bound to have a demoralizing effect on German youth and that it failed to do justice to the patriotism, courage, perseverance and endurance of the German people.

While testimony was being taken by the censors a legal representative of Universal Pictures Corporation announced the American producers would withdraw the film regardless of the ultimate verdict as they did not want its further showing to cause public disturbances.

The producers have not reached a decision as to whether another attempt is to be made to have the film readmitted after further cuts, although the prospects for such action are none too bright as one of the chief German objections to the present film rests on the ground that it is not the same version as that shown abroad.

While American producers operating in Germany are actively concerned with the outcome of today's official procedure, they are not committing themselves, and a representative of the Hays organization also declined to comment.

Liberal Press Bitter.

The Liberal press severely attacks the government for having banned the film. The Berliner Tageblatt says it was really suppressed by street vandalism and declares the surrender to the latter will augment the danger intended to be stayed. The paper draws a comparison between the sharp words Dr. Curtius addressed to the Czechoslovaks when the latter demonstrated against German films in Prague and his present attitude.

The Vossische Zeitung is convinced the Nationalists and Fascists will strengthen their attacks on the government after achieving this easy victory. The Boersen Courier asks how the alleged danger to German prestige can be prevented by withdrawing the film here while it is being shown in other countries.

The Socialist Vorwaerts calls the decision a victory for militarism and counter-revolution and adds that the German people are now in the midst of a decisive battle upon the outcome of which their fate will probably depend for decades.