

Dr. Oskar Cohn, SPD member of the Reichstag, as a Counterfigure to the Imagined Persona of the “Artist-soldier” or “Artist-politician” (1917)

Abstract

Dr. Oskar Cohn was a German-Jewish Reichstag member (SPD) during the First World War. After calling for the Reichstag to exercise tighter control over the military, he became a hated figure among the nationalist right. A satirical poem from 1917 bore the title “The Great Field Commander—the Social-Democratic Reichstag deputy from Nordhausen, Dr. Cohn, called in the Reichstag for the appointment of a commission to oversee the prosecution of the war.” It cast Cohn derisively as the opposite of the “German artist-soldier” or “artist-politician.”

Source

The Great Field Commander—the Social-Democratic Reichstag deputy from Nordhausen, Dr. Cohn, called in the Reichstag for the appointment of a commission to oversee the prosecution of the war.

Who's the commander, hard as stone,
That clever man of iron,
Who, German to the very bone,
Crushes like soft curds the foe,
Flashing his teeth like a lion?
Is it Hindenburg? Ludendorff?
Oh no, that is as clear as turf!
His turn on stage has scarcely begun,
Yet every child his praises has sung,
Oh, Germany, your champion,
Marshal Doctor Cohn!

Like Caesar, Alexander, Friedrich,
And Moltke he reduced to ash!
See how Dr. Cohn, with spirit and wit,
All the cherries has freshly picked,
From the cake they baked, in a flash,
He therefore roars like firedamp.
Doctor Cohn from Guttentag.
Bully for us, that we have him!
But you, Scharnhorst, Clausewitz, and Roon,
You cannot hold a candle to
Deputy Marshal Doctor Cohn.

How well his anger he doth wear!
His words do whirl about him!
Of mettle he does have his share,
And like Doppelkorn, he comes from where
Akvavit is made: Nordhausen!
Hindenburg's a nervous wreck
'Cause Cohn is breathing down his neck!
If Doctor Cohn but blows his nose,
Trembling ensues among our foes.
Roosevelt, Marianne, and John,
Fall silent before Doctor Cohn.

Cohn shreds before our eyes,
Everything that we most prize.
He says: "Submarine warfare is absurd,
And the same applies to Tannenberg,
The tattle about which is but lies."
Oh Germany, reap what you have sown,
Dare to cross this Rubi-Cohn
With your so-called "class army."
Yes, place him on the ruler's throne,
Dear fatherland that honored be,
I give you Marshal Doctor Cohn.

Source: Bund der Landwirte für Pommern, *Amtliches Blatt der Provinzialabteilung*, vols. 21, 25, May 1917, unpaginated; reprinted in Elke Kimmel, ed., *Methoden antisemitischer Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*. Die Presse des Bundes der Landwirte. Berlin: Metropol, 2001, pp. 222–23.

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