SECTION IV

THE CHALLENGE OF REMEMBRANCE
CHAPTER TWELVE

‘HUMANS ARE CHEAP AND THE BREAD IS DEAR.’
REPUBLICAN PORTRAYALS OF THE WAR
EXPERIENCE IN WEIMAR GERMANY

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The fundamental assumption of this chapter is that the Weimar Republic was essentially defined by Germany’s war experience, positively as a reaction against further bloodshed and negatively as a refusal to admit the reality of defeat. On this premise the following chapter will explore how a specifically republican narrative of the war experience was promoted following the establishment of the republic in 1918. In order to examine why this narrative emerged in opposition to German wartime propaganda, this analysis will contextualize the evaluation of the war, both as a general concept and from the soldiers’ point of view, in relation to the postwar political debate. This chapter will furthermore illustrate that the depiction of particular themes, such as the relationship between front and home front, as well as a particular portrayal of front soldiers and officers, attempted to counteract prevalent right-wing propaganda.

In order to understand the significance of an alternative narrative of the First World War during the Weimar Republic it is initially necessary to examine how wartime propaganda affected popular perceptions of the war experience. The Weimar memory of the war developed after a period of extensive censorship. Upon the outbreak of war in 1914, a state of siege was declared throughout Germany, which severely limited freedom of expression in order to control the flow of information about Germany’s military situation. This censorship not only applied

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1 Quote from: ’Die Mörder sitzen in der Oper,’ Vorwärts, 296 (12 June 1919).