

GERMAN REACTIONS TO WOMEN AT WORK

Excerpt 1) is a letter from Berthmann Hollweg, the Chief of the General Staff to the German Chancellor. Excerpt 2) is a memorandum written in March 1917 by an influential bureaucrat from the German Ministry of the Interior.

1) We Will Need the Woman as Spouse and Mother

It is also my opinion that women's work should not be overestimated. Almost all intellectual work, heavy physical labour, as well as all real manufacturing work will still fall on men—in addition to the entire waging of the war. It would be good if clear, official expression were given to these facts and if a stop were put to women's agitation for parity in all professions, and thereby, of course, for political emancipation. I completely agree with Your Excellency that compulsory labour for women would be an inappropriate measure. After the war, we will need the woman as spouse and mother. I thus strongly support those measures, enacted through law, prerogative, material aid, etc., aimed at that effect. In spite of the strong opposition to such measures, it is here that vigorous action needs to be taken, in order to extinguish the influence of this female rivalry, which disrupts the family. Your Excellency would please gather from the above that I am not only concerned with the war, but that I am also aware that, for the development of our people *after* the war, healthy social conditions, i.e. in the first place the protection of the family, are necessary.

If I *nevertheless* urge that the requirement to work be extended to all women who are either unemployed or working in trivial positions, now and for the duration of the war, I do so because, in my opinion, women can be employed in many areas to a still greater degree than previously and men can thereby be freed for other work. [...] In particular, I want to stress again that I consider it especially wrong to keep secondary schools and universities, which have been almost completely emptied of men by conscription, open only for women. It is valueless, because the scholarly gain is minimal; furthermore, because precisely that rivalry with the family that needs to be combated would be promoted; and finally, because it would represent the coarsest injustice if the young man, who is giving everything for his Fatherland, is forced behind the woman.

2) Something Disturbing about Female Labour

It cannot be denied that there is something disturbing about this entire development [of female labour in the war]. When one looks at women these days, how they are working in all of these difficult positions, the women in armaments factories, on the coach box, cleaning the streets, one has to look closely in order to tell whether one is looking at a woman or a man. Through the employment of women in male occupations, the entire female organism and the entire female sensibility is being pushed down other paths, and that ultimately expresses itself on the outside. We must, with all seriousness, take care to reverse this development. It will not always be easy. Women have found a very rewarding occupation in the various companies; they have, incidentally, often taken a great liking to this, and there will consequently be difficulties in removing them from these occupations. And yet this must be strived for in the interest of our common good, [and] simultaneously in the interest of the male worker as well. We must therefore proceed, on the one hand, with all advisable caution, but on the other, also with all the necessary energy.