

## Now For a Round Up



# Document A: Protecting Free Speech

**Context:** Senator Robert La Follette of Wisconsin voted against Woodrow Wilson's call for war against Germany in 1917. The following passage was taken from a speech given by La Follette in the Senate in response to the limits placed on free speech during the war.

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Today—for weeks past—honest and law abiding citizens of this country are being terrorized and outraged in their rights by those sworn to uphold the laws and protect the rights of the people...More than all, the citizen and his representative in Congress in time of war must maintain his right of free speech. More than in times of peace, it is necessary that the channels for free public discussion of governmental policies shall be open and unclogged.

I believe, Mr. President, that I am now touching upon the most important question in this country today—and that is the right of the citizens of this country and their representatives in congress to discuss in an orderly way, frankly and publicly and without fear, from the platform and through the press, every important phase of this war; its causes, the manner, the manner in which it should be conducted, and the terms upon which peace should be made...

I am contending for this right, because the exercise of it is necessary to the welfare, to the existence, of this government, to the successful conduct of this war, and to a peace which shall be enduring and for the best interest of this country...

Mr. President, our government, above all others, is founded on the right of the people freely to discuss all matters pertaining to their government, in war not less than in peace...How can that popular will express itself between elections except by meetings, by speeches, by publications, by petitions, and by addresses to the representatives of the people?

Any man who seeks to set a limit upon those rights, whether in war or peace, aims a blow at the most vital part of our government.

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# Document B: War Dissenters' Freedoms of Speech and Assembly Must Be Limited (1917)

**Context:** *Outlook* magazine published the following editorial, which argues that any individual who tries to “aid and comfort the enemy” is not protected under the Constitution. The editorial refers to a pacifist group who tried to hold a national convention and were eventually forbidden by the government to conduct their meetings.

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No one denies, on the one hand, that the right of free assembly in a Republic is one of the fundamental rights of the citizen. Democracy is imperiled without it... The right of free assembly must, however, be maintained by the authorities... The right to assemble is based on the purpose of the assembly.

There is...nothing in the right of free assembly which entitles any body of citizens to hold a meeting for an unlawful purpose on either public or private property...Burglars or train robbers have no right to meet for the purpose of planning a robbery.

Such offenses against the public peace can be readily recognized by even the most pro-German of our pacifists. But they fail to recognize what the overwhelming majority of our citizens do recognize that treason in time of war is an attack on public security enormously greater than any of the peace-time offenses...

In times of war any overt act which gives aid and comfort to the enemy is treason...The executive departments of the State and Nation are under very solemn obligation to do whatever is necessary to prevent action by irresponsible or malicious parties which will interfere with the prosecution of the war, and bring aid and comfort to our enemies.

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