

THE WAR TO END ALL GERMANS  
WISCONSIN SYNOD LUTHERANS AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by

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ABSTRACT  
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Under the Supervision of Professor Rachel Buff

The First World War came to the United States to the consternation of many of its citizens, especially its German Americans. On the home front, government officials required complete adherence to the war effort. This also included religious adherence. The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, a German-speaking religious group, met tremendous difficulties during the war years. In addition to the crusade against all things German, the synod faced religious persecution because it doctrinally abstained from religiously sanctioning the war aims and programs of the United States. The repression of the synod came from both patriotic citizens and government agents who typically misunderstood or disdained the religious practices of the synod. The situation created predicaments for German Lutherans as they attempted to serve both God and country.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APL	American Protective League: A citizen auxiliary to the Justice Department during the First World War with an estimated 250,000 members.
CPI	Committee on Public Information: The head propaganda organization of the federal government. It proactively sought cooperation with churches across the country to both "Americanize" and promote the war effort.
CPS	The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety: One of the many state organizations across the nation to promote proper war behavior and to police activities deemed harmful to the success of the United States.
DMLC	Doctor Martin Luther College: A teacher-training college for the parochial schools of the Wisconsin Synod.
OG	Old German Files: A 594 reel collection of microfilm of reports from the Justice Department and American Protective League Operatives, mostly concerning German Americans.
WELS	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod: At the time called the General Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States, or the Wisconsin Synod for short. The synod was created through a federation of the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Synods in 1892, whereby they fully amalgamated into one synod in 1917.

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## Introduction: The Divide

On 4 November 1890, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, "red hot and in fighting trim," swarmed to the polling places across Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> They endeavored to elect candidates to the Wisconsin State Legislature who promised to strike down the "oppressive and tyrannical" Bennett Law, passed the previous year by a Republican legislature. The Bennett Law was a compulsory education law meant to battle child labor and illiteracy. However, its provisions deeply affected the church schools of the Wisconsin Synod. English became the only accepted medium for all core subjects, a clause meant to strike at the German-language education of the Lutheran parochial schools. Students could only attend schools within their education districts. This also caused problems for the parochial schools, which often drew students from a number of districts. Furthermore, compulsory school days did not recognize the Lutheran calendar, which made the "celebration of weekday church holidays impossible."<sup>2</sup> The election was a rout, with Wisconsin Synod towns like Berlin voting as high as 96.8% Democratic.<sup>3</sup> The Republicans were buried by what Democratic Party members termed "the Lutheran land-slide."<sup>4</sup>

The election was a culmination of a year's worth of rhetoric and organization against the Bennett Law. The Wisconsin Synod created a committee within a month of its passage, which concluded, "the purpose of the Bennett Law was hostile to our schools and would bring terrible results." After giving twelve reasons to substantiate the claim, the synod published a statement:

We are not enemies of the public schools; we consider them and declare them to be a necessary institution. We are ever willing to pay our taxes for the support of the public schools...But we insist upon enjoying the privilege of founding private schools with our own means of regulating and governing them, without external interference, according to our conviction.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward C. Wall to Ellis Usher, 11 June 1890, in Usher MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

<sup>2</sup> "Synode Ausschussbericht," *Gemeindeblatt* 24:22 (15 July 1889), 172. This likely referred to midweek observances for Lent and Advent, as well as Reformation celebrations.

<sup>3</sup> Voting results found in Paul Kleppner, *Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900*, (New York: Free Press, 1970), 138.

<sup>4</sup> H.C. Payne to E.W. Keyes, 7 November 1890, Keyes MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

<sup>5</sup> "Beschlusse der Synode uber die Schulfrage," *Gemeindeblatt* 24:22 (15 July 1889), 172.

In February 1890, nineteen Wisconsin and Missouri Synod Lutheran congregations in Milwaukee passed a joint resolution which denounced the law and pledged to support only those candidates who promised its repeal. They believed a movement was afoot "to completely destroy parochial schools."<sup>6</sup> The Milwaukee Democratic platform appeased this sentiment and condemned the law as "wholly uncalled for, and uselessly harsh and unjust; and infringing on the liberty of conscience and on the natural right of parental control over their children."<sup>7</sup> The synod publication, the *Gemeindeblatt*, urged pastors to "watch their local papers so that they may continue to fight the enemy publicly where necessary."<sup>8</sup> The synod committee volunteered to help such pastors wherever they needed it.

Supporters of the Bennett Law fought with the same fervor as the German Lutherans. To them, the future of the public school was at stake, and the parochial alternative was a thorn in the side to both the "little red schoolhouse" and Americanization. Not a day passed in February and March, 1890, without the *Milwaukee Sentinel* publishing an editorial or letters to the editor regarding the Bennett Law. The *Sentinel* defended the law, attacked its opponents, and gave exposés of American-born adults who could not converse in English. "The great principle...of the right of the state to control the secular education of children," the *Sentinel* argued, "has been challenged."<sup>9</sup> In an argument which sounds ironic today, Bennett Law partisans asserted that the rapid growth of school-aged children attending parochial schools meant that the "Christianizing influences of the common school are being denied to an

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<sup>6</sup> "Bekanntmachung wegen des Bennett Gesetzes," *Gemeindeblatt* 25:15 (1 April 1890), 120.

<sup>7</sup> Kleppner, 159.

<sup>8</sup> "Sonstige Schritte der Schulbehörden gegen Gemeindeschulen," *Gemeindeblatt* 25:16 (15 April 1890), 126.

<sup>9</sup> Roger E. Wyman, "Wisconsin Ethnic Groups and the Election of 1890," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 51:4, Summer 1968, 271; Kleppner, 160. The *Sentinel* specifically attacked Lutherans for their position on the Bennett Law. Explicitly referring to a growing political union between Lutherans and Catholics, the Republican organ warned Lutheran voters that they should not ally with "the devil's own grandmother" simply to win an election.

increasingly large number of the next generation."The common school "stood for knowledge, liberty and virtue," and in opposition "to ignorance, to superstition, to immorality and wrong doing."<sup>10</sup> The arguments could even get personal. Republican governor William Hoard publically stated that Lutheran pastors and congregations took an oath "to darken the understanding of young people." The *Sentinel* implied that the anti-Bennett Law movement was provoked by Lutheran pastors, whom the people followed blindly.<sup>11</sup> Both sides fought this way, however. After the monumental victory, the *Gemeindeblatt* offered a statement "with heartfelt thanks to God, who put to shame the purposes of the fanatic, native-born enemies of...the German parochial schools, and has given to us the victory in the fight against the enemies of the Church and to the citizens the victory of freedom and knowledge."<sup>12</sup>

The Bennett Law episode highlighted a religious fault line which continually factored into the politics of the late nineteenth century Midwest. The support of the Bennett Law predominated from evangelical Protestants—of which most Methodists, Congregationalists, United Brethren, Baptists, revivalist Presbyterians, and "old stock" (or "American") Lutherans can be classified. Evangelicalism was a pietistic religious and social movement with roots in both the Reformation era and Great Awakenings. Evangelicals emphasized a "personal, vital, and fervent faith in a transcendental God."<sup>13</sup> Their religious customs focused on conversion and personal piety, a general informality and emotionalism in worship observances, and ecumenicism (endorsement of Christian unity with or without doctrinal agreement).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kleppner, 160, 168.

<sup>11</sup> "Allerlei zum Bennett-Gesetz," *Gemeindeblatt* 25:20 (15 June 1890), 156-157.

<sup>12</sup> "Das neue Schulgesetz des Staates Wisconsin," *Gemeindeblatt* 26:22 (15 July 1891), 172.

<sup>13</sup> Wyman, 274; Kleppner, 173.

<sup>14</sup> Brian W. Beltman, "Rural Church Reform in Wisconsin during the Progressive Era," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 60:1 (Autumn 1976), 12. The use of a blanket term for these religious groups has proven to be problematic. German Lutherans called these groups "sectarians," but this ecclesiastical term did not have much use beyond German Lutherans, and is no longer used by them today. Paul Kleppner, in his book *Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900*, used the term "Pietists." While this term properly highlights the main issue—that of using secular control to enforce religious piety—it can

Evangelicals viewed the world as sinful, but did not accept this fate. Instead, they felt compelled to purge the world of sin through earthly means. The life of an evangelical, then, became a series of efforts and opportunities to create the world anew to the glory of a personally knowable God. The first way to accomplish this was by changing hearts through conversion. Their informal worship setting and ecumenicism created an ideal environment to attract newcomers. When instruction and exhortation failed, evangelicals attempted to reform the "sinner" through what the *Gemeindeblatt* termed "Gewalt," or "violence" (secular laws).<sup>15</sup> Few can summarize it better than the Presbyterian minister John Marquis in 1917, "It is the business of religion to make the world a dangerous place for evil and evil-doers."<sup>16</sup> To this end, evangelicals used all possible means to purge the world from sin. They disregarded distinctions between church and secular, preached on "Christian living," and used terms such as "oneness of life."<sup>17</sup> Wisconsin Synod writers used a now defunct term, "sectarians," to refer to evangelicals. "Sectarians" were Christians with "a legal mind," wrote the *Gemeindeblatt*. Therefore, "They believe that the kingdom of God...is a state with a law book that will live up to all of God's holy and righteous demands."<sup>18</sup> Secular legalism became a powerful means to accomplish this goal, especially when pertaining to prohibition, gambling, and Sabbatarianism. As seen during the Bennett Law controversy, the common school system was another special reform tool of the

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cause confusion because many pietistic religious groups, such as the Mennonites, Hutterites, or the Amish, stressed personal piety but were withdrawn from society. Thus the term "evangelical" is being used, mostly along the same lines as religious historian William J. Phalen used in his *American Evangelical Protestantism and European Immigrants, 1800-1924*. Brian Beltman also favored this dichotomy in his article "Rural Church Reform in Wisconsin during the Progressive Era." Despite that this term is somewhat *ex post facto*, its usage in the mid to late twentieth century accurately exemplifies these groups. Perhaps the biggest stumbling block of this term is that "evangelical" is part of the current synod title—the Wisconsin *Evangelical* Lutheran Synod. The use of word "evangelical" by the synod, however, is very narrow: the church teaches justification by grace through faith. Evangelicalism in its broader sense usually entailed postmillennialism, personal "acceptance" of Christ, a focus on morals, secular legalism, and ecumenicism; all of these the synod rejected.

<sup>15</sup> W. Hoenecke, "Etliche Fragen über Prohibition," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:3 (1 February 1918), 37-38.

<sup>16</sup> F. Graeber, "Press Censorship and Religious Liberty," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:13 (7 July 1917), 101.

<sup>17</sup> Kleppner, 174.

<sup>18</sup> W. Hoenecke, "Etliche Fragen über Prohibition," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:3 (1 February 1918), 37-38.

evangelicals. Bible readings typically took up school time with the goal to inculcate a specific set of values in the younger generation. Curricular materials simply assumed a Protestant evangelical consciousness. Said a common school advocate in 1918, "The foundation of *American* and *true* Christianity lies in the free public school system instead of the parochial."<sup>19</sup>

Wisconsin Synod minister F. Schumann asserted that one could spot a "sectarian" preacher "if he lends himself to take over the role of a social reformer."<sup>20</sup> Because evangelicals usually viewed the state as a vehicle to purify society, their ministers preached that America was "God's chosen nation," and unapologetically entered the political fray to reform and uplift the society around them. At a time when postmillennialist beliefs were widespread, many evangelicals believed that the second coming of Christ would occur after the millennium—a thousand year establishment of the kingdom of God on earth through human effort. As one Illinois Baptist pastor put it, "Let us pray for His coming, and vote as we pray!"<sup>21</sup> In February 1917, the *Gemeindeblatt* even published an exposé of a Methodist minister, R.D. Snyder, who believed that "many votes cannot be counted at elections because they are not correctly marked." Snyder conducted a "school of balloting" at his church, where he passed out sample ballots at the morning service, which were "marked during the day and turned in at the evening service."<sup>22</sup> These ballots would typically be marked for the Republican Party of the late 19th century, which termed itself "the party of great moral ideas."<sup>23</sup> The party became a vehicle to transmit evangelical pietistic norms into the society around them. When an evangelical minister asked his parishioners whether a "Christian" could "go to the Lord's table on Sunday and vote

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<sup>19</sup> John Jenny, "Would Eliminate Parochial Schools," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:8 (21 April 1918), 61-62; William J. Phalen, *American Evangelical Protestantism and European Immigrants, 1800-1924* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2011), 7. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>20</sup> Heinrich Gieschen, "Sechsendsechzigste Conference der Wisconsin Synod," *Gemeindeblatt* 51:15 (1 August 1916), 229.

<sup>21</sup> Baptist minister quote found in Edward P. Brand, *Illinois Baptists* (Bloomington, Illinois, 1930), 60.

<sup>22</sup> Friederich Soll, "Die beiden Bäume," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:4 (15 February 1917), 57-58.

<sup>23</sup> Kleppner, 75.

for [Democrat presidential candidate] Cleveland on Tuesday," the response was overwhelmingly negative.<sup>24</sup>

The German Lutherans who arrived in the United States during the nineteenth century encountered this American religious culture very much dominated by the pietistic characteristics of American evangelicalism. These Lutherans repeated to these "sectarians" what Luther told the followers of Ulrich Zwingli in 1529: "*Ihr habt einen andern Geist als wir*," (You have a different spirit than we).<sup>25</sup> The evangelicals also identified something different about these foreigners' beliefs and customs. At a Wisconsin Baptist convention in 1886, it was concluded that "Emigration from the Old World is pouring in upon its hordes of Papal and infidel propagandists....Their influx corrupts morality and Christianity among us."<sup>26</sup> As more and more of these German Lutherans and Catholics arrived, a major question became how much these newcomers would assimilate to the culture around them. To the frustration of many Americans, the German Lutherans of the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod became famous, or infamous, for their steadfastness in their ethnic, cultural, and religious nature.

These German Lutherans, as well as American Catholics, had a "liturgical nature" which contrasted with the pietistic evangelicalism around them—even with so-termed "American Lutherans." These liturgical groups comprised the stronghold against the Bennett Law in 1890. The liturgical nature of the Wisconsin Synod stemmed from its belief that the "kingdom of God" should not be "of the world." This is strongly reflected in the beliefs and worship practices of the synod. Rather than deciphering God's will concerning current events and popular themes of society, Wisconsin Synod worship followed a yearly calendar based on prearranged Biblical

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<sup>24</sup> Cleveland quote found in Laurence M. Larson, *The Log Book of a Young Immigrant* (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1939), 113.

<sup>25</sup> Quote can be found in Joel Fredrich, "A Different Spirit," *Essay File*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, Node 566.

<sup>26</sup> *Minutes of the Wisconsin Baptist Anniversaries* (Milwaukee, WI: Wisconsin Baptist State Convention, 1953), 8.

stories and passages. Believing the Bible to be the inspired word of God and therefore completely infallible, the Wisconsin Synod stressed assent to its prescribed doctrines. Therefore, they placed emphasis on formal doctrine, traditional Lutheran Confessions, and ritual in worship practices—the liturgy. This contrasted with the emotionalism of evangelical worship. Wisconsin Synod minister Frederich Soll even admitted, "our sermons are correct, but cold and stiff."<sup>27</sup> Lutheranism's emphasis, rather than the *right behavior* of the evangelicals, was a *right belief* which came from God and the Bible. Where evangelicals condemned immoral behavior, the Wisconsin Synod reviled with equal fervency what they considered false doctrine—subordination of the message of "free salvation" by one of "Christian living."<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, liturgical Christians believed they lived in an inscrutable and sinful world created by an unfathomable God. Instead of viewing America as "God's chosen nation," they believed the postmillennial goal to create the kingdom of heaven on earth to be an impossible crusade.<sup>29</sup> Said Martin Luther in his work, *On Secular Authority*, "It is *out of the question* that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, or indeed over a single country or any considerable body of people."<sup>30</sup> These churches, then, especially the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, had a laissez-faire attitude toward government and morality—as long as the behavior was reciprocal. "Thank God Luther never was a politician," wrote a Wisconsin Synod pastor, "He was always nothing more—neither anything less—than a preacher of the Gospel."<sup>31</sup> The secular state typically did not keep its end of the bargain. Pietistic legalism promoted by evangelicals "made sin what is not sin," and undermined the "freedom of a

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<sup>27</sup> Friederich Soll, "Die beiden Bäume," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:4 (15 February 1917), 57-58.

<sup>28</sup> A popular slogan which evangelicals used was "deeds, not creeds." This should not in any way indicate a solidarity between Lutherans and Catholics in this period. Rather, Republican strategists found that the best way to lower Lutheran voter turnout was to portray the Democrats as the party of "the antichrist."

<sup>29</sup> Kleppner, 73.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther and John Calvin, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 45;

<sup>31</sup> Hans Koller Moussa, "The Birth of Freedom," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:21 (7 November 1917), 171-173.

Christian."<sup>32</sup> Liquor was fine in moderation, and beer drinking was a cherished German tradition for both Lutherans and Catholics. The "Puritan" Sabbath and other pietistic norms of conduct also found no place in Lutheran doctrine. Rev. Friedrich Schmid, the father of the Michigan Synod—eventually the Michigan District of the Wisconsin Synod—wrote already in 1833: "It is disheartening how most Christians...search from the outside to make themselves [holy]. They make laws which no one is in a position to obey."<sup>33</sup> While the theological arguments underlying the issues may have escaped some synod lay-members, prohibition agitation by evangelicals served as a constant reminder to what set them apart. The Wisconsin Synod understood the effects of their nonconformity. "Let us not be deceived," wrote Wisconsin Synod seminary professor August Pieper, "the sectarian churches consider the Lutheran church as a hindrance to culture, a danger to state and society."<sup>34</sup>

While the word "counterculture" would not be coined until decades later, it is clear the Wisconsin Synod looked to establish a religious counterculture in what University of Chicago historian Martin Marty called the "evangelical empire."<sup>35</sup> As a counterculture, this group by conviction opposed nearly all means of integration into a broader American society. By doing so, they hoped to avoid following the same course as the "American Lutherans" who came before them, who—according to German Lutherans—subordinated Lutheran tenets to evangelicalism. However, given the expansive nature of evangelicalism and its practice of ecumenicism, this remained a tall order for German Lutherans. A factor in favor of preserving this counterculture was that an overwhelming majority of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans worked as independent farmers or lived in small towns. This lifestyle involved less integration with the differing culture

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<sup>32</sup> Murray Rothbard, *History of Money and Banking in the United States: The Colonial Era to World War II* (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1994), 174.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Neidhard, "Reise Nach Michigan im Sommer 1834," *Michigan History Magazine* 35 (1951), 47.

<sup>34</sup> August Pieper, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 62 (Reprinted, 1965), 193.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Marty, *Pilgrims in their own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 7.

around them. Thus many German Lutherans consistently advocated the perceived paradox of being against both "big business" and "big labor," since both of these looked for an American cohesion for which the German Lutherans were not ready. This counterculture also explains the synod's dogged opposition to lodges and fraternities, which were well-known for their opposition to formal doctrine and their support of religious legalism—both major principles of evangelicalism. Membership in a lodge could even mean exclusion from the German Lutheran religious community. The biggest threat to the counterculture, however, always remained the public school, with its baldly stated goals of integration, and often "Christianization" into the evangelical mold. Correctly perceiving the common school as a system to inculcate evangelical pietistic norms, both Catholics and German Lutherans fostered parochial schools as vehicles to transmit their own religious values to their young in a country where they were a minority. Throughout all periods, German Lutherans passionately supported the Constitution of the United States because they believed its principles of freedom of speech, religion, and of limited government intrusion sanctioned their attempts to foster a distinct society on American soil.<sup>36</sup>

While Catholics created their own geographic parishes and relied on an international church hierarchy to preserve their religious culture, German Lutherans did not have this option. The key component to the perpetuation of this counterculture, therefore, became the German language. After the *Northwestern Lutheran*, a Wisconsin Synod bi-weekly, discussed the assimilation of other German Americans, it claimed,

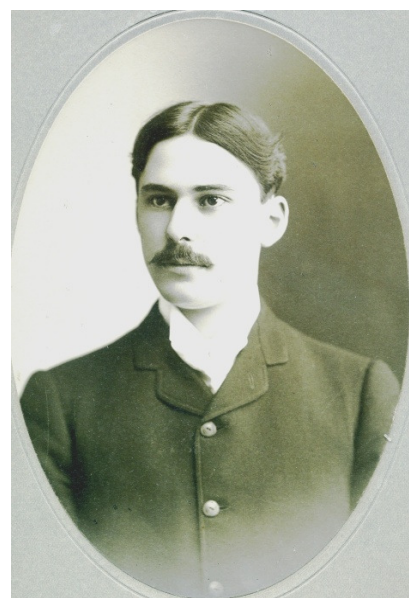
We...have done considerably better. Go into the country, where there are German churches with schools, and you will be surprised how German everybody is. I know [a synod town] where English had to be taught as a foreign language to the second generation when they entered school! [While] this is certainly not an accomplishment, it may be rather pleasing in the eyes of such who accuse us German-Americans that we do not remain German enough.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> More extensive synod demographics can be found in Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 2-5; Constitutional references will be listed on page 195 of this project.

<sup>37</sup> Frederich Meyer, "The German-Americans," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 3:17 (7 September 1916), 134-136.

Indeed, even by 1910, only three percent of congregations in the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods used English as their primary language.<sup>38</sup> This contrasted with the more rapid abandonment of the German language by Baptists, Methodists, and other German evangelicals who felt no fear of religious assimilation. Many Wisconsin Synod congregations still followed clauses in their constitutions requiring the German language. St. Peter Lutheran in Plymouth, Michigan, for example, still adhered to Article 3 in 1917, which read, "the church services as well as the instruction of the young must be held in the German language in this congregation."<sup>39</sup> At St. Paul Lutheran Church in New Ulm, Minnesota, 138 families were subscribed to the Wisconsin Synod's German language publication, the *Gemeindeblatt*, in 1919. Two had subscribed to the newly-established English bi-weekly, the *Northwestern Lutheran*.<sup>40</sup> English was practiced in varying degrees across the synod, however.



O.1: Rev. Hans Koller Moussa, *Northwestern Lutheran* editor

After failed attempts in previous years, Grace Lutheran in Milwaukee, contemplated restarting supplementary services in the English language in 1913. The church secretary reported, "After many pros and cons, it was decided that this would be valuable and necessary."<sup>41</sup> On the far end of the spectrum, St. Johannes (John) of Jefferson put English on the same footing as German in school in 1908 "because the younger generation was

<sup>38</sup> Language stats found in Mark Braun, "Being good Americans and better Lutherans: Synodical Conference Lutherans and the Military Chaplaincy, *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 19 (2001), 24. Most of the English speaking churches were located in missions outside the Midwest, such as Washington state.

<sup>39</sup> *Church History of St. Peter, Plymouth, MI*, (WLS Archives, Plymouth File), 26.

<sup>40</sup> Morton Schroeder, "Adolph Ackermann, Chauvinism, and Free Speech," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 2 (1984), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Quarterly Meeting Minutes of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI, October 1913.

turning more and more to the English language."<sup>42</sup> Their pastor, Hans Koller Moussa, of Arab name and descent, became the predominant English writer for the *Northwestern Lutheran*.<sup>43</sup>

As the Republican Party increased its reputation as the "party of great moral ideas," liturgical Christians generally cast their lot with the opposing party. The Democrats declared themselves to be the party of "personal liberty," and German Lutherans aligned with it to stave off political attacks on their liquor and parochial schools from the "pietist fanatics."<sup>44</sup> Being highly liturgical, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans voted Democrat "virtually to a man" during the late nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The towns of Theresa and Berlin, Wisconsin, both predominated by Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, consistently voted over ninety percent Democratic. This was the norm until 1896, when the Democrats nominated a populist, but pietist, William Jennings Bryan, as its presidential candidate. The voter turnout dropped in disgruntled Lutheran districts, and some even deferred to the Republicans. Even after the political environment turned ambiguous during the progressive era, polemics from both sides kept the struggle fully animated.

This religious political struggle often crossed ethnic lines, blurring the popularly accepted "immigrant and native" dichotomy of party politics. German evangelicals, such as Baptists, Methodists, and many Congregationalists, typically voted for the "party of great moral ideas."<sup>46</sup> During the Bennett Law contest, German evangelicals were even more adamant in their support for the law than their "Yankee" allies. Amid the struggle, the German United Brethren reported in a conference that "A foe to the common school has arisen in the *foreign* immigrant element, with *foreign* ideas and customs, who in the name of religion and personal

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<sup>42</sup> Diamond Jubilee of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. John, Jefferson, WI, 1851-1926, 26.

<sup>43</sup> James P. Schaefer, "Hans Koller Moussa," *Forward in Christ* 76:10 (May 1989). Moussa was exceptionally gifted. Chicago University, aware of his knowledge of no less than 14 languages, considered him a prospective president. He sometimes singlehandedly carried issues of the *Northwestern Lutheran* in its humble early days. His early death in 1928 at the age of 44 was deeply felt across the synod.

<sup>44</sup> Rothbard, 174.

<sup>45</sup> Voting records compiled in Paul Kleppner, *Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900*, (New York: Free Press, 1970), 138, 333.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 37, 78. Kleppner's compiled voting records religiously homogenous towns to analyze these groups.

liberty threaten the life of our time-honored American free-school system."<sup>47</sup> The use of the word "foreign" by this immigrant group is telling. The German United Brethren felt they could claim Americanism because of their "American" ideas and religious customs. In the "evangelical empire," immigrant groups with similar religious beliefs could be more easily assimilated than those who differed. Especially among the Germans, religion played a key role in determining how smooth the Americanization process could be.

As the Bennett Law controversy showed, both of these groups feared the other would subvert their value system. Liturgical Christians felt their institutions and ways of life were under consistent attack from the "pietist fanatics" who attempted to enlist *Gewalt*—governmental decrees—to reform their churches and society as a whole. On the other hand, evangelical Christians felt their way of life was threatened by the disparate institutions and "immoral behavior" of the liturgical groups, the Wisconsin Synod being one of them. As many evangelicals believed, the German Lutheran presence alone could even forestall Christ's second coming. This struggle ebbed and flowed throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and reached its crescendo during the "holy war" for Democracy, the First World War.

### **The First World War and a New Wave of Conflict**

At the start of the First World War in Europe in 1914, the German ethnicity of the Wisconsin Synod naturally created animosity with groups more apt to support Great Britain or France. This ethnic divide during the war is self-evident, and, frankly, requires minute analysis. It cannot be avoided, nonetheless, and will play a major part in the narrative of the Wisconsin Synod's difficulties on the "home front." What histories have left mostly untouched, however, is the religious aspect of the wartime divide. This evangelical and liturgical division, very much alive before the war, reared its ugly head once the First World War moved to the forefront of

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<sup>47</sup> United Brethren of Christ, Wisconsin Annual Conference Records, 1890, 41-42, MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, microfilm, emphasis is mine.

political discourse. A plausible reason for this omission is that historians, like many contemporaries of the war, were so caught up in the ethnic features of the German Lutherans that many religious aspects to their objections and persecutions were left unconsidered. Both religious groups, however, displayed behavior during the war consistent with their religious nature.

The evangelicals were especially consistent. In an article titled "Religious Freedom Endangered," Wisconsin Synod seminary professor John Schaller discussed the activities of the "sectarian" churches during the First World War. "You get the impression," wrote Schaller, "that the church has outgrown the real Gospel and has put on the habiliments of the political agitator."<sup>48</sup> The evangelical habit of "reforming" the world to meet "all of God's holy and righteous demands" led many to enter the political arena. During the war, God's "holy and righteous demands" called for a crusade to "civilize" Europe and to defend and spread democracy, the "holiest form of government." In short, the First World War was an opportunity to reform not only American society, but the world. This is plain in slogans such as "the war to end all wars." Most evangelical churches did not even wait for the declaration to get involved. In his book, *Is Preparedness for War Unchristian?*, Baptist clergyman Leonard Broughton concluded, "Preparedness...in this country is distinctly Christian, and in keeping with the highest principles of American statesmanship. And that a man, however sincere he may be, who sets himself against it, is not a friend of his country."<sup>49</sup> Another clergyman wrote, "Our moral sense as a nation is dulled. Morally we have lost our way. Our present lack of a national spirit is due also in part to a vast amount of well-meant but mistaken and really *unchristian* teaching about peace."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> John Schaller, "Religious Freedom Endangered II," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:12 (15 June 1919), 92-93;

<sup>49</sup> L. G. Broughton, *Is Preparedness for War Unchristian?* (New York: Hodder and Stroughton, 1916), 169.

<sup>50</sup> W.T. Manning, *The Present Crisis in the Nation's Life* (Pamphlet), emphasis is mine.

A typically informal worship routine and a chief focus on "Christian living" that often pertained to current events also made evangelical church bodies perfect candidates to assist the state in its war efforts. These churches eagerly enlisted to raise war funds, organized patriotic events, and roused the public's fighting spirit. In their minds, this was a requirement of all preachers on the home front. At a Methodist Episcopal Conference in Detroit, Bishop Theodore Henderson stated, "If there is any preacher...who doesn't see his way clear to espouse the cause of the Allies, if we can't regenerate him, we will eliminate him, and then turn him over to the Department of Justice."<sup>51</sup> Congregationalist theologian Lyman Abbott also exemplified this church militancy, "in this hour every Christian Church should be a recruiting office for the Kingdom of God...The Christian Church and the Christian ministry should hear the voice of the Master saying, 'I have come not to send peace, but a sword.'"<sup>52</sup> Preachers across the country happily accepted sermon texts and outlines from the federal government. Sermons even fell into the following rhetoric:

It is God who has summoned us to this war. It is his war we are fighting....This conflict is indeed a crusade. The greatest in history—the holiest. It is in the profoundest and truest sense a Holy War...Yes, it is Christ, the King of Righteousness, who calls us to grapple in deadly strife with this unholy and blasphemous power.<sup>53</sup>

To be fair, this sentiment was not universal; some evangelical churches advocated peace or demurred from transforming the pulpit into a patriotic loudspeaker. A few religious groups, such as the Mennonites, attempted to conscientiously abstain from the war because of their doctrine of pacifism. These defectors also received the punishment due to them for their defiance.

Likewise, the Wisconsin Synod exhibited behavior consistent with its highly liturgical nature. Unlike the evangelicals, Lutheranism believed that force, such as laws and wars, cannot

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<sup>51</sup> Ray H. Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969), 193.

<sup>52</sup> Liberty Loan Committee, Second Federal Reserve District, "Material for Clergy in Third Liberty Loan," 1918.

<sup>53</sup> R.H. McKim, *For God and Country* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1918), 116-117.

make people holy—only the gospel has that power. Therefore, the prospect of going to war to forcefully uplift Europe seemed very quixotic. Furthermore, while evangelicals could easily adapt their informal worship practices to preach patriotic themes and solicit war contributions, the Wisconsin Synod ministers would need to break the Lutheran church liturgical calendar to insert the government mandated texts and themes, which often conflicted with the synod's doctrine in the first place. Cooperation with government endeavors also caused trepidation over breaking the synod's beloved "dividing wall between church and state."<sup>54</sup> The synod labeled this development a "dangerous precedent with far reaching consequences...if officials were justified in this case to make such demands upon the churches according to their personal judgment, just where is the limit to this alleged privilege?"<sup>55</sup>

This fact did not temper the charges against the synod for being unpatriotic, nor did it moderate the persecution of both its pastors and members. Seminary professor August Pieper summarized the situation well: "the sectarian (evangelical) churches of America cannot understand our Lutheran Church...which wants to preach nothing but the Gospel...[and] refuse as churches to place the holy ministry and the church officers in the service of the government to recruit men, sell bonds, and the like." In some cases, "in the superheated atmosphere...and with a keen sense of being coerced," some synod churches "almost unjustifiably submitted under duress and, lending the machinery of the church to the government, rendered whatever aid they could with good conscience."<sup>56</sup>

As a religious community keen to preserve its distinct nature against integration, the prospect of a nationwide war effort could only produce difficulties. Wars require incorporation and solidarity to achieve victory. Hence, "national duty" would require many in the church to

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<sup>54</sup> John Brenner, "Liberty Church," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:11 (1 June 1919), 82-83.

<sup>55</sup> John Schaller, "Religious Freedom Endangered," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:11 (1 June 1919), 86-88.

<sup>56</sup> August Pieper, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 62 (1965), 193.

step outside its protective environment. The war "emergency" also brought about reinvigorated attacks against the synod's parochial schools and German-language church services, both of which were condemned as the enemies of "American unity." The worst by-product of the war, in the synod's opinion, was the attempt to create a religious cohesion for the war effort. Historian Ray Abrams put it this way, "What the churches had failed to accomplish in the furtherance of church unity in half a century of virtual peace came about almost overnight in a united effort to help kill the Germans and thereby promote the best interests of the kingdom of God."<sup>57</sup> This became apparent in the government controlled religious care of the soldiers, who were often given the generic choice of "Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish" for their ministers. Later in the war it even developed into common appeals for a national church—a postmillennial and ecumenical dream. Joint patriotic worship activities prevailed throughout the war years, and Wisconsin Synod Lutherans were called "scabs" when they declined to participate.<sup>58</sup> "That's their thing," claimed the *Gemeindeblatt*, "Lutherans may not, without denying our faith, make common religious cause with them."<sup>59</sup>

Critics might argue, as many did, that the German Lutherans exploited their tenets as a safe cover for their pro-German leanings. While this argument should not be ignored, it

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<sup>57</sup> Abrams, 80. A very popular book, *Religion and the War*, published in 1918, exemplifies the religious atmosphere of the time. After degrading the "narrow minded" and "dogmatic" churches who were a stumbling block to "Christian Unity" during the war, author Williston Walker laid the groundwork for which all Christian churches should unite after the war: "All of these elements—the intellectual, the pietistic, the aesthetic or symbolical—have a rightful place in religious life, but they are all *subordinate*, to the one great dominating element, the *moral*. And it is because of a failure to adequately recognize and practice this element that so many supposedly Christian nations are today in deadly conflict. All of them persist in their theological beliefs; all of them persist in pietistic communion; all of them persist in rite and ceremony; but some of them at least fail even to approximate the exemplification of their fundamental and *ethical requirements* of their faith. Their theology, their pietism, their worship,—their religion,—have not been *moralized*; and unless we are willing to make, both in belief and practice, the religious basis of word-organization truly ethical, we will fall as lamentably in the future as we have in the past." Emphasis is mine. Therefore, whenever the synod said they rejected ecumenicism, it was because they understood what ecumenicism meant: a subordination of salvation "by grace through faith *alone*" to a foremost emphasis on "moralizing" and "Christian living" to "earn" salvation.

<sup>58</sup> "Sectarian 'Tolerance,'" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 4:17 (7 September 1917), 131.

<sup>59</sup> "YMCA," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:12 (15 June 1917), 182.

oversimplifies the circumstances and makes religious conviction a moot point. The best way to judge the consistency of the synod is to examine their actions in comparable situations, but without the prospect of war with Germany. For one, the Spanish-American War of 1898 provides this opportunity. In an article posted on 15 July 1898, the *Gemeindeblatt* discussed the decision of the United States to declare war. "Whether this was wise is something we have not to judge," claimed the *Gemeindeblatt*, "Indeed we cannot, without having inspected the relevant documents."<sup>60</sup> This is hardly the case of a church playing the role of head cheerleader. Later in the war, it claimed, "War is a disaster, every war for every nation, even if its fleet and army rushes to victory, war is an evil...People in war believe they are free from all the commandments of God." It then gave sympathy to the "terrible losses suffered by the enemy...to the thousands who are wounded and maimed....Last week in the besieged city by our troops 15,000 old people, men, women, and children have fled and have saved nothing but their bare lives." Yet, the *Gemeindeblatt* claimed Christians should "be still and know that he is God," and that the government does have the authority to declare war.<sup>61</sup> Had this article been published during the First World War, the writer would most likely have been indicted under the Espionage or Sedition Act. Another example goes back all the way to 1868, when the Wisconsin Synod officially broke ties with the German state churches. With rhetoric sounding plainly similar to that in 1917-1918, the synod described these bodies as "a misuse of the power of the state over the church," whereby "consciences were enslaved and the church robbed of its possessions...Therefore not only a manufactured doctrinal union, but also an enforced

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<sup>60</sup> "Kriegs und Sieges Predigt," *Gemeindeblatt* 33:14 (15 July 1898), 105.

<sup>61</sup> "Kriegs und Friedenspredigt," *Gemeindeblatt* 33:20 (15 October 1898), 153. Another aspect of consistency with this war was the service to the soldiers. Like in World War I, the sole Wisconsin Synod pastor who served the soldiers, F.J. Eppling, worked separate from the government issued chaplains and held his own religious services. He even "feared the regimental chaplains want to give me trouble." At the request of the soldiers which he served, Eppling preached in German. One point of difference, however, is that the synod did not seem to have qualms receiving government assistance. Eppling rode down with the governor of Wisconsin seemingly free of passage.

organizational union are to be categorized as definitely worthy of condemnation."<sup>62</sup> That these words referred to churches in Germany makes this statement even more convincing.

At a time when civil liberties were rarely put into practice, and instead served simply as a catchphrase, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans received a rude awakening for their wartime dissent and their slow—or nonexistent—assimilation into American culture. Their story is mostly told through the words of detractors, investigators, and other government officials who left extensive records of their thoughts and activities concerning the German Lutherans. Throughout the struggle, the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans espoused their own version of patriotism, which differed from that imposed upon them. The narrative originates from this divergence.

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<sup>62</sup> Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 35.

## Chapter 1: Neutrality Betrayed

The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 surprised few of those who followed European affairs. Conflicts over colonies and an escalation in military preparations created an air of tension which finally detonated after the assassination of the Archduke of Austria. The unprecedented amplification and carnage of the conflict, however, both shocked and horrified onlookers. The Battle of the Marne, which in 1914 halted Germany's progress into France, resulted in half a million casualties. At the very beginning, the American people shuddered at the thought of participation and resolved to steer clear of the conflict.

In the interconnected world of 1914, however, such non-intervention was difficult to put into practice. The predominant European ethnicity of Americans stirred emotions and often aligned individuals with one side in the struggle, more often with the Allied Powers. Initial German successes in the war were also counterproductive in this way, as an invasion of Belgium and France allowed partisans for the Allies to pin Germany as the aggressor. The emerging economic giant of America also made it a possible balance of power in the struggle for supplies. The British, with a superior fleet, blockaded all merchant access to German ports in an attempt to wear down Germany in a war of attrition. The Germans responded by using the *Unterseeboot* to disrupt trade routes to the Allies. Of the two, the latter strategy was considered much less humane and antagonized Americans to a greater extent. As months went by, the war was increasingly viewed as less of a commercial rivalry than a struggle between the democracy of the Allies and autocracy of the Central Powers. The beloved neutrality at the beginning of the war began to slip away. By the fall of 1915, a nationwide survey of clergymen showed that over eighty percent preached preparedness for war.<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, however, remained

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<sup>1</sup> E. Hershey Sneath, *Religion and the War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1918), 82-83. Several other surveys during this time show similar patterns. Another vote in Brooklyn of over twenty

steadfast in their favor of neutrality. Their anguish, while it slowly dissipated, played a key role in drawing the lines on the home front.

### **Distant Guns Felt at Home**

The Wisconsin Synod (WELS) never believed humankind could overcome its wretchedness through civilization. The outbreak of a brutal war in what were deemed the most civilized societies only confirmed their belief in the total depravity of human nature. Wisconsin Synod pastor Carl Buenger declared peace under the auspices of civilization to be as fragile as a "*Seifenblase*" (soap bubble), because "all enlightenment and civilization by no means improves the corrupt heart of man from sin."<sup>2</sup> All culture is but a thin veneer, claimed WELS minister Hans K. Moussa, as he described the "pained surprise of those who thought modern civilization was so far advanced that war was outgrown."<sup>3</sup> These and other publications point to an unfavorable sentiment toward the European War from its beginning. Consequently, none of the synod publications promoted Germany's righteous cause in the war. Instead, they criticized all claims that God favored either nation as "the typical heathen idea of a *tribal God*."<sup>4</sup> Writers claimed the war started for economic reasons, as Moussa stated, "but whenever these very same [business] interests would not benefit by the avoidance, there will be war." As the American neutrality became more fragile, this rhetoric against business interests would only increase.

While the synod may not have parroted Germany's cause in the war, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans naturally felt partiality to their former homeland. This sentiment was felt by the older generation especially, since most of this generation either hailed from Germany or still had

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denominations tabulated 157 in favor of preparedness while only 14 opposed. A poll of Presbyterian ministers by Chicago's *The Continent* in 1915 found "an overwhelming majority" favoring preparedness.

<sup>2</sup> C. Bünger, "Europas Völkerkrieg," *Gemeindeblatt* 49:19 (1 Oct 1914), 295.

<sup>3</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Lessons of the War," *Northwestern Lutheran* 1:17 (7 September 1914), 137.

<sup>4</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "The Fifty-fifth Psalm," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:7 (7 April 1915), 50-51.

relatives living there. For instance, Pastor F. Mueller of the Missouri Synod, the sister synod of the WELS, had 15 cousins in the German army.<sup>5</sup> A myriad of relief efforts attempted to alleviate the hardship and suffering felt in Germany. While Hans K. Moussa claimed that sympathy was felt for all war victims, including the piteous "appeals...of Belgium, Serbia, and Northern France,"<sup>6</sup> German Lutheran pocketbooks did not match the rhetoric. Adele Falde, the editor of "College Notes" at the Wisconsin Synod's Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, summarized more candidly the feelings of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans:

Societies all over the United States are formed and are collecting for a good cause. An Englishman will collect for the Red Cross in England. A Frenchman for the Red Cross in France. We, being Germans, would materially help the Germans...We were visited by two young ladies from Mankato, selling rings made of iron to aid the Red Cross in Austria-Hungary and Germany...They were sold at the price of a dollar apiece, a very small amount considering the good that a dollar will do. Why not all buy a ring?"<sup>7</sup>

German Lutherans also partook in event benefits for the Red Cross in Germany and Austria. The Dr. Martin Luther College choirs participated in such an event at the New Ulm Turner Hall on 19 October 1914. Other organizations received assistance from the synod. Congregations from Milwaukee, for example, created a special collection to help war-weary members of the Lutheran Free Church in Germany, which was a separate entity from the German state churches and affiliated with the synod.<sup>8</sup>



1.1: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1917

<sup>5</sup> A.E. Farland Report, 2 October 1918, OG 241115.

<sup>6</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Helping the War Victims," *Northwestern Lutheran* 3:16 (21 August 1916), 122.

<sup>7</sup> *DMLC Messenger* (December 1914 and March 1915), found in Morton Schroeder, "Adolph Ackermann, Chauvinism, and Free Speech," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 2 (1984), 10-19.

<sup>8</sup> Quarterly Meeting Minutes of Grace Lutheran, Milwaukee, WI, 12 October 1914.

Within the first week of the war, the British cut the transatlantic cable to the United States somewhere east of the Azores. This maneuver blocked German sources of war news from reaching the United States. Hence, most items published in the American press reflected the heavy editing of Allied censorship. This caused the German American population to turn to other sources for war news. Travelling speakers from Germany found receptive audiences in Wisconsin Synod circles. Dr. Eugene Kühnemann, a celebrated German scholar, gave presentations for WELS congregations concerning the conditions of East Prussia—the former homeland for many WELS Lutherans—which was invaded by Russia in August and September 1914. "His enthusiasm is contagious," wrote Rev. Hans K. Moussa.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, a Mr. Hirsch from Konstanz, Germany visited Grace Lutheran in Milwaukee and held an "interesting meeting about the need of those who suffer" in the school auditorium on 6 April 1915.<sup>10</sup>

This thirst for war news without the Allied bias also spurred a revival in the German language press, which either reinterpreted Allied news sources or received reports from correspondents. The *Gemeindeblatt* twice reposted dispatches from the German Kaiser, which were unavailable in the English language press, and painted a better situation for Germany than otherwise reported.<sup>11</sup> Secular newspapers like the *Minneapolis Freie Presse* and Milwaukee's *Germania Herald* also experienced a revival in readership, and papers like these became the only trusted source of war-related news for many German Lutherans. The most famous, or infamous, of the proponents for Germany was an English language weekly called *The Fatherland*, edited by George Sylvester Viereck. *The Fatherland* educated Americans on the virtues of the German position and attempted to expose the conspiracy to draw America into

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<sup>9</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Helping the War Victims," *Northwestern Lutheran* 3:16 (21 August 1916), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Quarterly Meeting Minutes of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI, 6 April 1915.

<sup>11</sup> "Unseres Kaisers erste Siegesdepesche," *Gemeindeblatt* 50:5 (1 March 1915), 71; "Neujahrsbotschaft des Deutschen Kaisers," *Gemeindeblatt* 50:7 (1 April 1915), 107.

the war. Started in August 1914, more than 100,000 copies were in circulation by October.<sup>12</sup> Viereck gave his newspaper free to ministers, particularly Lutheran ministers, hoping these influential individuals would relay its sentiments to others. Many synod ministers likely subscribed to these various papers. A WELS congregation in Marshall, Wisconsin, read the *Milwaukee Germania Herald* "almost exclusively," reported a federal agent. Rev. Hans Eggert from Bay City, Michigan won a wardrobe from *Viereck's Weekly*, the new name for *The Fatherland* starting in 1917.<sup>13</sup> The only price was attention from the Justice Department, since as a reader of *Viereck's Weekly* he became suspected of pro-German leanings. Four other WELS ministers—Martin Sauer, Paul Budach, John Glaeser and Henry Viestens—later came under investigation because they subscribed to the *Milwaukee Free Press* before the war.<sup>14</sup> Thanks to these investigations, however, evidence exists of their readership of these papers.

The war in Europe continually made its presence felt in the minds of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. Military companies became a popular activity for students at the two WELS colleges. Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) drilled every Tuesday and Thursday, and around 100 students joined the company. The company thought highly of itself; said a member, "Judging from the material that has been given us this year, we may expect to reach a standard which will put us on the level with any other organization of the kind."<sup>15</sup> A military band also organized at DMLC during the neutrality period. At Northwestern, the 150 boys who drilled caught the attention of local Congregational pastor N.C. Daniell, who pleaded to authorities to confiscate the students' rifles. As a justice department agent investigated the situation, Professor J.H. Ott, the librarian at Northwestern, kindly reminded the visitor that according to the Constitution the government

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<sup>12</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, *Hearings on Brewing and Liquor Interests and German and Bolshevik Propaganda*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919, p. 1420; Wm. S. Fitch Report, 28 April 1917, OG 13652.

<sup>13</sup> *Viereck's Weekly*, 31 Oct 1917, Found in OG 12294, Page 25.

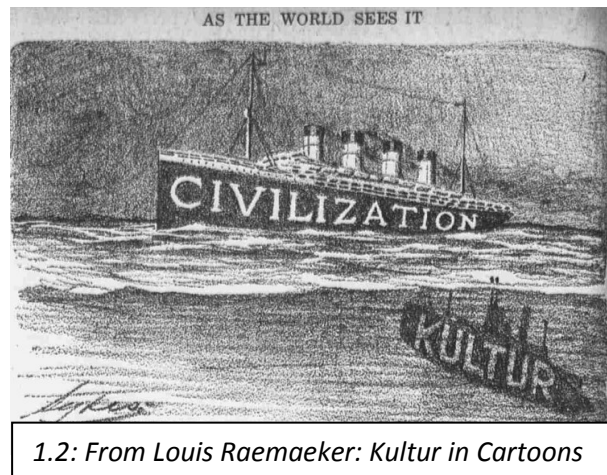
<sup>14</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, "Milwaukee Free Press," 23 March 1917, OG 20117.

<sup>15</sup> *DMLC Messenger* (March 1914, October 1915, and September 1916) found in Morton Schroeder, 11.

has no authority to depose of their rifles.<sup>16</sup> This tension over Northwestern's rifles went much deeper than their constitutionality. As steadfast partisans for peace and neutrality, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans bitterly sparred with those who by 1917 sounded the drums of war. As the neutrality became more fragile, the stakes became higher and the feud between the war and peace parties became more passionate.

### Partisans for Peace

Although a strong neutrality sentiment pervaded the United States early in the war, the neutrality position was increasingly on the defensive. Some, like former President Theodore Roosevelt, needed no convincing, as he told reporters from the beginning he would "declare war on Germany tomorrow."<sup>17</sup> Numerous defense leagues created a physical presence for war agitation. The most prominent was the National Security League, with a membership over 100,000, which drilled regularly and published names of "un-American" representatives who did not vote for defensive measures. A splinter group from the Security League, the American Defense Society, with Theodore Roosevelt as president, was far more vigorous in war preparation. Furthermore, a heavy majority of American newspapers favored the Allies and highlighted German



1.2: From Louis Raemaekers: *Kultur in Cartoons*

atrocities in acts of war or on the high seas. In opposition, WELS critics felt the neutrality was being undermined by the press' non-neutral nature. They attacked the "subsidized press" for provoking the American citizenry and then either minimized Germany's war crimes or defended

<sup>16</sup> Wm. H. Steiner Report, 3 April 1917, OG 1396; Wm. H. Steiner Report, "Dr. Ludwig Bleek, And Rifles at German Lutheran College," 27 April 1917, OG 1396.

<sup>17</sup> French Strother, *Fighting Germany's Spies* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1918), 45.

them. Synod members consistently defended the war's original perception as a commercial war, rather than the struggle between the darkness of autocracy and the light of democracy. Until the bitter end, most German Lutherans were baffled and frustrated at the credulous American citizens who refused to heed their admonitions and were so easily swayed by propaganda.

The first major dispute came over Germany's treatment of neutral Belgium. Germany's Schlieffen Plan called for the German army to pass through Belgium as a shortcut to Paris. When Belgium refused the German army passage, Germany invaded and occupied Belgium to open the route. Allied newspapers seized this opportunity to brand Germany with barbarism. Like most occupation armies, German soldiers were guilty of a wide array of abuse and maltreatment of the native population. However, sensationalized reports surfaced of German soldiers tearing children from mothers' arms and murdering them in cold blood, among other unspeakable tragedies. Germany's alleged treatment of Belgium firmly convinced many Americans to support the Allied cause. In response, German Lutherans accused the press of misrepresenting the situation in Europe for propaganda purposes. The *Gemeindeblatt* questioned the reports of "atrocities so hair-raising they are difficult to believe" and noted, "very few proper witnesses attested to these."<sup>18</sup> It accused the press of preying on the ignorance of the people. In another article, it shared correspondence with the editor of a Belgian newspaper who claimed he "traversed [Belgium] by length and breadth, but of starving women and children, I've never seen anything." While French and English papers illustrated a severe famine in Belgium, this correspondent contrarily stated, "I've eaten in small towns and villages, always very good and extremely cheap."<sup>19</sup>

In an article titled "Belgien und der Kongostaat," Rev. Walter Hoenecke attempted to expose the not so blameless character of "innocent Belgium." Inside, he described the atrocities

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<sup>18</sup> "Belgien," *Gemeindeblatt* 50:3 (1 Feb 1915), 41.

<sup>19</sup> "Wie es nach sieben Monaten Krieg in Deutschland aussieht," *Gemeindeblatt* 50:12 (15 June 1915), 182.

of King Leopold, the father of current Belgian King Albert, as "The vast natural resources of [Congo] have been exploited without regard for the population, forcing the inhabitants to slavery services and slaughtered en masse, often under cruel tortures." How terribly they treated the native population was "evident from the fact that the population since 1885 has fallen from 18 million to 4 million, but for Belgium it has earned billions of francs." Once again the English language press came under attack, noting that English language papers "overflowed with indignation over the Belgian Congo atrocities" until they needed the friendship of the Belgians, "then of course they were silent."<sup>20</sup> The Belgium situation received such a response from Wisconsin Synod writers because they understood how vital an issue it was for Allied propaganda. Indeed, when war eventually arrived, American soldiers were continually inspired by stories of Germany's oppression of innocent Belgium.

The eventual cause of American entry into the war, neutral shipping rights, received by far the most attention from the Wisconsin Synod. Both sides violated United States shipping rights in the war. Great Britain used its superior fleet to blockade all maritime trade to the Central Powers, from war supplies to foodstuffs. Germany, having the inferior fleet, chose to use its *Unterseeboot*, or submarine, to equalize the war of supplies. The nature of submarine warfare, however, repulsed many Americans, because submarines often killed without warning. Since a visible presence of a blockading fleet was not present in the Allied trade routes, United States merchants and industrialists were drawn to the profitable prospects of supplying a nation at war. These divergent interests naturally lead to complications. Germany warned all vessels trading with its enemies that no weapons of war would be admitted within a specified zone around England and France. This did little to stem the tide of trade, and merchants found creative ways to mask their activities. A very popular method was to use civilian vessels to

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<sup>20</sup> "Belgien," *Gemeindeblatt* 50:3 (1 Feb 1915), 41; Walter Hönecke, "Belgien und der Kongostaat," *Gemeindeblatt* 50:5 (1 March 1915), 70.

transport supplies. In May 1915 a German submarine suspected a civilian vessel, the *Lusitania*, of doing just that. It fired upon and sunk the *Lusitania*. While the assumption was correct—the *Lusitania* was carrying guns and ammunition—1,198 civilians died as a result, including 138 American citizens.<sup>21</sup> The ensuing firestorm made Germany relax its submarine warfare for a time. As war supplies continued to be shipped across the Atlantic, neutral shipping would remain at the forefront of public discourse throughout the neutrality period.

Many German Americans angered their fellow citizens by attempting to justify the *Lusitania's* sinking. They pointed to the fact that the *Lusitania* put its passengers in danger by carrying munitions, and that Germany had given ample warning to all prospective passengers. A popular cartoon circulated depicting a German American telling himself after the sinking, "Vell, ve varned 'em!"<sup>22</sup> While the Wisconsin Synod never officially defended the *Lusitania's* sinking, it made reference to it in a *Northwestern Lutheran* article, which depicted a Methodist Episcopal Conference's resolution condemning "in unsparing words the inhuman torpedoing and unchristian sinking of the steel steamship *Lusitania*."<sup>23</sup> The



1.3: *Life Magazine*, 10 May 1915

synod highlighted six ministers who bolted the meeting after fighting in vain to have the resolution tabled. Most synod members, being well read in the German language press, likely adhered to what they read—that supplying a belligerent with weaponry and ammunition was a

<sup>21</sup> Louise Doswald-Beck, *San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 124.

<sup>22</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 8 May 1915.

<sup>23</sup> "Pro-German Clergymen Bolt Chicago Meeting," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:10 (21 May 1915), 80.

virtual participation in war, and that Germany was justified in sinking vessels which carried those munitions.

The most telling sign of the Wisconsin Synod's attitude towards the *Lusitania* was their continued condemnation of "illicit" weaponry trade. They believed profiteering from the European war to be immoral and non-neutral in nature. Even before the *Lusitania* affair, the *Gemeindeblatt* posted an article titled "The Sin of America." Inside, it described the "shame of hypocrisy and idolatry of money" of those who enriched themselves from the killing in the European war.<sup>24</sup> The war supplies found their way strictly to Allied nations, allowing the Allied powers to "continue the war of extermination against the Germans." This was a flagrant breach of neutrality because "neutrality means favoring neither party." Since the bullets they sold killed people with whom America was not at war, the *Gemeindeblatt* called these profits "Blutgeld," or "blood money." With powerful enemies on all sides, Germany "will with American money and possessions be completely destroyed." At the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Synod in September 1915, the delegates unanimously adopted a resolution along similar lines:

The Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and other states in session assembled at Saginaw, Michigan, unanimously declared it is not within our providence as part of the Christian Church to decide the question whether or not our government according to so-called international law is guilty or not, during the present war, of partisanship in protecting and furthering the traffic in arms and ammunition. But, whereas, the sufferance of said traffic in arms and ammunition is virtually a participation in war, and also a gross transgression of the Divine commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," we, bound in conscience by the eternal laws of God, feel compelled to declare to our government that not only all traffickers in arms and ammunition of this country are, but also our government is guilty of the blood shed in this war. We solemnly disavow and repudiate such traffic and protest against it most emphatically.<sup>25</sup>

The convention then formally requested all synod members to pray without ceasing, both in public services and privately, that "God on high may make the war to cease and grant peace on earth again."

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<sup>24</sup> "Die Sünde Americas," *Gemeindeblatt* 50:6 (15 March 1915), 86-87.

<sup>25</sup> A.C. Haase, "Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the Joint Ev. Luth. Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:18 (21 September 1915), 142.

As the tide of mainstream opinion in the United States turned overwhelmingly to the Allies, the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans remained firm in their position. Nearly every act in the war turned into an opportunity for dispute. When the ancient French convent of the Celestins was destroyed by German bombardment, the English language press described the event as further proof of the "Huns'" disregard for civilization. Instead, the *Northwestern Lutheran* focused on the "scandal of permitting the building, which was classed as an historic monument, to be used as a barrack, which contributed to its destruction."<sup>26</sup> Among the numerous civilian massacres committed throughout the war, the *Northwestern* specifically focused on reports that Russia exiled to Siberia all the Lutherans of German extraction within its empire, which would be "nothing short of murder and robbery of the baldest sort." The maltreated Lutherans were never mentioned by the English Language press, for "it might be interpreted as undue sympathy for Germany....It makes one's blood boil at the injustice of it all."<sup>27</sup> The silence of the English language press on issues like this confirmed German Lutherans' belief that it was attempting to mislead the American people into a war with Germany. To counter this, the *Northwestern Lutheran* advertised a book in 1916 titled *War Echoes, or Germany and Austria in the Crisis*. The book was priced at \$1.25, and it received high praise from the *Northwestern*:

We have not seen another publication on the great World's War that can compare with this in thoroughness, comprehensiveness, and excellence. Every American not conversant with the German language should read this book and have their eyes opened on such questions as "The Causes of the War," "Why Belgium was not Protected," "Reasons for Germany in the World War," "Reasons for Great Britain in the World War," "Neutrality in the United States," and dozens of other questions answered by...famous authorities, together with the most important official documents bearing on the subject.<sup>28</sup>

German Lutherans often chose to vote with their money when they disapproved of the actions of their financial institutions. Many banks throughout the neutrality period invested in

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<sup>26</sup> "Historic Convent Destroyed," *Northwestern Lutheran* 3:15 (7 August 1916), 120.

<sup>27</sup> "An Atrocity?" *Northwestern Lutheran* 3:17 (7 September 1916), 130-131.

<sup>28</sup> "War Echoes, or Germany and Austria in the Crisis," *Northwestern Lutheran* 3:22 (15 November 1916), 174.

Allied War Bonds, firstly to help the Allied cause and secondly because it included a high return of investment. WELS minister Otto Engel, like many German Lutherans, pulled his funds from these misbehaving banks. He wrote to his friend, Rev. Hermann Zimmerman, "Certainly I have taken gold out of deposit from the bank and advise others to take the same course. It is also in order to occasionally have a little 'talk' with the banker."<sup>29</sup> In Milwaukee, such a furor was raised "against the sale of any Anglo-French bonds that...not a single Milwaukee bank openly handled any Anglo-French bonds."<sup>30</sup> Many banks on the eastern seaboard, especially J.P. Morgan banks, invested substantially in Allied bonds. Therefore, an Allied victory would ensure that these investments would be paid in full. Thus the German Lutheran rhetoric against Wall Street emerged because many of these institutions understood that American involvement in the war would further protect their investments.

This anti-bank rhetoric should not be strictly construed as opportunistic of the German Lutherans, as many assumed. The Lutheran religion maintained a streak of anti-bank sentiment ever since Martin Luther published his thoughts in "A Treaty on Usury." While many protestant denominations had already given up the battle against usury by Luther's time, many Catholics and Lutherans theologically contested the practice well into the 19th century. C.F.W. Walther, the most influential Lutheran in America and highly revered by the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, in 1869 put the taking of interest in the same category as "theft, robbery, adultery, and idolatry" and claimed that "banks are nothing but institutions of usury."<sup>31</sup> This sentiment may have dimmed as the nature of lending changed, but reverberations still existed prior to the war.

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<sup>29</sup> Otto Engel to Hermann Zimmerman, 17 September 1915, OG 5025.

<sup>30</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, *Hearings on the National German-American Alliance*, 65th Cong., 2d sess., 1918, p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Die Wucherfrage: Protokoll der Verbundlungen der deutschen evang. Luth. Gemeinde U.A.C. zu St. Louis, Mo., uber dieste Frage nebst einigen Autzuegen aus den Schriften von Theologen vor und nach den Reformation und andern dieselbe betreffenden Documenten* (St. Louis, Mo: August Wiebusch und Sohn, 1869), 32, 56.

This is especially true for the western regions of the synod—Minnesota and the Dakotas. In these states, the Nonpartisan League was a political force, and some Lutherans were drawn to its anti-banking tenets. Furthermore, banks—especially nationally prominent ones—stood as a natural obstacle to the Wisconsin Synod's attempt to create a distinct society on American soil.<sup>32</sup>

With a presidential election forthcoming in 1916, most understood its significance on the future course of American participation in the war. Dissatisfied with the current regime's policies, most German Lutherans favored Republican challenger Charles Evans Hughes. A member of the Wisconsin Democratic State Campaign Committee reported that Lutherans from Sheboygan, Calumet, and Waupaca counties were especially active and "willing to condemn Wilson."<sup>33</sup> Nearly every German language newspaper endorsed Hughes, so much so that the New York Times dubbed him the "German favorite son." The *Gemeindeblatt* and *Northwestern Lutheran* did not endorse Hughes, however, and instead warned that some in the church had dangerously breached the political divide. John Brenner in the *Northwestern Lutheran* admitted, "many of our Lutheran brethren have in these last years acted unwisely by their love for the land of their birth, or, we will admit, by the sense of justice." While many of these individuals petitioned the government prefaced as "American citizens," the fact remained that "the name of our church was brought into connection with them and that the appearance was thus created that the Lutheran church was now beginning to enter the field of politics."<sup>34</sup> Pastors mistakenly believed their activities away from the church to protect neutrality would have no bearing on their occupation in the pulpit. Rev. Hans Moussa, however, cautioned the WELS pastor that his

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<sup>32</sup> The theological issue of usury became much more complicated after the emergence of the market economy. During the early days of the Christian church, however, money was truly a "barren" commodity, meaning that the borrower typically did not employ the money to invest, but to subsist.

<sup>33</sup> Otto LaBudde to Husting, 31 October 1915, Found in James J. Lorence, "Dynamite for the Brain: The Growth and Decline of Socialism in Central and Lakeshore Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66 (Summer 1983), 250-73.

<sup>34</sup> John Brenner, "Urges Lutherans to Political Activity," *Northwestern Lutheran* 3:18 (21 September 1916), 139.

"office is not to be stripped off and put on at his pleasure, like a garment."<sup>35</sup> Brenner believed this participation in political activity to be spiritually dangerous. He wrote, "Christ says, 'My kingdom is not of this world,' thus teaching the separation of Church and State....The Church cannot find a quicker method of self destruction than political activity."

The synod had an ambiguous score according to its own criteria. When it came to official church activity, however, the synod's pastors conducted themselves far better than other church bodies in keeping politics out of the pulpit. Synod pastors followed principle in late October 1916, when various Milwaukee meetings formulated to encourage Republican voting among religious organizations for the election. The *Milwaukee Journal* reported on the meeting's resolutions, noting,

While clergymen of the more *pietistic* bodies—the Evangelical Synod, the Evangelical Association, the German Reformed church, and a Methodist conference—affixed their signatures, no pastor of either the Wisconsin or Missouri synods (the two most numerous German Protestant church bodies in the state) would so violate the orthodox principle of noninvolvement in partisan politics.<sup>36</sup>

The synod also generally avoided work with the National German-American Alliance, and frustrated their otherwise successful efforts to court religious groups to form a solid bloc of German Americans to fight for neutrality. Like all unifying efforts, members of the Wisconsin synod generally showed disdain for the organization. It then admonished other religious bodies, both pro-war and against, for "prostitution of our one and only duty as preachers and spreaders of the Gospel."<sup>37</sup> The *Northwestern Lutheran* even highlighted Milwaukee clergyman Paul B. Jenkins's sermon on the subject of preparedness, and claimed that by "entering the arena of political controversy he, by pulpit utterances, courts contradiction: how will he fare when it suits his pleasure to deliver the message entrusted to him by the Master?"<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Private Affairs of the Pastor," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:16 (21 August 1915), 126.

<sup>36</sup> *Milwaukee Journal*, 24 October 1916, emphasis is mine.

<sup>37</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "The Political Campaign," *Northwestern Lutheran* 1:22 (21 November 1914), 177.

<sup>38</sup> "Politics and the Pulpit." *Northwestern Lutheran* 3:5 (7 March 1916), 34.

However, many ministers naively believed that their private indignation over the breach of neutrality could be separated from their public proclamation as pastors in the pulpit. These auxiliary activities of ministers and other workers during the neutrality period came back to haunt many after the declaration of war. For these individuals, it would have been prudent to heed the admonisher's warning in the *Northwestern Lutheran*. Since they were in a position of leadership in their communities, however, many felt compelled to work for the interests of their people. Many preachers rebuked various political figures for their activities and decisions that were contrary to the interests of German Americans. After an election speech by President Wilson which attacked all "hyphenated" Americans, Rev. Henry Boettcher of Gibbon, Minnesota fired a letter to the Democratic National Committee:

If ever I have been sorry for a deed, it is that I helped elect Wilson [in 1912]. ...I have been as good an American as ever any of the Wilsons were. Yea a better American, because none of my ancestors raised a hand against the Stars and Stripes, like Wilsons ancestors....And to be called an undesirable citizen by a man, who's [*sic*] only boast is, that he is a fine breed Englishman, who feels at home in English surroundings, is indeed strong! ...He deliberately insulted us! He knew better, he knew that he wronged us, but purposely he did do it, because he hated us, since we had not his English blood in our veins.<sup>39</sup>

President Wilson and Minnesota Congressman Franklin Ellsworth received another letter from Professor Ackermann of Doctor Martin Luther College. After expressing the anti-war sentiment of his community, he chastised their decisions during the neutrality period: "Americans were warned to keep out of the danger zone in Mexico, why not warned to stay off ammunition ships? Wall street and ammunition manufacturers is [*sic*] not the voice of the people."<sup>40</sup> While their English grammar may have been sloppy, these religious leaders may have possessed the strongest English skills available in their communities to petition the government.

While none of the Wisconsin Synod pastors were able to hold an audience with any congressional committees, a member of the Synodical Conference, Professor Frederick Bente of

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<sup>39</sup> Rev. Henry Boettcher to the Democratic National Committee, 22 October 1916, found in Nathan Meyer, "The Presidential Election of 1916 in the Middle West" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1966), 250.

<sup>40</sup> *Brown County Journal*, 17 February 1917.

the Missouri Synod's Concordia Seminary, presented at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee concerning the prohibition of exportation of munitions of war. Bente, like many WELS ministers, believed his personal activities could stay separate from his religious occupation. He told the committee, "I represent here strictly by delegation the American Neutrality League. I am not delegated exactly by Concordia Seminary nor by the synod, although I know that practically every Lutheran in the country would identify himself with the stand which we take on this question."<sup>41</sup> The Neutrality League took a stand against "the sale of munitions to belligerents in any war which the United States is not a party." In his speech, Bente attacked the duplicity of the nation in publicly proclaiming neutrality and praying for peace while furnishing weapons to one of the warring parties. Despite Bente's claim to be solely representing the American Neutrality League, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge's letter to Theodore Roosevelt shows the difficulty of disconnecting from one's religious profession:

The German-American propaganda has become pretty bad. We had them before the Foreign Relations Committee the other day on the question of prohibiting the export of war munitions, when a man from the Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis, named Bente, addressed us. He had been born and brought up in Germany...[and] had an accent so strong that you could tumble over it, and he proceeded to lecture us on Americanism, patriotism, what true Americanism was, and what the opinions of George Washington were...They are now engaged in telling us how loyal they are to the United States.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps no Wisconsin Synod member was busier during the neutrality period than Rev. Otto Engel of Norwalk, Wisconsin. A young man—31 years old in 1916—he was nonetheless very influential in his congregation and the town of Norwalk. Engel held personal acquaintances with many Germans and Austrians, including the mayor of Vienna, and he received much of his war news from his correspondence with them.<sup>43</sup> He deplored the influence of British propaganda on

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<sup>41</sup> United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Prohibition of Exportation of Munitions of War*, 3 February 1915, State Department Records, National Archives, Group 59, Roll 0151.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to Theodore Roosevelt, 22 February 1915, found in *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1914* (New York, 1925), II, 457.

<sup>43</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 10 April 1917, OG 5025; Marlborough Churchill, "Memorandum: Rev. Otto Engel," 10 August 1918, OG 5025; Wm. H. Steiner Report, 4 October 1918, OG 5025.

the American citizenry, and created the American Liberty League to counteract it. Engel served as president of this league, which included the following in its constitution:

Believing that the British propaganda...is bending every effort to speed the day of an Anglo-American entente, the Liberty League has been organized with the object of guarding our American rights against pro-ally influences....We must enlighten our American people on what is behind this war, thus frustrating the scheme of forcing us into an alliance with England. This effort is patriotic, for we are striving to develop a genuine American national type, while the Tories insist that we be and remain merely a British off-shoot.<sup>44</sup>

The American Liberty League sent "thousands of letters to Lutherans and also Wisconsin members of Congress."<sup>45</sup> Engel arranged many writers to pen circulars arguing for strict neutrality to be distributed all over the country. As the league gained influence and the neutrality situation worsened, Engel began reaching out to Congressmen across the United States. After receiving a circular from one of his best writers, Engel assured him this message would reach important decision makers:

Dear Friend: I return to you the list of Secretaries of the 65th Congress, after I have made a copy of those People's Representatives under consideration, I will mail 2000 letters containing your pamphlet as soon as the printed matter has come into my possession. The 2000 stamped envelopes are being addressed now: Professors, Mayors, Pastors, Teachers, Doctors, etc.<sup>46</sup>

These pamphlets from the American Liberty League included "The Lusitania Case," "Neutrality and Public Opinion," and "Strict Accountability, or the Underlying Intention." Through his work with the American Liberty League, Engel became a prominent figure for peace. Wisconsin Lutherans often sent their petitions to the government through him, hoping through his influence to be heard. Despite his successes, his actions caused concern among members of the synod. Ernest von Briesen, a prominent lawyer and leading member of the synod, "several times called Engel's attention to his class of work." Von Briesen wrote Engel a letter severely criticizing

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<sup>44</sup> Pamphlet of the American Liberty League, found in OG 5025, p. 17. Rev. Engel was a very well-informed man. He subscribed to dozens of newspapers in the United States, Asia, and South America. Those who knew him said he was always "reading or writing." He also contributed to Juergen Neve's 1915 history of Lutherans in America. Neve inserted Engel's contributions relating to the Wisconsin Synod verbatim.

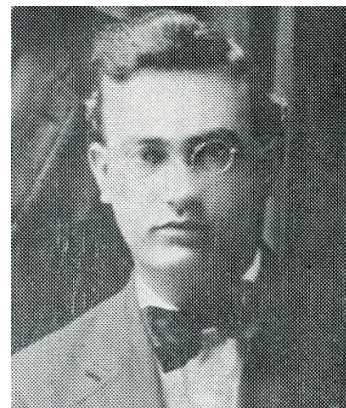
<sup>45</sup> Frank F. Wolfgram Report, 7 November 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>46</sup> Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 27 March 1917, OG 5025.

him for taking part in politics and asked him to "immediately discontinue his activities in political matters."<sup>47</sup> Engel neglected to heed these warnings, however, and this decision cost him much agony after the declaration of war.

Sometimes congregation members pressured their ministers to represent them. At a quarterly meeting at Christ Lutheran Church in West Salem, Wisconsin, Rev. Herman

Zimmermann "was instructed to send a petition to President Wilson and [La Follette], [Husting] and Esch" to reflect an anti-war letter read in Congress.<sup>48</sup> In West Salem's case, the anti-war position taken by Lutherans caused conflict in the community. The same meeting "discussed...several people from the English here in the village [who] have insulted our Pastor, or even lied [about] him, in regard to the war. Those who insulted



1.4: Rev. Otto Engel, 1915

the Pastor should, at least, take back what they have said." Pastor Zimmerman appears to have weathered this storm, as indicated in a personal letter from Otto Engel: "I congratulate you on the successful finish of the slander affair. I am enclosing the newspaper clippings as per your request. That is the way to go after the ultra-patriots, right from the start."<sup>49</sup> Because Zimmerman and his church made enemies in the West Salem community, and because of his association with Engel, he too would come under much persecution after the declaration of war.

When the war in Europe erupted, Ludwig Bleek, a citizen of nobility in Germany, was visiting London. When England did not allow him passage back to his homeland, he and his wife

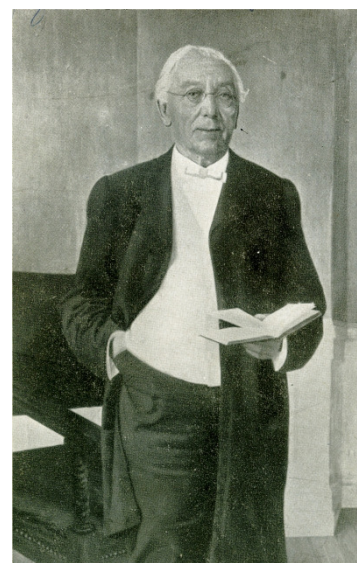
<sup>47</sup> Frank F. Wolfram Report, 18 February 1919, OG 5025.

<sup>48</sup> Quarterly Meeting Minutes of Christ Lutheran Church, West Salem, WI, 1 April 1917. Translated by Prof. Arnold Koelpin, 20 July 2012. Zimmermann had been in contact with these representatives and others prior to this. He received letters from Wisconsin Congressman John Esch and Senator Robert La Follette in April 1916. Zimmermann also sent an editorial to the *Milwaukee Free Press* in February 1915 which favored an arms-embargo. He was also one of the many Lutheran subscribers to *The Fatherland* and later *Viereck's Weekly*, and held many pamphlets from Engel's American Liberty League.

<sup>49</sup> Otto Engel to Herman Zimmerman, 26 April 1917, OG 5025.

moved to the United States. After spending some time in New York, Bleek heard of a German American community in Watertown, Wisconsin and decided to relocate there. Once in Watertown, he associated himself with the city's intellectuals, especially the professors at the Wisconsin Synod's Northwestern College. Bleek also brought a lot of baggage to Watertown, in the form of government investigators. Since Bleek was a German citizen, the government considered him to be a potential German spy or saboteur.<sup>50</sup>

While visiting Watertown, the investigators considered the city "the center of an intensely Pro-German, anti-administration movement."<sup>51</sup> During the Bleek investigation, officials came across his closest friend, President August Ernst of Northwestern College, a Wisconsin Synod school. The German American Club of Watertown, which Ernst presided, also caught their attention. This club functioned somewhat as a literary society; its official purpose was to encourage the use of the German language. During the neutrality period, however, it often held meetings which favored Germany. A minister of a local Congregational church, N.C. Daniell, volunteered accounts to investigators concerning four pro-German meetings previously held by the club. One of these meetings was held on 1 August 1916 at the Hotel Waukesha in



1.5: Prof. August Ernst

Watertown, and included a special guest—a "Hindoo [*sic*] named Krishua."<sup>52</sup> The subject of his lecture was "British Misrule in India." Krishua spoke strongly in favor of Germany's "more lenient" system of colonization, and ridiculed England's. He said they were prohibited in India from hanging up pictures of Lincoln or Washington on their walls. Daniell described Krishua as

<sup>50</sup> Chas. P. Tighe Report, "Neutrality Matter," 16 March 1916, OG 1167.

<sup>51</sup> H.G. Clabuagh Report, 17 February 1916, OG 1167.

<sup>52</sup> Chas. P. Tighe Report, "Neutrality Matter," 16 March 1916, OG 1167;

an anarchist, and that "Professor Ernst of the college is very pro-German and seems to be at the head of the Watertown Germans, and Dr. Bleek is a close confidential associate of his." Other speakers at these meetings included Dr. Herman and Professor Huth, other faculty members at Northwestern. When Bleek was interviewed by government officials, they tried to obtain information about these professors, but Bleek was very short with his answers.<sup>53</sup> The government's investigation of the German American club at Watertown, while the country was still technically neutral, gave a foretaste of the repression to come to German Lutherans once the United States declared war.

When one attempts to comprehend the synod's position and rhetoric regarding the European War, there are both simple and complex explanations. Clearly, the thought of fighting a war against relatives and their former country made war unthinkable in their minds. Additionally, a pride in German civilization and culture—*Kultur*—led some to believe that the Germans, not the Allies, were fighting on the side of progress. At the same time, the German Lutherans' anti-war rhetoric never drastically differed from their characteristics prior to the war, and often coincided with them. The sentiment against banks and speculators, as previously discussed, had occupational and theological roots. Furthermore, with an American religious environment divided into two distinct camps—reformer and reformee—it is natural that the reformers—the evangelical organizations—could be tempted to partake in the reconstruction of the globe. The quixotic war objectives of "a war to end all wars," and "a war to save democracy," signified a reformer's dream. With God securely on the side of democracy, peace advocates could even be labeled "unchristian." The Wisconsin Synod, rather than viewing war as a medium to positive change, typically considered it a corrupting mechanism. Recall the words of the *Gemeindeblatt* concerning the War of 1898, "War is a disaster....People in war believe

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<sup>53</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, "Dr. Ludwig Bleek, and Rifles at German Lutheran College," 24 April 1917, OG 1167.

they are free from the commandments of God."<sup>54</sup> After viewing the war's effect on the Christian Church as a whole, the synod's beliefs were regrettably confirmed.

### **On the Cusp of War**

Despite the pleas for embargo, munitions continued to be exported to the Allies in increasing amounts. In February 1917 Germany took a calculated risk and resumed its unrestricted submarine warfare. Its generals understood that this likely would bring the United States into the war, but it also gave them a window to subdue a presumably ill-supplied Britain and France before the United States could play a major role militarily.<sup>55</sup> In response, churches across the nation sounded their war drums. At the suggestion of the influential New York Federation of Churches, for example, "War Sunday" was celebrated. *Literary Digest* reported that "in flag-draped pulpits the pastors of New York...sounded the call to arms."<sup>56</sup> Wisconsin Synod Lutherans also understood this likely would mean war with their former homeland. Even with war appearing inevitable, they held fast to their convictions to the bitter end.

The *Gemeindeblatt* made it clear it had not moved an inch in its sentiments. In its 15 April 1917 issue, the advertisement section included two books which displayed partiality to Germany. The first book, *The Journey of Captain Paul König*, featured a German submarine which evaded the British and French blockade to transport foodstuffs to a starving German population. The *Gemeindeblatt* gave it high marks: "The book will be immediately classified among the classics of sea literature."<sup>57</sup> A second book, *Ayesha*, featured German captain Hellmuth von Muecke's adventurous journey from the Keeling Islands to Constantinople, which was good for a "mischievous laugh in the middle of battle roar of the mighty struggle of

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<sup>54</sup> "Kriegs und Sieges Predigt," *Gemeindeblatt* 33:14 (15 July 1898), 105; "Kriegs und Friedenspredigt," *Gemeindeblatt* 33:20 (15 October 1898), 153.

<sup>55</sup> Joachim Schröder, *Die U-Boote des Kaisers: Die Geschichte des deutschen U-Boot-Krieges gegen Grossbritannien im ersten Weltkrieg* (Lauf an der Pegnitz: Europaforum-Verlag, 2001), 205.

<sup>56</sup> *Literary Digest*, 11 March 1917.

<sup>57</sup> "Die Fahrt der Deutschland," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:8 (15 April 1917), 128.

nations."<sup>58</sup> Since the United States declared war on 6 April 1917 it would appear the *Gemeindeblatt* advertised books featuring the enemy of the United States. However, the 15 April date marks the end of the biweekly production period of the publication. This issue was likely printed a few days before the declaration of war; the next issue chose the less controversial route of advertising organ music.

A few days before the United States declared war, one thousand people packed the armory in New Ulm, Minnesota for a peace meeting. This meeting included speeches against the expected declaration, with two professors from the Wisconsin Synod's Doctor Martin Luther College—A.F. Reim and Adolph Ackermann—contributing. Ackermann made the most extended address of the evening. He discussed the situation of the country from the standpoint of the Constitution of the United States. "It has been said," Ackermann declared, "that we have not the right to meet to protest against war, but this is not true. I stand tonight on my Constitutional rights as an American citizen in addressing this audience." After reading extracts from the Constitution to prove his point, Ackermann gave the true meaning of treason, which friends of peace had been charged so repeatedly in the past. "Treason," he said, "is the act of causing war....Who then is guilty of treason if this country is plunged into war at this time?" To Ackermann, the answer appeared plainly obvious, since the shout of war was "being heard from all sides as jingoists were trying to force the nation into war." These jingoists were supported by a "subsidized" press which created war hysteria through slanted reporting. Throughout the public meeting, Ackermann and the other speakers repeatedly pledged their loyalty and often interjected patriotic songs and readings into their program. They considered peace to be the patriotic position because it promoted the best interest of the American people.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "Ayesha," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:8 (15 April 1917), 128.

<sup>59</sup> "Patriotism Rings at Peace Meeting," *New Ulm Review*, 4 April 1917; *Brown County Journal*, 17 April 1917.

At the peace meeting, it was decided to send a delegation from New Ulm to Washington D.C. to attend a peace conference and to plead with representatives for non-intervention. Among the three delegates selected was F.H. Retzlaff, a highly involved WELS lay-member who regularly attended synod conventions.<sup>60</sup> When they arrived in Washington, they met an atmosphere in the capitol city hostile to any peace movement and found all pro-war Congressmen and Senators intractable to persuasion. Amid the disappointment, the *New Ulm Review* singled out Minnesota Congressman Franklin Ellsworth of the second district, "who admitted that he knew that probably 85 percent of his constituents desired peace, but he hated the Kaiser and German *autocracy* and that he could not conscientiously vote against the war resolution."<sup>61</sup>

During the New Ulm peace meeting, professor Ackermann suggested that the war declaration be put to a popular referendum, believing the people would not choose war if asked. New Ulm did just that, which resulted in a 23 to 1 ratio favoring peace.<sup>62</sup> Other cities with high densities of German Lutherans did likewise. In the city of Sheboygan, Wisconsin the ballots asked, "Shall the United States enter the European War?" These ballots were distributed to the churches. The local vote set for April 1-3 was interrupted before its completion, but the incomplete result was announced as 4,112 "noes" and 17 "ayes."<sup>63</sup> Manitowoc also held an unofficial referendum on the war, with 1,460 against and only 15 for the war. A vote in Monroe, Wisconsin revealed 954 votes against the war, while 95 voted in favor.<sup>64</sup> In the uncertain times of April 1917 only one thing was clear, this war would be extremely unpopular with German

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<sup>60</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 4 April 1917.

<sup>61</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 11 April 1917.

<sup>62</sup> Results from Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (Dekalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 206;

<sup>63</sup> Karen Falk, "Public Opinion in Wisconsin during World War I," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 25 (June 1942), 395.

<sup>64</sup> William Thomas, Jr., *Unsafe for Democracy: World War I and the U.S. Justice Department's Covert Campaign to Suppress Dissent* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 21.

Lutherans and other communities. Government officials rightfully feared a non-cohesive home front in the upcoming war. The vast quantity and size of the government bureaucracies equipped to deal with home front issues make plain this fear.

## Chapter 2: The Machinery of Repression

After the United States declared war on Germany, a spy hysteria swept the nation. Every fire, every explosion in a munitions plant, or every accident on land and sea was straightway credited to the German spy system. If a cut in a child's hand did not heal, then the Germans had placed germs in the bandages. If a woman's headache did not dissipate with medicine, then the Germans had "doped" the particular pill or powder. Americans everywhere sifted through their food to make sure there was no broken glass intermixed. The press was the most important agent in spreading this fear of espionage. James R. Mock recalled that "it was difficult to find a newspaper published in April 1917 that did not have on every other page some reference to the malevolent work of the enemy within."<sup>1</sup> Many publishers looked to profit from this frenzy and produced histories of German machinations on American soil. A small sampling of these titles include, *Conquest and Kultur*, *Face to Face with Kaiserism*, *Fighting Germany's Spies*, *German Conspiracies in America*, *Germanism and the American Crusade*, *Germanism from Within*, *Pan-Germanism: it's Plans for German Expansion in the World*, *The German American Plot*, and *The United States and Pan-Germanism*. Some of these titles estimated that over 200,000 spies were "honeycombing the country," actively working for the German government.<sup>2</sup>



### Which of the Men You know is a German Agent?

2.1: Part of a full page advertisement in the Milwaukee Journal for the upcoming book, *Face to Face with Kaiserism*, late 1917.

<sup>1</sup> James R. Mock, *Words that Won the War: the Committee of Public Information* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1939), 32.

<sup>2</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper & Brothres, 1920), 168.

Besides spies, Americans feared fifth column disloyalty. Not only were there "two million men of German blood inside our borders, guaranteed by the Kaiser to be loyal to Germany,"<sup>3</sup> but it was generally believed that Germany paid and encouraged radicals and pacifists to undermine wartime unity. Eventually, the terms "German" and "radical," or "wide-eyed anarchist," became synonymous in public opinion. The region which caused the most consternation was the "polyglot" upper-Midwest, of which the German-speaking Wisconsin Synod Lutherans were naturally considered one of the worst offenders. Journalist and bureaucrat George Creel recalled the tenuous atmosphere of April 1917:

Who does not remember the fears of "wholesale disloyalty" that shook us daily? There were to be "revolutions" in Milwaukee, St. Louis, Cincinnati; armed uprisings here, there, and everywhere; small armies herding thousands of rebellious enemy aliens into huge internment camps; incendiarism, sabotage, explosions, murder, domestic riot.<sup>4</sup>

Amid this hysteria, the federal and state governments instituted an immense system of wartime bureaucracy to both inspire and police the home front. Even before the declaration of war, representatives worked to create legislation which would give teeth to these organizations. On 5 February 1917, two months before war, Senator Lee Overman and Congressman Edwin Webb introduced similar bills to "define and punish espionage." On April 2, after President Wilson delivered his war message and war appeared imminent, Webb introduced a more expansive espionage bill, which after nine weeks of debate and amendment became the law of the land. The Espionage Act of 1917 made it illegal to "willfully make or convey false reports or false statements with the intent to interfere with the operation or success" of the United States.<sup>5</sup> It also punished all attempts to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of

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<sup>3</sup> Emerson Hough, *The Web: The Authorized History of the American Protective League* (Chicago: The Reilly & Lee Co., 1919), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Creel, 166.

<sup>5</sup> Despite unwavering arguments by WELS critics that the Espionage Act infringed upon freedom of expression, some historians argue that protection of speech was not time-honored, and did not even need to be invoked until WWI. Paul Murphy, in his work *World War I and the Origin of Civil Liberties in the United States* (1979) argued that freedom of speech as a civil liberty was born in the repression of WWI.

duty in the military or naval forces. The maximum penalty for breaking this law was a fine of \$10,000 or imprisonment of twenty years, or both.<sup>6</sup>

The Espionage Act originally included a "Card Amendment" which called for press censorship, but this clause raised such a furor from all types of publications that it was shelved. James R. Mock perceived the irony: "The press itself was the most important agency in spreading fear of espionage, and at the same time was attempting to limit the provisions of the Espionage Bill."<sup>7</sup> The *Northwestern Lutheran* was one of those that voiced protest against the Card Amendment, arguing on the grounds of religious liberty:

There can be no violation of American traditions which will not work harm and injustice to the free development of the Church and the free exercise of its rights under the constitutional guarantee of religious liberty. Chief among these rights is the guarantee that it may teach its doctrines according to conviction, taking no regard of the wealth, rank, or station of those whose actions and opinions it must condemn as contrary to the Word of God.<sup>8</sup>

One foreseeable abuse of this law was for the government to police Lutheran objections to evangelical beliefs regarding "the Church, her nature, her functions and purpose." These objections could be interpreted as a reflection on the religious, even messianic, war aims proclaimed by president Wilson and other religious bodies. Indeed, when the opportunity presented itself, Wisconsin Synod publications denounced all attempts to brand the First World War as a religious conflict, causing irritation to propaganda organizations. While the synod publications, the *Gemeindeblatt* and *Northwestern Lutheran*, escaped suppression, other German language and socialist publications like the *Milwaukee Leader* were censored and banned from the United States mails.

However, the Espionage Act was merciful in comparison to the 1918 Sedition Act.

Agitation for a stricter statute came from law enforcement and vigilantes who were frustrated

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<sup>6</sup> Mock, 23-25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> "Press Censorship and Religious Liberty," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:13 (7 July 1917), 101; See Chapter 3 for more detailed WELS criticism of wartime policies.

by the difficulty of securing convictions for disloyal Americans. The Sedition Act made unlawful any intentional writing, speaking, or publication of "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government...or the Constitution...or the military or naval forces...or the flag...or the uniform of the army and navy of the United States." This act clearly was meant to strike at the heart of "enemy propaganda," which "is especially dangerous in any country governed by public opinion."<sup>9</sup> Three months after the act's passage, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported improved results in the courtroom, writing, "21 war cases tried, not one acquittal has resulted, the record shows."<sup>10</sup> Armed with these statutes, the colossal home front war machine could successfully root out all disloyalty.

### **The Department of Justice and the American Protective League**

In 1976, nearly sixty years after the First World War, the FBI released to the National Archives partial wartime records of the Department of Justice and the American Protective League. This delay might be attributed to a number of factors. The suppression of socialist and communist groups was certainly a sore subject during the Cold War. The Department may have wished to protect its vigilante informants from retribution. Furthermore, it is likely that a delay occurred because the Bureau recognized it miscalculated the situation on the home front and investigated individuals it had no business looking into, while breaching the rights and privacy of these same individuals. That this happened in the formative years of the FBI further added to the discomfiture because these investigations were the impetus for the substantial growth of the Bureau in the first place. Had it not been for the reform of the FBI in the wake of Watergate, COINTELPRO, and other affairs, these records may have never been released.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hough, 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 9 August 1918.

<sup>11</sup> William Thomas, Jr., *Unsafe for Democracy: World War I and the U.S. Justice Department's Covert Campaign to Suppress Dissent* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 8. The Freedom of Information Act of 1974 pushed once sensitive documents like these into the public domain.

During the war, the Department of Justice was certainly not embarrassed of its record. To them, the situation demanded drastic action. Allegations of disloyalty flooded the Justice Department. Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory noted, "every day hundreds of articles or passages from newspapers, pamphlets, books...reports from private conversations, etc., have been reported to officials of the department" with the hope for prosecution.<sup>12</sup> The department received 1,000 accusations of disloyalty a day in May 1917, a year later that number rose to 1,500. The department grew to meet these requests. Gregory boasted after the war,

It would have been difficult for fifty persons to have met for any purpose, in any place, from a church to a dance hall in any part of the United States, without one representative of the government being present. I doubt if any country was ever so thoroughly and intelligently policed in the history of the world.<sup>13</sup>

George Creel, the head of the Committee on Public Information, the government propaganda organ during the war, agreed: "Never was a country so thoroughly contra-espionaged! Not a pin dropped in the home of any one with a foreign name but that it rang like thunder in the inner ear of some listening sleuth!"<sup>14</sup> The department relied heavily on tips from a variety of sources, from cooperative clergy to local officials. Its most useful tool, however, was a 250,000 strong volunteer home front army—the American Protective League.<sup>15</sup>

The American Protective League (APL) originated in March 1917, two weeks before the war. Mr. A.M. Briggs from Chicago created a local branch and took the idea to Washington, where he secured authority to establish it as a volunteer auxiliary to the Department of Justice on 22 March 1917. Within a month, the APL was organized in 280 cities and towns, which followed the model of Chicago and answered to the Justice Department. In Wisconsin, for example, the APL set up headquarters in 37 different cities and towns, which quadrupled the

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory in a speech seven months after the war, found in Thomas, p.3.

<sup>14</sup> Creel, 167.

<sup>15</sup> Harold M. Hyman, *To Try Men's Souls: Loyalty Tests in American History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 271-272.

per capita average.<sup>16</sup> Michigan's 43 outlets tripled the per capita average. The Wisconsin Synod's primary footprint—Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Nebraska, and the Dakotas—claimed over 130 APL headquarters, nearly half of the total. The speed of the APL's creation was spurred by "the knowledge of how widespread and unscrupulous was the German spy system, and how seriously it was affecting the temper and loyalty of aliens and naturalized citizens." From the start, the league listed its two main functions. The first was "to make prompt and reliable report of all disloyal or enemy activities and of all infractions or evasions of the war code of the United States." The second, "to make prompt and thorough investigation of all matters...referred to it by the Department of Justice."<sup>17</sup> Thereby, APL agents worked undercover in close cooperation with the local agents of the Department of Justice.

The profile of the APL volunteers, according to its account, were successful men of affairs, "business and professional men....Men of proved judgment, intelligence, initiative, and energy."<sup>18</sup> Most of these volunteers claimed to be either necessary to their families or past service age, but "still were fired with patriotism and filled with wrath at the progress of German propaganda and plotting in this country." A pent up feeling of being unable to fight the enemy overseas led many to search for the enemy at home. Indeed, league members believed that war waged between two secret organizations—the German spy system versus the "loyal Americans under the unseen banner of the American Protective League."<sup>19</sup> As Emerson Hough, the official APL historian described it, "It met that German Army as ours met it at Chateau-Thierry, and in the Argonne....Like to our Army under arms—the Army where any of us would have preferred to

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<sup>16</sup> Report: "Total Towns Organized to Date," 26 June 1917, OG 15093. This report listed the towns in which the APL had headquarters. It also listed the APL executives and the Department of Justice officials to which the APL members reported their findings.

<sup>17</sup> French Strother, *Fighting Germany's Spies* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1918), 195-198.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

<sup>19</sup> Hough, 89.

serve had it been possible for us—it never gave back an inch of ground."<sup>20</sup> The APL not only held its ground, but its crusade only increased in its vigor through the end of the war—and beyond.

An impromptu vigilante organization cannot coalesce without hiccups. The first major mistake by Bureau director A. Bruce Bielaski was to offer APL badges, at 75 cents apiece, to volunteers. These badges closely resembled Secret Service badges. Local APL chiefs ordered flocks of badges and disbursed them to members. Secretary of Treasury William McAdoo severely objected to this development because the Secret Service belonged to his Treasury Department and was therefore separate from the Justice Department. Furthermore, private individuals suddenly wielded badges that gave them the appearance of federal authority. At an incident on a train in South Dakota, one eyewitness described, "[I] was on a train in South Dakota near Brookings when a man who claimed to be in the Secret Service, entered the car, displayed his badge to everyone in it and talked in a



*2.2: Members of the American Protective League could receive a badge for 75 cents.*

loud tone of voice about his work, his loyalty and said he was looking for slackers."<sup>21</sup> Other APL agents discovered that a slight wave of the badge could unlock information ordinarily considered confidential or gain them free admittance to theaters, subways, and parking lots. The Justice Department tried to solve this problem in two ways. First, APL leaders scrambled to retrieve as many "Secret Service" badges as possible. The APL bulletin then reminded volunteers

<sup>20</sup> Hough, 13.

<sup>21</sup> R.M. Markham to J.F. McAuley, 1 Oct 1918, OG 22490, p. 103.

that "under no circumstances shall [members] state they are members of the Secret Service Department of the United States...members are not Secret Service Officers of the United States. It is absolutely necessary that members understand this to avoid...impersonating a government official."<sup>22</sup> Secondly, the Justice Department worked to give the league more legitimacy. It investigated prospective members and made some swear to uphold the Constitution. By agreeing to improve its image, the APL gained even more authority from the Department of Justice to fight espionage.

Many APL agents felt no scruple with using illegal tactics to protect America. Even the "official" league historian boldly admitted, "It is supposed that breaking and entering a man's home or office place without warrant is burglary. Granted. But the League has done that thousands of times and has never been detected!"<sup>23</sup> He then gave a well detailed story of agents secretly breaking into an office, taking photographs of incriminating evidence, and sending the photos to the Department of Justice, whereby they made the arrest and found the evidence where it was described. "You think this case imaginary, far-fetched, impossible? It is neither of the three," claimed the author. Not all illegal searches went as planned, however. An agent named Werner Hanni, while investigating a Lutheran pastor in Emerald, Nebraska, tried to enter the pastor's empty house. The doors, however, "were all locked and the windows also and screens on each window, which were fastened from the inside."<sup>24</sup> One agent in Minneapolis had to crawl through a coal chute to get into a woman's basement, whereby he described the conversations upstairs as seditious.<sup>25</sup> After all that work, a report asserting the subject's innocence would have been surprising.

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<sup>22</sup> Joan Jensen, *The Price of Vigilance* (Chicago: RandMcNally,1968), 16, 44, 48, 49, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Hough, 163-166. While seemingly under no pressure to justify these tactics, Hough nevertheless claimed, "It [the investigations] did not harm or unsettle any innocent man. It was after the guilty alone."

<sup>24</sup> Eberstein Report, 13 June 1918, OG 173400.

<sup>25</sup> Jensen, 152.

Investigations also included sloppy execution. In one case, APL members seized an abandoned suitcase in a downtown square. They "gingerly" brought it into a police station, where it was "carefully examined and was found to contain a quantity of men's soiled underwear."<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, while investigating the loyalty of the headwaiter at a hotel, two agents became suspicious of each other's activity. Having both reported the dubious activity of the other, both men were brought into custody by the Department of Justice.<sup>27</sup> Investigative problems became so pervasive that an APL bulletin had to address them: "Recent occurrences make it necessary to issue further instructions...No captain, lieutenant, or operative has the power to arrest....No dictographs shall be installed, telephone wires tapped, or similar methods employed without specific authority."<sup>28</sup> When legalities came between an agent and a spy, however, such formalities could be disregarded.

For many agents, America needed protection from more than German spies and sympathizers. Through proper policing, the APL sought to restore and protect traditional pietistic canons, especially in the liturgical strongholds of the upper Midwest. In a telling story of intra-ethnic conflict in Lake Zurich, Illinois, near the Wisconsin border, members of the German Baptist Church succeeded in passing a law to close the saloons in the town on Sundays. When they suspected that the German Lutherans of the town continued to operate taverns, the minister and deacon of the congregation both wrote the APL and complained of the conditions in Lake Zurich. A German-speaking agent visited the town and received tips from the Baptist minister where to find the liquor sales. He also suggested that the agent visit a church service and listen for disloyalty, to which the agent also obliged.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, the criteria for acceptance

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<sup>26</sup> *Portland Telegram*, quoted in Clark T. Irwin Jr., "From a Gilded Age onto a World War," in *Greater Portland Celebration* 350, comp. and ed. Albert F. Barnes (Portland, ME., 1984), 124.

<sup>27</sup> Mock, 14; Jensen, 49.

<sup>28</sup> *APL Bulletin*, 15 October 1917.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Schmid Report, 16 June 1918, OG 236002.

as an agent included "citizens of good moral character." Good moral behavior typically meant one was a "dry." Noticing this character in the APL, the War Department assigned APL agents the task to enforce liquor control around the soldiers' cantonments. Visiting a saloon in Montello, Wisconsin, an APL agent saw the owner, Rudolph Tagatz, serve a round of beer to three soldiers. The agent then reported Tagatz's reputation as "bad, both in loyalty and in character." He then recommended a prosecution "for the good of the community."<sup>30</sup>

Agents also subscribed to the idea that the church could serve as an auxiliary to the government. Hence the APL enlisted many ministers, typically of evangelical church bodies, to report disloyalty in their communities. A minister at the evangelical United Brethren Church in Vermillion, South Dakota routed APL agents to Lutheran ministers in Battle Creek and Plattsmouth, Nebraska, vaguely telling agents that they both "show strong signs of disloyalty."<sup>31</sup> Upstate, Rev. Harvey Kerstetter of a Methodist-Episcopal Church in Mobridge, South Dakota held close correspondence with agent E.W. Fiske, mainly in examining area Lutheran ministers.<sup>32</sup>

A Lutheran coming under investigation became a common occurrence for the APL. In fact, Lutherans were the favorite target of the organization.<sup>33</sup> The prominent locations of APL headquarters in Lutheran towns was no coincidence. In his "official" history of the APL, Emerson Hough spared no hostility for the Lutheran church:

The pulpit was a recognized part of the German system of spy work in America....It is not just to accuse all Lutheran ministers of desecrating the cloth they wore. There are good Lutheran ministers who are loyal Americans without question. At the same time it is true that more charges have been brought against pastors of the Lutheran church, and charges more specific in nature, than against any other class or profession in our country....These are so numerous that one cannot avoid calling the Lutheran pulpit in America the most active and poisonous influence which existed in America during the war.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> W.E. Cox to R.B. Spencer, "Rudolph Tagatz," 30 October 1918, OG 315182.

<sup>31</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to M. Ebertstein, 8 June 1918, OG 209986.

<sup>32</sup> Rev. Harvey Kerstetter to E.W. Fiske, 9 Sept 1918, OG 22490.

<sup>33</sup> Hough, 69.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 70. Hough served as Captain with the Intelligent Service, so he likely had many personal brushes with Lutherans. Hough claimed there were over 1,200 total cases investigated. Since there were about six thousand Lutheran Congregations at this time, that makes for one in every five churches.

Certainly, the fact that many Lutherans were ethnic Germans contributed to this sentiment of the APL. Moreover, the APL's highly pietistic makeup likely contributed. Towns permeated by German Lutherans tended to be strongholds for anti-prohibition efforts and anti-sabbatarian ordinances. This new organization gave local leaders the opportunity to use the federal authority in these long-existing community struggles to tip the balance in their favor. Lutherans also rejected and criticized the efforts of evangelical church bodies to officially work with government war programs, and this antagonized and perplexed numerous investigators.

Voices against the policies and tactics of the APL were few and far between during the war. The most consistent defense of justice, however, came from John Lord O'Brian, head of the War-Emergency Division of the Department of Justice. After the war, he stated that "no other cause contributed so much to the oppression of innocent men as the systematic and indiscriminate agitation against what was claimed to be an all-pervasive system of German espionage."<sup>35</sup> Captain Henry T. Hunt of the Military Intelligence counter-espionage section also told authors that many "unfounded spy stories...started with the apparent object of removing or inconveniencing local political, business, or *social* rivals."<sup>36</sup> Unlike these two detractors, and like almost everyone else, President Wilson accepted the conspiracy thesis of German espionage. He thus allowed this counter-conspiracy system to flourish. Until the end of the war, he would emphasize the threat of subversion and the continued need of organizations like the APL to win the war.

### **The Committee on Public Information**

During the Second World War, President Franklin D. Roosevelt inspired and reassured the nation through the medium of radio. While "wireless stations" had emerged across the

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<sup>35</sup> Mock, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Jensen, 292.

country by 1917, the technology was not developed nor pervasive enough to serve that purpose in the First World War. Also unlike the Second World War, where the attack on Pearl Harbor roused the American nation, Wilson felt extreme pressure to cultivate—even manufacture—public opinion. As historian David Kennedy put it, "Here, the Great War was peculiarly an affair of the mind."<sup>37</sup> The result was the all-encompassing propaganda organization titled the Committee on Public Information.

President Wilson created the Committee on Public Information (CPI) through an executive order on 13 April 1917. Journalist and Democratic Muckraker George Creel received Wilson's appointment to chair the organization. To Creel, the task before him was both daunting and imperative to the war effort. Previous wars went no deeper than their physical aspects, but in this war "German Kultur raised issues that had to be fought out in the hearts and minds of people as well as on the actual firing line."<sup>38</sup> The minority against the war caused endangerment to the war effort, especially when "civilization [was] hanging in the balance."<sup>39</sup> Thus the CPI sought to control nearly every aspect which concerned home front morale. It published "official" accounts of war news, sought to counteract antiwar propaganda, and encouraged war funding and participation in patriotic and Americanization organizations.

Creel considered the Midwest—particularly Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas—to be the area of most pressing need. Rival antiwar organizations, such as the Nonpartisan League and the People's Council of America, were most pervasive in these states. Therefore, the CPI "attacked the [Midwest] at once."<sup>40</sup> The Nonpartisan League's "lie" about a "rich man's war" was the most stubborn belief of these inhabitants. The CPI counteracted this by making this topic the

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<sup>37</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 46.

<sup>38</sup> Creel, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Mock, 2-4.

<sup>40</sup> Creel, 178.

most frequent in its publications, and it worked with the APL and various state associations to root out meetings of the Nonpartisan League and similar organizations.

A volunteer organization called the Four Minute Men became the most visible presence of the CPI. Around 75,000 voluntary speakers were recruited by this organization, which gave an estimated 755,190 four-minute speeches to audiences totaling 314,454,514 people.<sup>41</sup> Creel supplied speakers with weekly patriotic topics, whereby these speakers would find a public location to give a four minute speech. The most popular location became motion picture theaters, where speeches were given during "four minute intermissions." A Junior Division of the Four Minute Men was also instituted. This division worked with the public schools, which gave assignments and held contests for best speeches against the "Huns" or for the promotion of thrift stamps. This likely alienated many German Americans in the public school system. This could explain the spike in enrollment at Grace Lutheran in Milwaukee during the war, from 61 in 1914 to 114 in 1918, of which school officials labeled 46 "strangers."<sup>42</sup>

Speakers were often drawn to the Four Minute Men by ambition. On more than one occasion the CPI reminded speakers in its official bulletin that they must keep their speeches to four minutes and to refrain from partisanship. Creel admitted that many men "had the deep conviction that they were William J. Bryans."<sup>43</sup> Those rejected by local officials sometimes even travelled to Washington D.C. to appeal to Creel by giving him a sample four minute speech. The CPI often catered to these ambitious speakers by furnishing dramatic speeches for them. The following "suggested speech" for the Second Liberty Loan could easily grab the audience's attention:

Ladies and Gentlemen: I have just received information that there is a German spy among us—A German spy watching us. He is around, here somewhere, reporting upon you and me—sending

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 90-93.

<sup>42</sup> Quarterly Meeting Minutes of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI, October 1914 and April 1918.

<sup>43</sup> Creel, 88.

reports about us to Berlin and telling the Germans just what we are doing with the Liberty Loan. From every section of the country these spies have been getting reports over to Potsdam—not general reports but details—where the loan is going well and where its success seems weak....Don't let that German spy hear and report that *you* are a slacker. Don't let him tell the Berlin government that there is no need to worry about the people in (name of town), and that they are not patriots.<sup>44</sup>

The CPI and many evangelical churches felt no qualm in working together for the war effort. The CPI highlighted the war activities of churches and encouraged them to send in sermon extracts which set forth the ideals and war aims of the nation. The best of these sermons earned publication in the *Official Bulletin*. Even prayers were published, such as this one from Rev. Henry M. Couden of Minnesota: "Dear Lord, deliver us from the hyphenated American, the pro-German, the spy, the profiteer, the pacifist, the slacker, and all who would retard the prosecution of the war for human rights, human happiness, in the establishment of a permanent and world-wide peace, for Christ's sake, Amen."<sup>45</sup> The Four Minute Men also penetrated church doors. The Four Minute Men organized a church department to "present four-minute speeches in churches, synagogues, and Sunday-schools."<sup>46</sup> The idea spread across the country. Creel was especially appreciative of this development because it allowed him to reach out more successfully to rural communities. The CPI also urged ministers to use the *Official Bulletin* for patriotic talks to their congregations. While the CPI experienced much success with this program with evangelical church bodies, the WELS and other liturgical bodies like the Catholic Church adamantly rejected this development throughout the course of the war.<sup>47</sup>

The CPI issued proclamations with an ominous threat of government enforcement. The organization itself could not arrest or prosecute, but it held close contact with the APL or law

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<sup>44</sup> Committee on Public Information, "The Second Liberty Loan of 1917: Bulletin and Sample Speeches," 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.

<sup>45</sup> Creel, 89.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 270.

<sup>47</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski Report, "General Matters," OG 209513; U.S., Committee on Public Information, *The Four Minute Men of Chicago* (Pamphlet), 15.

enforcement agencies which were prepared to force compliance with the Committee's wishes. For example, the CPI repeatedly wrote ministers across the country requesting them to preach in favor of Liberty Loan purchases or food and fuel conservation. All ministers who refused to reply and report, the letters claimed, would be "noted."<sup>48</sup> In one case, a Lutheran minister named George Meyer did reply to the CPI, but declined the request to preach "the doctrine of food conservation from the pulpit."<sup>49</sup> Meyer listed church and state scruples and claimed that all his time and strength were "occupied in supplying my people with spiritual food." The CPI created a carbon copy of the letter and sent it to A. Bruce Bielaski, chief of the Bureau of Investigation. Bielaski reassured the sender that "this matter will receive proper attention."<sup>50</sup> In another case, Creel forced his will on an upcoming movie, *The Spirit of '76*. This Revolutionary War film included the Wyoming Massacre, where British soldiers killed women and children and carried off young girls. Any Revolutionary War film unsettled authorities, since this might disturb Allied solidarity in the war. Making the situation worse, the producer, Robert Goldstein, purposely omitted the Wyoming scene when showing the movie to the CPI censorship board. Once this offense was discovered, authorities seized the reels under Title XI of the Espionage Act, the film company went into bankruptcy, and Goldstein was sentenced to ten years in a federal penitentiary.<sup>51</sup>

Creel, nonetheless, stood by his record during the war. "Our European comrades," claimed Creel, "viewed the [CPI] experiment with amazement...for in every other belligerent country censorship laws established iron rules, rigid suppressions, and drastic prohibitions

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<sup>48</sup> John E. Ferris Report, "Paul F. Mayott: Investigation for the Committee on Public Information," 27 Feb 1918, OG 126654.

<sup>49</sup> Rev. George Meyer to George Creel, 19 July 1917, OG 43413. This brush with the CPI and the investigation were only the beginning of Meyer's troubles. His school was dynamited later in the war.

<sup>50</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to N.I. Antrim, 2 November 1917, OG 43413.

<sup>51</sup> E. W. Finch Report, "Committee on Public Information—Division of Films, 24 Jan 1919," OG 344061; Mock, 42, 148.

carrying severe penalties."<sup>52</sup> While "rigid suppressions" were not the norm, the historian David Kennedy could only see Orwellian Themes in the American World War I experience, with an "overbearing concern for correct opinion, expression, for language itself, and the creation of an enormous propaganda apparatus to nurture the desired state of mind to excoriate all dissenters."<sup>53</sup> The CPI may have accomplished this while bearing a benign face, but the implication of force lurking behind it could be tacitly assumed.

### **Other Organizations**

At the urging of President Wilson, various local and state organizations arose alongside the federal bureaucracy. Minnesota and Wisconsin were the first states to heed the call. The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety and the Wisconsin Council of Defense were instituted within the first week of the war. The goals of these organizations closely matched that of the Committee on Public Information, and in many ways they served as its handmaiden. The German Lutheran experience varied widely based on the assertiveness of their state organization. While the state organizations differed little in their propaganda and conservation efforts, their repression of "harmful" behavior varied considerably by state.

Minnesota Germans drew the short straw since their state was home to the most active organization. Some members of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety (CPS) could make agents of the American Protective League seem like devoted constitutionalists. Judge John McGee, a dominant personality within the CPS, illustrates the organization well. He charged that the policy of the Justice Department had been a "ghastly failure from the beginning." What the government should have done, claimed McGee, was to organize firing squads across the nation immediately after the war was declared. "I know of no objection or reason why there should be any further delay in organizing the squad, or why they should not, when organized, work

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<sup>52</sup> Creel, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Kennedy, 62.

overtime in order to make up for lost time," asserted McGee.<sup>54</sup> The CPS, on the grounds of a wartime emergency, gave itself explicit powers to do almost anything. Among these powers included seizure of property, mass discarding of textbooks, requirement of anyone to appear before its agents, the issue of subpoenas by district courts, and the examination of the conduct of public officials.<sup>55</sup> The CPS remained exceptionally busy throughout the war; it processed an average of 18 sacks of mail weekly and investigated 682 cases concerning sedition.<sup>56</sup> Many of these letters came from citizens reporting disloyal neighbors or social enemies.

The Wisconsin State Council of Defense, although policing a state with similar demographics as Minnesota, was lenient by comparison. In fact, Governor Emanuel Philipp's unusual restraint earned him frequent criticism. His enemies suggested that his ties to German American interests were "rather too intimate for the times."<sup>57</sup> Council leaders prided themselves in their ability to reason the disloyalty out of dissenters. Magnus Swenson, the chairman of the Council, shared his strategy for dealing with dissent: "First, stop their talking, then get after them with personal persuasion if possible."<sup>58</sup> Swenson then gave a story of his dealings with a Lutheran minister to display his comprehension of his fellow citizens. Upon a receipt of a report of disloyalty, the Council of Defense asked the "erring cleric" to come to the state capital and "have a talk with Mr. Swenson." The Lutheran minister arrived in a state of unmitigated alarm, admitting that he had shared his opinion that the United States should not have declared war on Germany. "Why?" Mr. Swenson asked, and he summarized the reply: "Out of a tremulous jumble of LaFolleteism, pacifism, and ignorance, the real reason presently

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<sup>54</sup> Jensen, 120.

<sup>55</sup> La Vern J. Rippley, "Conflict in the Classroom: Anti-Germanism in Minnesota Schools, 1917-1918," *Minnesota History* 54 (1981), 171-173.

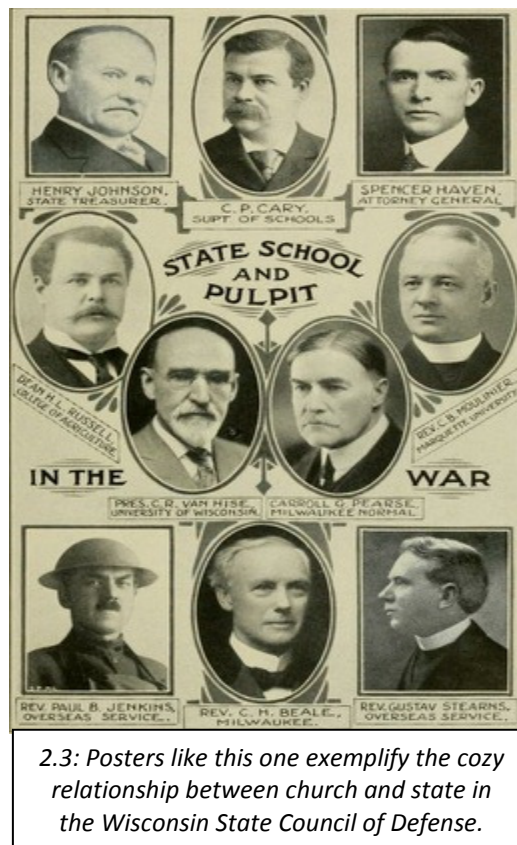
<sup>56</sup> Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, *Report of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety* (St. Paul: L.F. Dow Co., 1919), 29.

<sup>57</sup> Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (Dekalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 296;

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Hopkins Adams, "Invaded America: Winning the Battle in the Middle West," *Everybody's Magazine* (February 1918), 32.

emerged. The man honestly believed that the United States sought, in this war, to expunge Germany and German civilization from the world, by joining other nations in a plan of overwhelming conquest." Swenson "kindly" replied, "Sit down and let's talk it over." He then presented America's cause for war in "simple terms," to the listener's "growing astonishment...It was all new to him, as new as if he had been a resident of central Prussia." After his sit-down with Swenson, the Lutheran minister draped an American flag over his pulpit and "preached a sermon, alien in language, but otherwise one hundred per cent patriotism." Swenson likely rounded the edges of his story, and the pastor likely changed his behavior more out of fear than from his influence, but his account highlights the stark contrast between Minnesota and Wisconsin in dealing with disloyalty.<sup>59</sup>

Like the national organizations, the state councils and commissions possessed moral and religious characteristics consistent with evangelical piety. Both Wisconsin and Minnesota used their wartime powers to create and enforce anti-saloon legislation. Wisconsin shortened their operating hours and discontinued the practice of free lunches in saloons. Minnesota skipped these formalities and simply closed saloons, forty-two of them in the Minneapolis area alone. The CPS claimed this maneuver protected the soldiers and increased the efficiency of workers. In one of its twenty-one



2.3: Posters like this one exemplify the cozy relationship between church and state in the Wisconsin State Council of Defense.

<sup>59</sup> Samuel Hopkins Adams, "Invaded America: Winning the Battle in the Middle West," *Everybody's Magazine* (February 1918), 31-35. The article never gives the name or location of the preacher, and no record has been found of the conversation, so the identity of the pastor is unknown.

official orders dealing with saloons, the CPS declared bartending to be unpatriotic "in lieu of the serious shortage of farm workers."<sup>60</sup> This moral philosophy naturally drew protestant evangelical ministers to the cause. Twenty-four ministers served on county boards for the Minnesota CPS, while forty-six served on the Wisconsin Council of Defense. None were from the Wisconsin Synod or its sister synod, Missouri.<sup>61</sup> These organizations also encouraged activities to which these synods felt aversion. The CPS requested "all ministers in [Freeborn] County to speak patriotic sermons and to unite in one big loyalty meeting in the city of Albert Lea."<sup>62</sup> This service was attended by over 1,500 worshippers, but the Wisconsin Synod nervously abstained. During a Liberty Loan drive, the CPS sent letters to each of the county directors urging them to use local talent, specifically "preachers...who are used to persuade and convince their neighbors."<sup>63</sup> Baptist minister R. Bedford of Luverne, Minnesota, for example, answered this call and delivered loyalty speeches until "he was no longer asked to do so, presumably because he was too forceful to suit those in the county who had charge of such activities."<sup>64</sup> Other ministers took up the pen, such as Methodist minister S.R. Maxwell, who wrote an editorial for the CPS which "exposed the Non-Partisan League." Ecumenical war efforts pleased the CPS the most, one headline of the *Official Bulletin* read, "Priests and Protestant ministers travel together for the Liberty Loan cause."<sup>65</sup> During a cold Wisconsin winter, an army colonel posted an notice in the local newspaper at West Salem, Wisconsin, and claimed Christ Lutheran and the two other churches in town "must [worship] together to save coal."<sup>66</sup> Wisconsin Synod Lutherans,

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<sup>60</sup> Commission Report, 84-85.

<sup>61</sup> Minister statistics compiled from the official histories and records of the Wisconsin Council of Defense and the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, which listed board members from every county in their respective states.

<sup>62</sup> Freeborn County General Liberty Loan Program, April 1918, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.

<sup>63</sup> Minnesota Public Safety Commission to County Directors for Liberty Loans, 8 Oct 1917, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records; W. O'Brien to Public Safety Commission, 10 Oct 1917, 103.L.8.4.

<sup>64</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 16 June 1918, OG 188937.

<sup>65</sup> *Rochester [MN] Post Record*, 6 August 1918.

<sup>66</sup> H.R. Zimmerman to Otto Engel, 1 March 1918, OG 5025.

conscience bound-not to confuse church and state convictions, not to mention distressed over a war against their relatives, could only have their duress increased from this outside religious pressure to conform.

Private patriotic organizations also preached and enforced the gospel of loyalty. The most prominent of these was the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion. A contributing factor to the Legion's strength was disappointment at the "inaction" of the Wisconsin Council of Defense. Thus the Legion attracted members with extremely bold objectives. Even director George Creel of the CPI admitted that their "patriotism was a thing of screams, violence, and extremes; they outjingoed the worst of jingoes, and their constant practice of extreme statement left a trail of anger, irritation, and resentment."<sup>67</sup> Wisconsin Synod minister Otto Engel also used choice words to describe the Legion to his friend: "Those people are traitors to the Constitution; they are traitors to the United States."<sup>68</sup> Legion members visited "hotbeds" of disloyalty attempting to intimidate them to change their behavior. During elections, members would often attend to polling places to discourage "Un-American," that is, Socialist, voting.<sup>69</sup> The Wisconsin Loyalty Legion came dangerously close to mob rule. Other vigilante activity across the nation, however, lost all sense of the rule of law.

### **The Mob Rules**

As if organizations like the American Protective League, the Commission for Public Safety, and the Loyalty Legion were not enough, frustrated American citizens took it upon themselves to punish disloyalty. In one case, it turned deadly. A rowdy mob lynched a German American named Robert Prager on 5 April 1918 after dynamite went missing from a coal mine he worked at. It was unlikely that Prager was the thief; one year earlier, he volunteered to be in

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<sup>67</sup> Creel, 180.

<sup>68</sup> Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 3 Dec 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>69</sup> Lorin Lee Cary, "Wisconsin Patriots Combat Disloyalty: the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion and Politics, 1917-1918," (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1965), 49.

the United States army, but being blind in one eye his service was declined.<sup>70</sup> Prager's story is merely the most famous of countless mob infractions against German Americans. A rope was cast around the neck of a Wisconsin German American, John Deml, before the mob shrank from the "ultimate solution" and settled for beating and bloodying its victim.<sup>71</sup> Tar-and-feather "parties" were commonplace across the nation. In Ashland, Wisconsin, two tar-and-feather incidents occurred within a two week period. In one of those incidents, a professor from Northland College in Ashland was dragged from his home, beaten, given a "generous" coat of tar and feathers, and left by the side of the road a mile from town.<sup>72</sup> In Milwaukee, a mob mounted a machine gun outside Pabst Theater to prevent the staging of the German-language production, *Wilhelm Tell*.<sup>73</sup>

Other types of public humiliation were also used. Yellow paint on churches, monuments, and homes became the most common public mark of disloyalty. A "bond slacker" in Evansville, Wisconsin was taken from her home, placed in a lion cage salvaged from a junk dealer, and hauled around the city square.<sup>74</sup> This mob action actually inspired the APL to police more fervently. The APL's official publication, *Spy Glass*, claimed the organization could "forestall mob action by wiping out the conditions under which loyal and peaceful citizens sometimes resort to lynch law." Mob violence, therefore, was not the fault of the mob, but rather the disloyalty which provoked it.<sup>75</sup>

Like government organizations, mobs specifically targeted Lutherans. In Illinois, a mob beat a Lutheran pastor and his wife because the minister preached in German.<sup>76</sup> In Peshtigo,

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<sup>70</sup> For a detailed account of the Prager lynching, see Luebke, 3-24.

<sup>71</sup> Luebke 249, 274.

<sup>72</sup> *Ashland Daily Press*, 1 April 1918.

<sup>73</sup> Ludwig Kreiss to Robert Lansing, 6 April 1917; State Department Records, 763.72111.4763.

<sup>74</sup> Falk, 403.

<sup>75</sup> *Spy Glass*, 10 Aug 1918.

<sup>76</sup> Bielaski Report, "Lawlessness," 20 October 1918, OG 290513.

Wisconsin, members from a German Lutheran church even joined a mob that forced one of their fellow Lutherans to purchase Liberty Bonds and to kiss the American flag.<sup>77</sup> Actions against Lutheran parochial schools were also common. In the worst case, two Lutheran schools—one in Herington, Kansas and the other in Lincoln, Missouri—were burned to the ground.<sup>78</sup> Another Lutheran school in Schumm, Ohio, was dynamited.<sup>79</sup> In Walla Walla, Washington, a German Lutheran school was boarded up. School was delayed while the obstructions were removed. The next night, the school was again boarded up by unauthorized persons. Pastor P. Schmidt made an appeal to Sheriff Duffy of Benton County, who informed him that he had no authority to act. Schmidt then made his plea to Mayor Shirk, who "did his duty as his name would indicate," an APL agent happily reported.<sup>80</sup> For some, going to school constituted an act of bravery. As WELS teacher George Pullman was instructing students, a bullet was fired through the window of the classroom. Fortunately, no one was injured.<sup>81</sup>

In early 1918, a yellow coat of paint was splattered on Wisconsin Synod minister A.C. Baumann's home in Prescott, Wisconsin. Yellow paint on one's home usually caused embarrassment and hurried labor to remove it. Baumann, however, left the new paint job untouched for quite some time and "stated that he is proud of it," according to the testimony of Rev. Iny, a local minister and member of the Wisconsin Council of Defense.<sup>82</sup> In spite of this vandalism, Baumann refused to change his habits. He still "prefers to talk the German language on the street and in the pulpit, rather than the English language. He never attends any of the

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<sup>77</sup> Luebke 282. The Peshtigo incident *likely* involved WELS Lutherans from Zion or St. John, these being the most prominent Lutheran churches in Peshtigo.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 281.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 281. The dynamited school belonged to Rev. George Meyer's congregation, mentioned earlier for penning a letter to the CPI.

<sup>80</sup> E.L. Wells Report, 5 April 1918, OG 178895.

<sup>81</sup> Esther Pullman Weidner, "Remembering George & Hilda Pullman," Balge Family Records.

<sup>82</sup> C.I. Rukes Report, 11 Sep 1918, OG 188937.

Loyalty meetings...associates with pro-Germans, and takes no interest in war work."<sup>83</sup> Baumann personified the character of many Wisconsin Synod Lutherans after the declaration of war, who, despite this machinery of repression, or in ignorance of it, displayed a combative nature toward the war policies with which they disagreed.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

## Chapter 3: Combativeness

After Congress declared war on 6 April 1917, German Lutherans hardly made a smooth transition from partisans for peace to flag waving patriots. Especially in the first months after declaration, Lutherans openly shared their objections to the conflict and ensuing government policies. Many felt no scruple with expressing their distaste because they had no idea what was required of them in a "total war." Many nineteenth century wars, such as the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, and the Spanish-American War, witnessed open dissent and non-compliance with impunity; it would have taken great foresight to predict otherwise for the upcoming war.<sup>1</sup>

Another significant factor in Wisconsin Synod combativeness on the home front was their prominence in rural communities where ethnic Germans, and often Lutherans, maintained a majority of the population. This created an environment of positive reinforcement for activities and remarks against the war. Moreover, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans became exceedingly antagonized by government efforts to officially involve the church. Not only would this have broken Lutherans' strictly guarded church and state barrier, but it would have raised doctrinal scruples by requiring Lutheran religious conformity with their traditional political and religious counterparts. As countless religious denominations became intimate with the state and with each other during the war, many members of the synod feared the war would be a catalyst to the founding of a state church. This was a development the German Lutherans witnessed first-hand in their former country a century earlier. Throughout the process, it appeared Lutheran religious culture was under jeopardy, and this sentiment caused the strongest wartime protests from the synod.

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<sup>1</sup> The Civil War is the obvious exception. Draft riots and their suppressions killed hundreds in New York and other areas of high foreign populations. Anti-draft demonstrations and social strife in the Midwest, especially among certain Wisconsin immigrants, has mostly been a neglected topic to-date.

## Reactions to the Declaration

The *Gemeindeblatt* displayed mixed emotions after the declaration. It posted a "Prayer for the War Time," and prayed that God "give us such hearts, that we honor in this evil time our government and willingly obey them and pray for them."<sup>2</sup> Later in the same issue, the publication claimed "the war party has implemented their will," and then questioned the decision making of Congress and the president:

What is war, everyone should know, because war is raging for three years in Europe, Asia and Africa, and we have all read it and were so shaken by the horrors and the bloodshed....One would have thought that our people would have considered it a thousand times before they would be plants in this sea. But the voices of the faithful admonisher are unheard.<sup>3</sup>

The *Gemeindeblatt* did not change its beliefs about the cause of the war, either, as it pointed to the countless weapons of war sent to the Allies under the guise of neutrality. It claimed the love of money determined the actions of the neutrality period, not the love for democracy. After making these arguments, it vouched for the loyalty of German Lutherans: "They will not trust us, and they put our loyalty into question, and will accuse us from all sides of being enemies; this is not true." This article reveals a common trend in the thought of WELS Lutherans during the war. That they could object to wartime measures but still attest to their loyalty to the United States seemed to them a natural and logical argument.

A month later, an article in the *Gemeindeblatt* gave a detailed account of the role speculators played in the outbreak of war, especially during the drought of 1916. "Speculators and gamblers in the stocks bid wheat and corn to further heights...and they resent the U-boats, that they might interfere with navigation and the stocks in which the port cities can accumulate."<sup>4</sup> These people did not consider the country first, argued the *Gemeindeblatt*. Instead, "We think America first, the American people first when it comes to the food: wheat,

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<sup>2</sup> "Gebet zur kriegszeit," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:9 (1 May 1917), 129.

<sup>3</sup> "Krieg," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:9 (1 May 1917), 135.

<sup>4</sup> "Die Pflichten der Regierung," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:11 (1 June 1917), 165-166.

bread...and other necessities for the maintenance of clothing and shoes." Those necessities instead were shipped to Europe for European promises to pay which would likely go unfulfilled. Just as citizens have an obligation to the government, it claimed, the government also had an obligation to its citizens to cease these speculative activities, and it failed in that obligation. Once again, the *Gemeindeblatt* did not see itself as unpatriotic in stating this position, but rather called it "thoroughly justified Christian criticism."

WELS Lutherans did not confine their disposition to church publications. According to seminary professor J.P. Koehler, his colleagues, August Pieper and John Schaller, attended mass meetings and anti-war protests.<sup>5</sup> A lack of a Justice Department file suggests that they did not continue their activities beyond their early dismay of the declaration. Koehler himself chose to write both Woodrow Wilson and Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette. This was likely a split audience: Wilson was highly unpopular among German Lutherans, while La Follette was considered a hero for his stand against war profiteering. In these letters, Koehler recalled that he remonstrated "with the president and former historian by calling attention to the history of the Prussian monarchy in contrast to the history of all democracies."<sup>6</sup> Koehler certainly made good points about the fragile and divisive nature of a democracy, and the WELS was about to bear witness to what happens when a majority gets drunk with power, but letters like this one could only fuel criticism and support the rumors of a Lutheran love for German autocracy.

Unlike his colleague Robert La Follette, Wisconsin Senator Paul Husting did not attempt to court the German Lutheran vote. To WELS Lutherans, he symbolized the new intolerance of the Democratic Party. During the neutrality period, Husting spiritedly defended Wilson's

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Braun, "Being good Americans and better Lutherans: Synodical Conference Lutherans and the Military Chaplaincy, *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 19 (2001), 25;

<sup>6</sup> John Philipp Koehler, Reminiscences, under the title, "Beginnings of the opposition in the Wisconsin Synod underlying the Controversies in the Years from 1924 to 1930." Unpublished manuscript, Koehler file, CHI, recorded 1930, 43.

policies, voted for war, and branded those who advocated peace as disloyal. Thereby on his return home to Mayville, Wisconsin from Washington, he was given a large "welcome back" festival by two or three thousand "visitors." These visitors came from the counties surrounding Mayville, the most prominent German Lutheran counties in Wisconsin. The demonstration began with a marching parade of the visitors which stopped



3.1: Wisconsin Senator Husting

about 100 feet from the Senator's house, and there they "rendered a concert the like of which was never heard in Mayville before."<sup>7</sup> According to a Justice Department informant, "it was done to show Mr. Husting that his acts of Americanism in Washington were not approved." This activity brought a score of government officials to assess the situation. "We are in a hot bed of sedition here and I believe it is time that the Government does something to relieve the situation," read the report.<sup>8</sup> It suggested that the government appoint someone fluent in German to visit the towns of Mayville, Theresa, and Hustisford. Like many other anti-war demonstrations, swift government action put an end to nearly all public sentiment against the war in the Mayville area.<sup>9</sup>

### **Notorious New Ulm**

While reporting the actions and loyalty of Lutherans to the Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, Captain George Lester on the whole painted an unflattering picture of Lutherans on the home front. He did, however, give them one compliment in his testimony:

But I must state this in fairness to the Lutheran clergymen, even those who were pro-German, that when the question of conscription came, there was no evidence, except in isolated cases, of

<sup>7</sup> G. Clabaugh to Ralph Izard, 24 December 1917, OG 16703.

<sup>8</sup> A.A. Viall Report, "General Disloyalty Conditions," 16 February 1918, OG 16703.

<sup>9</sup> G. Clabaugh to J.H. Means, 18 May 1918, OG 16703;

any attempt upon the part of the Lutheran church to persuade the young men to evade military service. In other religious bodies there was a strong effort to defeat conscription, but when the conscription law was passed and the first draft there was no attempt to defeat its operation, except in one or two very isolated cases.<sup>10</sup>

As Captain Lester referred to the "one or two" isolated cases, he likely had in mind the notorious New Ulm, Minnesota "draft meeting" which took place on 25 July 1917. The demonstrations and petitions against conscription in New Ulm constituted the largest movement of its kind that took place in the United States during the war. It resulted in one of the strongest power demonstrations by the Minnesota Commission on Public Safety, as it forced the removal of the New Ulm mayor, the city attorney, and the president of the Wisconsin Synod's Doctor Martin Luther College.<sup>11</sup>

To better understand the causes of the forceful demonstration against the New Ulm citizens, it is important to comprehend the anxious attitude of public officials in relation to conscription. After the declaration of war, conscription was by no means a foregone conclusion. In many ways, conscripting Americans against their will to cross an ocean to fight an enemy was a revolutionary concept. America's previous experience with conscription, the Civil War, encountered violence and rejection on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, and this happened while under the continuous prospect of invasion. How much more violence and rejection, public officials worried, would be encountered if that danger was not directly perceived by the public?

Many members of Congress failed to recognize this immediate need for conscription.

During the debate over the first Conscription Act, one Senator made this clear:

I have thought that in a Republic like ours, where the public sentiment was supposed to control, a cause for war must be so plain and so just and so necessary that the people would rise as one man and volunteer their lives to support the cause. Do you find any such proposition suggested in the United States Senate or in this Congress today? No! We must, in order to raise and arm

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<sup>10</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, *Hearings on Brewing and Liquor Interests and German and Bolshevik Propaganda*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919, p. 1791.

<sup>11</sup> This section will mostly focus on the activities and suppression of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans in the New Ulm incident. A overview concerning Mayor Fritsche and Attorney Albert Pfaender can be found in Daniel J. Hoisington's *A German Town: A History of New Ulm, Minnesota* (2004).

troops, adopt this same militarism that we have denounced and decried. In order to raise an army we must make compulsory universal military service.<sup>12</sup>

House Speaker Champ Clark of Missouri also preached that "in the estimation of Missourians there is precious little difference between a conscript and a convict."<sup>13</sup> Despite these rejoinders, the Selective Service Act passed both the House and Senate. After its passage, those opposed to the law felt public opinion might convince lawmakers to alter its provisions or even revoke the draft. Nervous public officials, however, considered the debate over and done, and any continuation of it to be dangerous. Senator Newton Baker predicted to his peers that the streets would run red on the first registration day. Provost Marshall Crowder admitted, "There were many who feared the total failure of the selective service law."<sup>14</sup> Because of this, the success of the draft became the most sensitive topic to wartime officials, and any movement to defeat it would be dealt with swiftly and harshly.

The German American enclave of New Ulm was strongly opposed to the draft, for self-evident reasons. An APL agent visiting New Ulm before the incident reported that everyone he met "in the vicinity of New Ulm was opposed to conscription."<sup>15</sup> How an organized movement against the draft originated, however, became elusive. Part of the reason is that after the swift government retribution, no one wished to be branded as the agitator. The individual who likely played the most prominent role in the draft meeting's formation was Frank Retzlaff, a hardware store owner and prominent WELS lay-member. Retzlaff claimed that a number of drafted men came to his store, and they wanted to know what their legal duties were in regard to the draft. The boys told Retzlaff that they planned a meeting at the Turner Hall that night, Monday, July

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<sup>12</sup> David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Rutherford Pixley, *Wisconsin in the World War: An Account of the Activities of the Wisconsin Citizens in the Great War* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin War History Company, 1919), 188.

<sup>15</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, "Conditions At New Ulm, Minn," 15 September 1917, OG 17438.

23, and they requested that he attend the meeting. Around fifty drafted men, Retzlaff, the New Ulm mayor and city attorney appeared for the original meeting. At this meeting, it was decided to have a mass public meeting two days later.<sup>16</sup>

Retzlaff went to work organizing this meeting. He later justified his decision: "The boys of this city have come to me for guidance and advice in this time of trouble, and I would not be doing my duty, if I did not stand by the boys."<sup>17</sup> He arranged a band to play in a parade, set up a speaking platform at Turner Park, and lined up speakers to address the crowd.<sup>18</sup> The meeting also received a boost from the People's Council, a pacifist association which hoped to organize opposition to the war through publications and mass meetings. The disgruntled German American population in New Ulm provided a perfect opportunity to execute an exemplar mass meeting which they hoped would have a ripple effect across the country.<sup>19</sup>

The main purpose of the upcoming meeting, Retzlaff later testified, "was to persuade the boys to submit and obey the law until it could be repealed."<sup>20</sup> Retzlaff argued that if the meeting had not been held, many boys would have refused to go to the training camps. Aside from this, however, participants testified that it was generally understood the meeting would petition the government to reconsider the constitutionality of the draft law and to send only volunteers to Europe. Whatever the original intentions, posters and flyers began circulating promoting a "draft protest meeting."<sup>21</sup> Word spread to neighboring areas about the upcoming event. After a midweek funeral service, Rev. William Albrecht of St. Johannes Lutheran in Sleepy Eye was reported to have told "all the men present of draft age to be sure and go to the anti-

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<sup>16</sup> John F. McGovern Report, 23 July 1917, OG 17438.

<sup>17</sup> *New Ulm Review* 1 Aug 1917.

<sup>18</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to R.H. Van Deman, 1 September 1917, OG 1917.

<sup>19</sup> La Vern J. Rippley, "Conflict in the Classroom: Anti-Germanism in Minnesota Schools, 1917-1918," *Minnesota History* 54 (1981), 173.

<sup>20</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, 30 August 1918, OG 17438.

<sup>21</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, 15 September 1917, OG 17438.

draft meeting in New Ulm."<sup>22</sup> Newspapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul published articles concerning the upcoming event, and rumors circulated that the National Guard would put a stop to it. The meeting was famous before it began.<sup>23</sup>

The procession started on a Wednesday evening with a parade of around 3,500 participants, which marched through the streets of New Ulm and made its way over to Turner Park. The crowd in the park was estimated between 7,000 and 10,000.<sup>24</sup> New Ulm's population at that time was a little over 3,000, so these figures show the significance of this event throughout the whole Minnesota River Valley. Once in the park, a series of speeches were made by prominent figures of the city. Retzlaff was the first speaker. He had been warned not to speak at the meeting because there were government secret service men present. Instead, Retzlaff invited all secret service men to sit on the platform, declaring he had nothing to say which he was not willing for them to hear, and that he would stand up for the drafted boys until there was not a drop of blood left in his veins. He later said, "If all the money in the state of Minnesota were piled on this table and offered to me that I would be willing for my boy to go across the ocean and fight in the trenches I would throw it in the face of the man who dared tempt me. I love my country from the bottom of my heart, but I am going to stand by the boys." Retzlaff then explained to the crowd that a number of petitions had been prepared, and he encouraged those present to sign. The petition read,

Avowing loyalty to this country and pledging in its defense the highest sacrifices to the extent of life itself if need be, and with full realization of the difficulties that beset a government in times of war, we respectfully petition the President and Congress of this nation not to transport or force across the ocean to the battlefields of Europe any men outside of the regular army, contrary to their desires, but that such matter be left to voluntary enlistment.<sup>25</sup>

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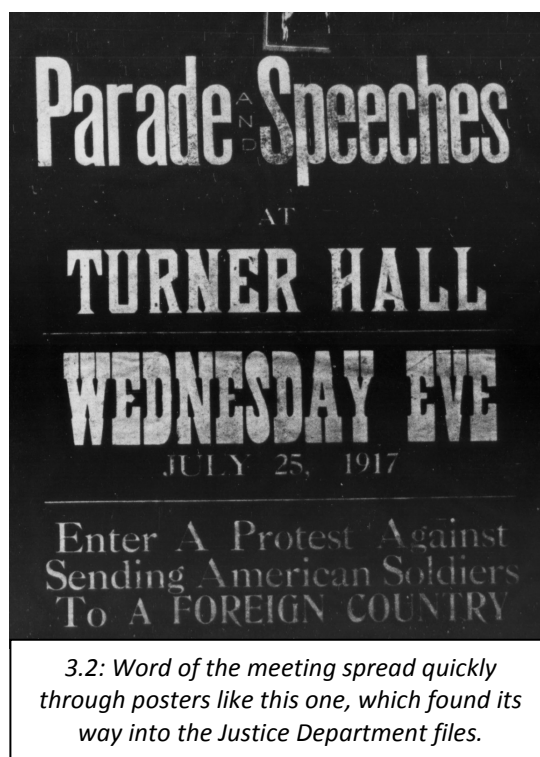
<sup>22</sup> Agent to T.G. Winter, 24 Sep 1917, Brown County Historical Society Records.

<sup>23</sup> *New Ulm Review* 29 Sep 1917; *Brown County Journal* 28 July 1917. The agent in charge, John McGovern, received criticism for allowing the meeting to take place. Detractors claimed that he had enough evidence to understand the nature of the meeting. This caused McGovern to be especially aggressive in the aftermath.

<sup>24</sup> John F. McGovern Report, "Protest Meeting at New Ulm, Minn," 25 July 1917, OG 17438.

<sup>25</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 1 Aug 1917.

After speeches by other prominent figures of the city, two professors at Dr. Martin Luther College, M.J. Wagner and Adolph Ackermann, were the last to speak. Wagner, a drafted man himself, agreed to Retzlaff's request for him to participate on the condition that he could speak on the topic of democracy. "This great assemblage proves that we are democratic," said Wagner to the crowd.<sup>26</sup> "The Constitution of the United States gives us the right to assemble and address a petition of redress to our government." He then declared the draft law to be undemocratic "because it forces people to fight against their desires...If we fight this war in an autocratic manner for democratic ideals, we are not consistent." Wagner called on the government to clearly define its war aims, which was a common plea at the time and a delicate way of suggesting that the real aims of the war were to enrich speculators and arms dealers.



Ackermann, the president of DMLC, arrived after a very busy day and claimed he had not found time to prepare a speech. He said every citizen has a right to express his opinion. The reason he gave for his appearance was to testify to the "loyalty, patriotism and peacefulness" of the citizenship of New Ulm, and he would consider himself a coward if he did not testify for them in times like these.<sup>27</sup> Ackermann supported sending petitions to Congress and the president because their congressman, Franklin Ellsworth, did not work for the interests of his

<sup>26</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 1 Aug 1917.

<sup>27</sup> Carl H. Chrislock, *Watchdog of Loyalty: The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety During World War I* (St. Paul: The Minnesota Historical Society Press), 135. Ackermann believed that there was "a great movement afoot to deprive the people and the press" of the freedom of speech.

voters. "More than 80 per cent of the voters are of a different opinion about his duty than he is."<sup>28</sup> When loud applause followed this remark Ackermann replied, "I do not give a snap about your applause if you do not go to the polls and see to it, that this representative is not reelected." Like Wagner, Ackermann displayed a typical Lutheran pessimism toward a war to uplift humanity. "If they tell us it is a war for humanity they better create humanity in our own country first." For examples, he mentioned the recent killings of blacks in East St. Louis and the deplorable conditions which working men and women had to work. "There is plenty to do in our own country without sticking our noses into other people's business, without fighting battles for Wall Street or John Bull." The crowd indulged throughout in much handclapping, stamping of feet, and shouting.<sup>29</sup> Ackermann's speech closed the official events of the meeting, now more properly termed a rally.

Those opposed to the draft considered the rally a complete success. Towns in the surrounding area must have felt that way as well. According to the *New Ulm Review*, Frank Retzlaff was "besieged with letters and telegrams asking for information, speakers, etc."<sup>30</sup> Other speakers and organizers from the New Ulm rally were "also receiving letters and telegrams by the score." Copies of the petition were requested from "all parts of the state, and from several points in South Dakota and Wisconsin." The New Ulm city attorney was reported to say that New Ulm was only a start and that meetings of that kind would be held all over the state and nation until the draft act was repealed.<sup>31</sup> The speakers at the New Ulm rally made arrangements to speak at similar events in the surrounding communities, hoping the fire would spread. This time, however, government officials and patriotic citizens were determined to stay one step ahead of the curve. Proposed meetings at Wabasso, Mankato, and Arlington were suppressed

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<sup>28</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 1 Aug 1917.

<sup>29</sup> John F. McGovern Report, "Protest Meeting at New Ulm, Minn," 25 July 1917, OG 17438.

<sup>30</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 1 Aug 1917.

<sup>31</sup> *New Ulm Review* 29 Sep 1917.

by strong arm tactics and threats. Despite the danger involved, meetings still materialized and speeches were given at many locations, some as close as Nicollet and Glencoe, others as far away as Iowa and South Dakota.<sup>32</sup>

Twenty miles north of New Ulm, a large anti-draft meeting was in the works at Gibbon, Minnesota. Government investigators caught wind of this meeting and hastily descended upon Gibbon, arriving the morning of August 3rd, the day the meeting was supposed to take place. Both the CPS and APL brought representatives to the scene. W.F. Nelson and John Boock of the CPS summoned the village council to a special session and requested them to forbid any "unlawful" meeting within the city limits. The council obliged and called Retzlaff—one of the speakers that evening—and notified him of this development. Retzlaff replied that "the speakers would come anyway, that nobody could stop them from coming."<sup>33</sup> The mayor of Gibbon, having left town, was called on the phone and requested to return, which he did, whereby he ordered all the saloons in town to close at 8 p.m. The saloonkeepers, knowing the meeting would be a boon to business, defied the mayor and kept their businesses open.<sup>34</sup> All this time, crowds were gathering in Gibbon. The tension of the situation grew by the hour.

In the early evening, the speakers arrived from New Ulm. The three included Retzlaff, Ackermann, and Albert Pfaender, the city attorney. They "were insistent upon speaking and questioned the right or authority of the State Safety Commission to forbid the meeting."<sup>35</sup> The speakers asked Boock and Nelson to state their reasons for forbidding the meeting, and a heated argument followed. Nelson warned the speakers that meetings of this kind threw "monkey wrenches into the wheels of governmental machinery." After this quarrel, the two parties split up. The government officials called Governor Lind for further instructions, while the

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<sup>32</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, 6 September 1917, OG 17438.

<sup>33</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.

<sup>34</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 29 Sep 1917.

<sup>35</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.

speakers and the visitors made for a grove about a mile outside the city limits to hold their meeting.

After the phone call, Boock, Nelson, the county sheriff, a Pinkerton Detective, and APL agent Robert Davis piled into Boock's car to search for the meeting. They eventually found the grove but they missed most of Pfaender's speech. Ackermann's speech came next, which Davis described as "the most nauseating to a patriotic citizen although he made no specific statements warranting official action."<sup>36</sup> Retzlaff mostly read letters of commendation from the New Ulm meeting and pleaded for sustained momentum for the movement. All the speakers "were very careful to advise their hearers that they should observe the law and answer to the draft but to remember that high legal rights had expressed the opinion that the conscription act was unconstitutional; that they had a right of free speech and petition and could voice their desire in a legal manner." Davis judged the crowd to be in the neighborhood of 2,500 to 3,000 people. Had the meeting stayed in town, it would have been much larger. Davis estimated around 5,000 had gathered in Gibbon, but not all made the trip to the grove. He did, however, report the crowd to be orderly. The *New Ulm Review* also painted a rosy picture of the evening:

The meeting is said to have been an exceptionally orderly character and several hundred of those present signed the petition asking congress to make a change in the conscription law, compelling drafted men to go to France to fight. The petition was identical to the one signed at the New Ulm meetings and elsewhere...No reports were received of any disorders.<sup>37</sup>

Those gathered at Gibbon did not take the village council's decision well. B. Nagell, the sister-in-law of Boock, reported that someone told her, "if John Boock gets home tonight safe, he will be lucky."<sup>38</sup> Boock reported to the APL that within two days of the meeting depositors withdrew over \$46,000 from his bank. Davis concluded that much more manpower and reprisals were needed to quell the dissent in the Minnesota River Valley.

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<sup>36</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.

<sup>37</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 8 Aug 1917.

<sup>38</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.

The retribution from the Commission and the Justice Department halted the momentum of the movement and eventually put it in full flight. Patriotic sentiment also wished for vengeance upon the city for its disloyalty. "Is it any wonder," asked a Minnesota paper, "that there are those who regret the Sioux did not do a better job at New Ulm fifty-five years ago?"<sup>39</sup> The neighboring town of Sleepy Eye placed a banner over its main street which read, "Berlin, Ten Miles East."<sup>40</sup> Businesses from as far away as Washington state boycotted goods from New Ulm. Agents for the state and national government interviewed people of the city and found a few informants to help make arrests and convictions. The most prominent informants in the city were Rev. Christian Hohn and Dr. G.F. Reineke of the German Methodist Church.<sup>41</sup> After their findings, the mayor of New Ulm, L.A. Fritsche, and city attorney, Major Robert Pfaender, were deposed by the Commission by the end of the year. The government appeared to possess limitless powers to quell discontent in the Minnesota River Valley.

Among those investigated were WELS figures Retzlaff, Wagner, and Ackermann. Retzlaff received much initial attention for his role as instigator and because he "possibly exerts the greatest influence" within the movement.<sup>42</sup> In the Justice Department's report, Retzlaff's store was deemed "a hang-out for disloyalists," and that all his employees, except for one, "are absolutely wrong."<sup>43</sup> One agent who visited the store claimed Retzlaff was defiant and that "he did not give a dam [*sic*] for the Public Safety Commission." One informant gave testimony about an ongoing boycott of loyalist institutions, and said that Retzlaff went to an owner of a boycotted store and asked him if he wished to sell out. Authorities then tried to determine if

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<sup>39</sup> *Princeton Review*, August 1917, found in Chrislock, 137. This quote refers to the Dakota War of 1862, where New Ulm was besieged by the Sioux and nearly overtaken.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Hoisington, *A German Town: A History of New Ulm, Minnesota* (St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2004), 78.

<sup>41</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 21 August 1918, OG 17438.

<sup>42</sup> WGS to Commission on Public Safety, 24 Aug 1917, Brown County HSS Records.

<sup>43</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 21 August 1918, OG 17438.

Retzlaff was the instigator of the boycott. Retzlaff, like many in a similar position, later attempted to cover himself through acts of patriotism. He paid out of pocket to provide a band to escort his son and other New Ulm drafted boys to Mankato, where they were entertained until they boarded their train for Des Moines.<sup>44</sup> An agent also noticed a poster in his store advertising a patriotic meeting to be held at Springfield, Minnesota. To be expected, the Commission was not convinced.<sup>45</sup>

Most troubling to authorities was Retzlaff's continued work against the draft. When Retzlaff left New Ulm for a week, agents did some digging and found he was in Chicago attending a meeting of the People's Council, the cosponsor of the New Ulm meeting. Upon returning, Retzlaff endeavored to open chapters of the People's Council throughout the area.<sup>46</sup> After establishing chapters in Nicollet and Courtland, Retzlaff headed to Swan Lake to hold a "secret meeting," but this was broken up by the sheriff.<sup>47</sup> An informant working in Courtland claimed that many men in this locality "now take the side of Germany and seem anxious that Germany win the war," and he attributed this sentiment "to the work of Retzlaff as he has a great influence in that township."<sup>48</sup> Because of his leadership against the Selective Service Act, Retzlaff was a high profile target. However, because his occupation made him less of a public figure than the others, and since the Sedition Act of 1918 had not been passed prior to his actions, Retzlaff's reprimand was comparably light. After he toned down his work among the German population, he was harassed and questioned by officials, but they never took action.<sup>49</sup>

The same cannot be said for one of the two DMLC professors. While M.J. Wagner was briefly looked into by the Commission and the Justice Department, the Commission determined

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<sup>44</sup> H.C. Hess to C.W. Ames, 9 Oct 1918, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 103, CPS Records.

<sup>45</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 23 August 1918, OG 17438.

<sup>46</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 21 August 1918, OG 17438.

<sup>47</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, 30 August 1917, OG 17438;

<sup>48</sup> J.P. Arnoldy Report, 18 September 1918, OG 17438.

<sup>49</sup> J.P. Arnoldy Report, 4 September 1917, OG 17438; A.F. Kearney Report, 7 September 1917, OG 17438.

that he was persuaded by Retzlaff to participate in New Ulm. After he desisted in his activities, his case was dropped.<sup>50</sup> Ackermann did not initiate the New Ulm incident either, but his involvement in spreading the movement beyond New Ulm antagonized public officials. One informant testified to an APL agent that

Dr. A. Ackerman [*sic*], Prof in the Lutheran Theological College at this place, is one of the worst traitors to the United States in this section, and to his influence can be attributed to the fact that the Lutherans of this section are almost solidly disloyal; Ackerman for months had been making speeches thru Minnesota, Iowa and the Dakotas in which he condemns the position of the United States and upholds the position of Germany.<sup>51</sup>

Thus a crusade initiated against Ackermann to make him pay for his activities. T. G.

Winter stated to agent WGS that he desired to have Ackermann investigated with the expectation that enough evidence might be found to take action against him. Ackermann acquired a tail very frequently during the months following the protest activities. Agents WGS and #83 of the Minnesota Commission followed Ackermann on his trips to the Twin Cities. They made certain not to arouse suspicion from Ackermann and kept their distance to



3.3: Adolph Ackermann, DMLC President

remain discreet. The investigation could prove at times to be very mundane. Agent #83 reported Ackermann entering department stores, making purchases, traveling to an Indian Mound park, watching the short film "Battle of the Somme," and even attending a baseball game. So far, all they could report was an entertaining lifestyle.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Special Agent in Charge J.E. Campbell to A. Bruce Bielaski, 17 January 1918, OG 17438.

<sup>51</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, "Conditions at New Ulm, Minn.," 6 September 1917, OG 17438.

<sup>52</sup> WGS to Commission on Public Safety, 21 Aug 1917, Brown County HSS Records. Later in the investigation, agents were less careful about being discreet. Agent WGS "telephoned" Rev. A.C. Haase of Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Paul to inquire his trip itinerary. Haase may have intentionally given WGS a wrong location on the first day, as WGS "waited until 6 p.m. but failed to see Ackerman [*sic*]."

Prospects seemed much better for finding evidence when Ackermann travelled to Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Paul to conduct a special service commemorating the 400th anniversary of the Reformation and 25th anniversary of the Joint Synod. The event was attended by thousands and earned a write up from the *Northwestern Lutheran*.<sup>53</sup> What the *Northwestern* did not know was that all three services held throughout the day were attended by a government agent. The day proved unfruitful for an investigation, but agent WGS became thoroughly educated about the history and doctrine of the Lutheran Church. After the 10:00 service, he reported, "Nothing but religion was mentioned."<sup>54</sup> At the 3:00 p.m. service, "Ackerman [*sic*] confined all his speech to the history of the Lutheran Church and the Synod." After the last service in the evening, WGS briefly penned "nothing spoken that was not of a religious nature." Afterwards, Ackermann continued to go about his business. He travelled to Watertown, Wisconsin in November to give a presentation concerning Luther's philosophy of education at a teachers' conference. The *Gemeindeblatt* reported, "The talk was quite fascinating, as was to be expected."<sup>55</sup>

Despite these fruitless investigations and the changed behavior of Ackermann, the Commission decided to take action. After the CPS summoned Ackermann and interviewed him on his role in New Ulm and the surrounding area's unrest, Commissioner Lind on 20 November 1917 moved that Counsel Tighe "mail...testimony taken at [Ackermann's] hearing to the trustees of Martin Luther College at New Ulm and ask their approval or disapproval of the stand of Professor A. Ackerman [*sic*] as given by him therein."<sup>56</sup> The next day Tighe did as told and asked the DMLC board its "opinion as to the propriety of Dr. Ackerman's conduct...[and] as to whether

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<sup>53</sup> "Biennial Meeting of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod, August 15-21," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:17 (7 September 1917), 134.

<sup>54</sup> WGS to Public Safety Commission, 21 August 1917, Brown County HSS Records.

<sup>55</sup> "Staatskonferenz der Lehrer," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:24 (15 December 1917), 374.

<sup>56</sup> Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, *Report of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety* (St. Paul: L.F. Dow Co., 1919), 219.

his position represents the position of the college...and as to what, if any, action you may be proposing to take." With Ackermann branded as disloyal, the CPS did not leave the board many options, saying it would "not tolerate the continued operation" of any educational establishment where the "teachings and instructors...are not unquestionably loyal."<sup>57</sup>

The DMLC board tried to prolong the process and delay action on Ackermann as long as possible. Time was needed, said the board chairman, for every member to review the transcript during the busy holiday season. An anxious Tighe on 9 January 1918 admonished the board and asked it to "fix a limit beyond which you will not expect the Commission to withhold action."<sup>58</sup> The board chairman replied that another month was needed, and it would report "no later than February 20, 1918." This was unacceptable to Tighe, and he wrote back that he intended to report the condition of the Ackermann case to the CPS on February 5, and that if the board acted early enough he would include that in the report. His final warning made the situation rather clear: "The Commission prefers that the elimination of pro-German teachings and teachers from the state's religious and educational institutions should be made by those directly in control of such institutions, but it will not hesitate to act itself...where those in control fail to."<sup>59</sup>

With their hands tied, the board agreed to meet on January 29 and gave into the demands of Tighe the next day, as they wrote, "Complying with the request of the Committee and board Prof. Ackermann has tendered his resignation, same to take effect immediately."<sup>60</sup> When tendering his resignation, Ackermann declared, "*Recht muss Recht blieben!*" or, "What is

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>58</sup> Chrislock, 155.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 156.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 156.

right remains right!"<sup>61</sup> And thus Ackermann's twenty-four years of service at Dr. Martin Luther College came to an abrupt end. The decision came as a shock to many. "Like a bolt from a clear sky came the announcement...that Prof. Ackermann had resigned his position as director of the Dr. Martin Lutheran College," wrote the *New Ulm Review*. Amid the anger, the *Review* pointed fingers:

The College board of trustees would never have taken the action...if pressure from above had not been brot [*sic*] to bear upon them, and it is currently reported that citizens from here kept the matter alive and that even if the Public Safety Commission had wanted to forget their plans to have Prof. Ackermann ousted they were prevented from doing so by activities from here.<sup>62</sup>

Following his resignation, Ackermann remained involved in Wisconsin Synod affairs, but was in limbo until the end of the war. Until he was assigned a parish, it is believed he worked at a local jewelry store.<sup>63</sup> He presented at a Joint Conference of Southwest Minnesota in October 1918, where he was listed as "Prof. Ackermann (die alte)" in the *Gemeindeblatt*.<sup>64</sup> Synod officials were unsure what to do with him, however. In 1919, after the war, he was listed as a candidate for an opening at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin. No record is given of his installation, but he is listed in a synod report in 1920 as a pastor of the Essig-Brighton congregation in the vicinity of New Ulm. Earlier that year, the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Synod met and exonerated Ackermann from charges of un-American activities. The Synod stated that Ackermann was the victim of "vicious politicians and fanatical patriots."<sup>65</sup> Sixteen years later, he was elected president of that same district.

The German Lutherans at New Ulm fit the profile of those who openly combated government war policies and programs. It is no accident that the largest confrontations

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<sup>61</sup> Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 138;

<sup>62</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 6 February 1918.

<sup>63</sup> Morton Schroeder, "Adolph Ackermann, Chauvinism, and Free Speech," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 2 (1984), 17.

<sup>64</sup> "Die Gemischte Konferenz von Sudwest-Minnesota," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:20 (29 September 1918), 316.

<sup>65</sup> *New Ulm Review*, 20 June 1920.

occurred in what government officials described as "islands of Germanism." The German enclave environment emboldened many to fight for their beliefs, trusting that they were among like-minded individuals. While the New Ulm incident likely stemmed more from ethnic motivation than religious, it is also important to consider that Lutherans understood universal military service to have an assimilating effect, which would cause difficulty in their attempt to perpetuate a religious counterculture. Provost Marshall Enoch Crowder, in his book *The Spirit of Selective Service*, listed the assimilating effects of soldiery as the primary benefit of the draft.<sup>66</sup> This rhetoric was repeatedly preached in the congressional debates concerning the Selective Service Act. This may explain why the "Lutherans of this section" were more "solidly against the draft" than other ethnic Germans, and why two German Methodist leaders became the primary informants in the city. Another factor that contributed to the confrontation came from the mistaken belief that freedoms of speech, petition, and assembly were established and honored rights during this period. Ackermann, for his part, was imprudent to think he could separate his extra-curricular activities from his calling as a professor. Once German Lutherans in New Ulm understood that they were not so alone, but shared a community with informants and government agents who did not respect their freedoms, their behavior changed accordingly.

### **Church and State**

Unlike protests against the war and the draft, which both ignited and dwindled in rapid succession, the Wisconsin Synod announced strong religious objections throughout the war, even after government censorship and retribution became widespread. In an age when pastors outnumbered college professors by a ratio of more than seven to one, United States officials understood the sway that religious leaders held in public opinion.<sup>67</sup> Hence they enlisted the

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<sup>66</sup> Enoch Crowder, *The Spirit of Selective Service* (New York: The Century Company, 1920), 24.

<sup>67</sup> William Thomas, Jr., *Unsafe for Democracy: World War I and the U.S. Justice Department's Covert Campaign to Suppress Dissent* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 4.

church in efforts to bolster home front programs and to increase war time enthusiasm.

Evangelical church bodies enlisted without scruple, as Seminary Professor John Schaller of the Seminary described it, "It is the insidious habit of the Reformed churches to meddle with all manner of things that are not the business of the Church on the part of the government."<sup>68</sup>

Contrarily, WELS leaders saw these efforts as a blunt assault on the church and state divide, which had always been a defining characteristic of the Lutheran church. Another Lutheran stronghold, doctrinal unity as a basis of joint worship, also caused Lutherans to object to government initiated joint religious ventures. These positions made the church easy prey for vigilantes or government officials who either exploited war enthusiasm to attack WELS religious objections or were completely unaware of the religious aspect of their opposition.

The Wisconsin Synod's first major brush with the Committee on Public Information came over "Liberty Loan Sunday." The CPI announced the event with the following promotion:

It is the earnest wish...that the gospel of the "Liberty Bond" be preached from every pulpit Sunday, June 3, 1917...It is suggested that every minister, either himself or through a committee of his congregation, volunteer to act in the capacity of agent in the taking of applications for bonds and the placing of the applications with such banks as the members may desire.<sup>69</sup>

The CPI then included five possible sermon outlines which preachers could use to display God's favor for the Allied cause and God's love for democracy. Churches of all creeds and denominations were organized for the effort and divided into three groups: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. The CPI was enthused by the reaction among the clergy nationwide. "Liberty prayers" were said and "Liberty anthems" were sung in the churches. For example, a Syracuse, New York newspaper published a sampling of sermon titles from area congregations the following week, which included "The Loan and Liberty," "The Cost of Going Forward," "Little Loans Help," "Keep the Home Fires Burning," "In the Trenches," and "The Destroyed Churches of

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<sup>68</sup> John Schaller, "Religious Freedom Endangered," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:11 (1 June 1919), 86-88.

<sup>69</sup> 25 March 1918; "Was alles den Pastoren zugemutet wird!" *Gemeindeblatt* 52:13 (1 July 1917), 200.

France," among others.<sup>70</sup> William Gibbs McAdoo, the US Secretary of Treasury, urged congregations to use church funds to purchase Liberty Loans and to donate church bulletin space for the use of Liberty Loan advertisements. The first attempt to transition the church into the right arm of the state went quite smoothly.

This event triggered the strongest protest from the *Gemeindeblatt* during the war. Its title translates to "What is Expected of all our Pastors!" Inside it chastises both church and state for forgetting its proper role. By participating in a government endeavor, "the church has forgotten its God-given profession," said the article. "The war is for the state, not the church. The state has a sword, not the church."<sup>71</sup> The *Gemeindeblatt* spared no criticism for the state, either. Referring to the "bond sermons," it called the outlines "silly and blasphemous drivel...It sounds as if someone from the state is subjecting the church to ridicule." The article then dissected and dismantled the government issued sermon outlines. On the Luke 4:18 outline, for example, the article scoffed at the connection between Jesus setting spiritual prisoners free and Americans liberating Europe. It then argued on semantics, claiming the government chose that text because "the English translation has the word freedom in there." Because the first Liberty Loan Sunday was such a financial success, protests like this from the Wisconsin Synod could not turn the tide. Liberty Loan Sunday became a frequent occurrence whenever the government needed an extra push in war funding.

A month after Liberty Loan Sunday, Herbert Hoover, at that time head of the Food Administration, sent a letter to the Wisconsin Synod asking its pastors on 1 July 1917 to preach from the pulpit on the conservation of food. Instead of relaying that message to its pastors, the Synod published its objections in the *Northwestern Lutheran*:

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<sup>70</sup> *Syracuse Herald*, 27 April 1918; *Alton Evening Telegraph*, 29 March 1918; *Chicago Tribune*, 25 March 1918.

<sup>71</sup> "Was alles den Pastoren zugemutet wird!" *Gemeindeblatt* 52:13 (1 July 1917), 200.

Just now our perplexity has been further increased by a direct request for an answer whether we would comply with the...request in Mr. Hoover's letter, in order that our answer might be reported to headquarters in Washington. We are perplexed to know whether or not Mr. Hoover's letter was a command instead of a request. If a command we would like to know its basis of authority. If not complied with...we would like to know what construction is to be placed on the failure to comply.<sup>72</sup>

The criticisms in the rest of the article made that failure plainly obvious. "We have never used the pulpit as a platform from which to discuss *current events* or *political* or *social* movements," said the *Northwestern*. The letter appears to have found a waste basket, "We have disposed of all such secular documents according to previous custom." A final point slammed the door on any future participation:

We are not well versed in the meaning of military necessity, but being brought face to face as we are these days with the complete disregard of the Lord's day practiced by those who are devoted to the up building of our great war machine, we feel more than ever the need of bringing the nation to a realization of the greatest danger which confronts it, the danger of forgetting God, of forfeiting his blessings, and of inviting His wrath.<sup>73</sup>

In a separate article, Hans K. Moussa of the *Northwestern Lutheran* commented on the absurdity of teaching German Lutherans about conservation and personal economy. "It does seem like carrying coals to Newcastle to have homes invaded by officious persons that have never in their lives practiced economy and have these tell others about economy; others who have been forced by grim necessity to weigh every ounce of food before they venture to use it."<sup>74</sup> The churches which fell victim to this scheme received special attention from the *Northwestern*. In an article titled "Gardens Displace Sermons," Fred Graeber was bemused at a Unitarian congregation that omitted its worship services and replaced them with a joint venture to plant victory gardens. "It would appear that somebody is sadly mixing what is the Lord's and what is the state's," lamented Graeber.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> "The Pulpit and the Food Problem," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:14 (July 21, 1917), 109.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>74</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Food Conservation," *Northwestern* 4:17 (7 September 1917), 130-131.

<sup>75</sup> F. Graeber, "Gardens Displace Sermons," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:10 (21 May 1917), 74.

The portrayal of the war as a religious conflict also annoyed the synod. A common perception which the WELS confronted was expounded in the *Western Christian Advocate*, a Methodist Episcopal publication: "Democracy is Christianity in Government," and "Democracy is Christ proclaiming universal brotherhood."<sup>76</sup> By placing Christ on the side of democracy, many churches attempted to turn the First World War into a religious crusade. In response to the *Advocate*, the *Northwestern Lutheran* simply commented, "What confusion! It is high time that some Christians find out what Christianity really is."<sup>77</sup> Along similar lines, the United States Treasury Department issued a circular which included the sermon of a Rev. Marquis. This sermon made an overwhelming case for a religious war:

In the Bible, both Old and New Testament, the righteousness of a war for human liberty is clearly revealed and well sustained. This war of our Nation has an essentially religious character. The warfare to which America is called is so missionary that investment in the bonds is a religious act; participation in a crusade against oppression...The Churches are...in a position to make our land a better Republic of God...The issues of this war are, to an unprecedented degree, moral and finally religious, and they call, therefore, preeminently, for the rallying of all our spiritual forces from the start.<sup>78</sup>

A WELS responder, after inquiring where exactly the Bible promotes wars for human liberty, recognized this argument from previous experience. "This is much more than simply the Calvinistic doctrine of a theocratic state, which shall use force to make men good," said the article, "On religious grounds, as disciples of Jesus, in a Messianic capacity, the United States has entered the war! Shall we permit religious fanaticism to add a new horror to the world war?"<sup>79</sup> Wisconsin Synod abstinence from joint religious ventures became more comprehensible in wake of this ideological divide, as most of these ceremonies would make suppositions about God's will which the Wisconsin Synod could not accept.

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<sup>76</sup> "What Confusion!" *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:14 (21 July 1917), 112.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>78</sup> F. Graeber, "Press Censorship and Religious Liberty," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:13 (7 July 1917), 101.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

One of the major reasons German Lutherans deplored this condition of affairs was that they knew from experience where this road led. During the 19th century, Prussia dismissed doctrinal differences between Lutheran and Reformed and created an amalgamation between the two through the Prussian State Church. During the war, the Prussian State Church acted as Germany's own version of the Committee on Public Information and used theological arguments to increase war enthusiasm. Many evangelical churches in the United States proposed to do the same: "Their slogan is, Down with the Creed!" according to John Schaller, continuing, "this movement openly applauds the efforts of a multitude of alleged Christians to achieve deliverance from the irksome yoke of the definite dogma."<sup>80</sup> The war created opportunities to use patriotism as pressure, "If Americanism calls for a state church, the mob spirit will see to it that a state church is established without law, and with utter disregard of the most elementary human rights." In this way, the Wisconsin Synod's argument—that it stood up for American principles—held some weight because a strong barrier between church and state differentiated America from the European belligerents. To many proponents of this movement, however, the Wisconsin Synod's obstinate rejection on religious grounds was a cloak for pro-Germanism and a roadblock to home front solidarity. Many pleaded for widespread investigation to root out the subversion of the Lutheran church.

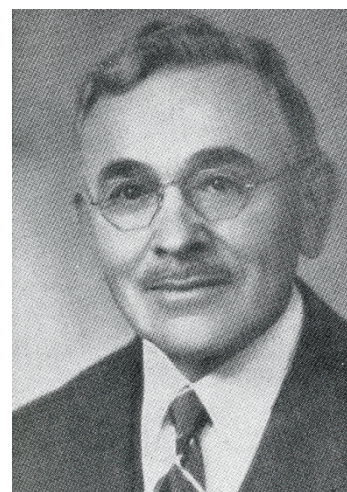
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<sup>80</sup> John Schaller, "Religious Freedom Endangered II," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:12 (15 June 1919), 92-93. The amalgamation of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Prussia caused many non-complying Lutheran clergymen to migrate to the United States in search of freedom from state control. It played a major role in the countercultural tendencies of the German Lutherans of the Midwest. Any push for American "unity," no matter how well intended, naturally met suspicion.

## Chapter 4: Special Visitors

Three weeks after the declaration of war, Rev. Emil Dornfeld of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Marshall, Wisconsin received a phone call from a man representing the *Milwaukee Free Press*, a publication which had favored peace during neutrality. This phone caller wished to gauge the opinions of Dornfeld and his congregation concerning the war situation. Dornfeld weighed his words during the conversation, but gave some indication where he leaned on the issue. He praised Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette's stand against the war declaration, and said

"there should be more men like him." The caller also asked for a lot of personal information. Dornfeld revealed that he was "forty years old; married and [had] five children, three to seventeen years old," and that he "[had] been pastor of this church for seventeen years and [had] a congregation of about 100 members."<sup>1</sup> When asked of his congregation's position, Dornfeld dodged the question and claimed his "people were very generous and noble." This interview never made it to the



4.1: Rev. Emil Dornfeld

*Milwaukee Free Press*, not for lack of interesting content but because the caller was not from the *Free Press* at all, but instead Operative W.T.E., an agent of the American Protective League reporting to the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.

The phone call with Dornfeld convinced W.T.E. to visit Marshall and find out more about the minister. He engaged the postmaster at Marshall in an attempt to uncover disloyalty through his mail. The postmaster could not give any substantial information, only that Dornfeld received "a great many letters from Milwaukee and other towns in Wisconsin."<sup>2</sup> W.T.E. then

<sup>1</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 28 April 1917, OG 13652.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

instructed the postmaster to reroute all suspicious mailings to Special Agent Fitch of the Justice Department. The postmaster appeared willing to cooperate, and even gave further evidence of Dornfeld's disloyalty, telling W.T.E. that Dornfeld "will not attend Memorial Day exercises or graduating exercises in the public high school and has not done so in the past altho [sic] each year has been extended an invitation."<sup>3</sup> Upon hearing this, W.T.E. reported to the Justice Department that "this case will require further investigation," and he reminded the postmaster not to alert the town to the ongoing investigation.

Dornfeld's profession as a German Lutheran minister in a small German American town made him a top priority to the Justice Department. In a report to Bureau of Investigation director A. Bruce Bielaski, a US attorney claimed that "wherever there is a large German element in the population, the German Lutheran ministers...are, in my opinion, largely responsible for the hostility and opposition to the policies of the Government."<sup>4</sup> Bielaski assured the sender that the report was read with interest. The crusade of the APL and the Justice Department against Lutheranism proved that these institutions shared this sentiment as well. In its course, ministers like Emil Dornfeld were sought out despite committing no prior infractions. The focus on Dornfeld's specifically Lutheran doctrinal behavior—his avoidance of ecumenical worship—is very telling. Whenever a search did find objectionable traits in a Lutheran minister or member, agents tenaciously pursued the subject to secure indictments. In the process, agents suppressed many fundamental constitutional rights—including religious rights—of Lutherans.

### **The Anatomy of an Investigation**

Many popular rumors circulated about the Lutheran Church during the war. These often gave the impression that it was the church of the enemy. One story spread that Lutheran

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Agent to A. Bruce Bielaski, 13 Aug 1917, OG 37083.

ministers, as part of their initiation, swore allegiance to the Kaiser.<sup>5</sup> A YMCA official even suggested the Lutheran church received direct funding from the German government, "probably by pneumatic tube through the Atlantic Ocean."<sup>6</sup> Agents often initiated investigations from rumors and hearsay. In one example, a Lutheran church was investigated because its church bell rang shortly after a German victory in battle.<sup>7</sup> Two weeks after the declaration of war, two Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students were held up by investigators, whereby their satchels were searched for bombs.<sup>8</sup> Whenever Lutheran ministers gathered in large numbers, investigators suspected malevolent intentions. In Grand Rapids, Wisconsin, for example, agents were alerted to a pro-German meeting about to take place in that city. Upon further research, investigators concluded that "this was the regular meeting of the German Lutheran Church."<sup>9</sup>

The APL and the Justice Department typically instigated an investigation whenever they received accusations from locals or heard rumors of disloyalty concerning a minister. In southeastern Wisconsin, for example, Attorney William Coerper of Milwaukee wrote the Department claiming that Rev. F.J. Bliefernicht of Huilsburg, Wisconsin told people at a church festival that "there was no particular reason for the entry of the United States into the war."<sup>10</sup> The festival just happened to be a celebration of Bliefernicht's 25th year in the ministry, an event which earned an impressive write-up in the Synod's bi-weekly publication, the *Gemeindeblatt*.<sup>11</sup> An APL agent then visited Huilsburg and questioned Coerper and others about Bliefernicht's attitude. The agent concluded that Bliefernicht was "decidedly pro-German in his

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<sup>5</sup> William Thomas, Jr., *Unsafe for Democracy: World War I and the U.S. Justice Department's Covert Campaign to Suppress Dissent* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 69.

<sup>6</sup> "Ein Regierungbeamter," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:18 (1 September 1918), 287.

<sup>7</sup> W.B. Farrar to Intelligence Officer, Camp John Wise, 18 September 1918, OG 338884. Farrar believed that the church rang the bell to signal German citizens to come purchase newspapers discussing the German war victories.

<sup>8</sup> Otto Engel to H.R. Zimmerman, 26 April 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>9</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 10 November 1917, OG 7324.

<sup>10</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 4 May 1917, OG 14184.

<sup>11</sup> "Amtsjubilaen," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:11 (1 June 1918), 170.

sentiment," but quickly closed the investigation saying that "altho [*sic*] Bliefernicht is a bothersome individual, he is harmless."<sup>12</sup>

Many of these individuals forwarded rumors to the Department hoping they would take action against personal enemies. In Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, Rev. Henry Gieschen confronted members of his congregation who were involved with a lodge—an activity prohibited by Lutheran doctrine because lodges often contradicted Lutheranism's belief in salvation through faith alone. After these members quit the church, one of them sent a rumor to the Justice Department stating that Gieschen, "upon the death of one Nehring, a soldier in the United States Army, made the remark that if the body was shipped to Wauwatosa in the uniform of a soldier and draped in the American flag, he would refuse to conduct the burial service."<sup>13</sup> Upon receipt of this rumor, an APL agent visited Wauwatosa to investigate. He proceeded to Gieschen's home and interviewed him. Gieschen proved he had buried Nehring with full military honors, and that Nehring was dressed in his uniform and the casket draped in the American flag. He convinced the agent, who reported, "the statement alleged to have been made by Rev. Gieschen was misconstrued and there is no truth in it." Nonetheless, the agent saw an opportunity to investigate Gieschen's war stance. He asked Gieschen what work he had done to further the war effort from the pulpit. The agent reported that Gieschen "did not consider the church the proper place to make pleas to raise money for war needs and that it was against the Lutheran Church to bring politics into the pulpit." Upon this, the agent closed the investigation. Gieschen proved to be fortunate, for when Lutheran ministers declined on spiritual grounds to promote bonds and other war programs from the pulpit, investigators usually believed this to be a convenient cloak for pro-German leanings.

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<sup>12</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 4 May 1917, OG 14184.

<sup>13</sup> P.J. Kelly Report, 10 Oct. 1918, OG 317186. The lodge was one of the most pressing issues for Confessional Lutherans. Lodges and other secret societies typically unified Christians under a common denominator of "morality," which Lutherans believed would undermine their "faith alone" doctrine.

The actions of ministers during the tense neutrality period also prompted investigations after war was declared. Revs. Theodore Hartwig of Hartland, Wisconsin; August Bartz of Winthrop, Minnesota; and August Vogt of Dowagiac, Michigan all received attention because they previously favored peace.<sup>14</sup> After tailing Bartz, who "was opposed to the shipment of ammunitions before the United States entered the war," an APL agent decided that "[h]e has apparently changed his point of view...he is all right now."<sup>15</sup> August Vogt also appeared to have changed his behavior: "[I] have not heard any complaint about his utterances or having drawn pictures placed in public places." However, the agent discovered that Vogt "has an elaborate picture of the Kaiser in his home,"<sup>16</sup> which prompted further investigation. Since Vogt was born in Germany in 1860 and moved while a young child, the agent endeavored to ascertain his citizenship status. If he was an alien enemy, any legal bounds for an investigation or internment could be more easily ignored.<sup>17</sup>

Investigations typically reached a dead end rather quickly. A German-speaking investigator visited the church of Rev. Henry Schmitt in Eagle River, Wisconsin only to hear Schmitt tell his congregation, "Perhaps the Germans are being punished for their sins," and later, "As Christians we are bound to obey the law, and as citizens to be loyal to this country."<sup>18</sup> Trying another angle, the investigator visited the local Red Cross secretary, who testified that Rev. Schmitt donated \$5.00 and became a member of the local chapter, and "he had not been solicited," but instead "he wished to join." Realizing he made an unnecessary investigation, he "thought it best not to call on Rev. Schmidt [*sic*] and give him any inkling that he had been under observation by the Department of Justice." Another investigator looked into Rev. J. Haase of

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<sup>14</sup> APL Report, "Applicant for Chaplaincy," 20 August 1918, OG 37082; Report: "Alleged Violation Conscription Act," 18 July 1917.

<sup>15</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 24 Aug 1917, OG 37082.

<sup>16</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 11 March 1918, OG 167232.

<sup>17</sup> "Looking Back in Dowagiac," *The Dowagiac News*, 3 July 1963.

<sup>18</sup> A. Viall Report, 27 Nov. 1917, OG 105855.

Randolph, Wisconsin, and interviewed three separate people in town. The first claimed Haase to be "unquestionably loyal and not a talkative man."<sup>19</sup> The second labeled Haase "a reticent man, and well liked in the community," and that he had never heard anything of a seditious or disloyal character being attributed to Haase. Not yet convinced, the agent interrogated a third witness, who claimed he had never heard of any seditious remarks emanating from Haase. For this agent, the spy catching would have to wait for later date.

While investigating Rev. Paul Hinderer of South Shore, South Dakota, an agent became very frustrated in his attempts to acquire information about the minister. Here, the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans' inclination to forming a close knit religious culture frustrated the agent, who wrote that "on being questioned on matters pertaining to activities of Hinderer they have refused to give anyone information...[and] have been very careful in making friends with strangers and have confined their relationships to those personally known as of German descent."<sup>20</sup> Noticing that his investigation was going nowhere, he decided to postpone any more activity until June, "as the German farmers of the vicinity [would] by that time have completed their farm work" and would be spending more time in the South Shore saloons, whereby "direct evidence [would] be more easily obtained." Having missed the last passenger train leaving South Shore, the agent left on a freight train at 2:10 a.m., and no record indicates his return.

Investigators often harbored ill feeling toward Lutheran teachings, and some made this plain in their reports to the Justice Department. Visiting a German Lutheran Church in Adrian, Michigan, an agent did not hear any disloyal remarks, but instead reported listening to "an orthodox, antiquated sermon based on the Bible."<sup>21</sup> Another investigator visiting a Wisconsin Synod church in White, South Dakota, found "German books written by professors of the

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<sup>19</sup> Julius Rosin Report, 28 April 1917, OG 12889.

<sup>20</sup> AC. Moore Report, 10 May 1917, OG 18330.

<sup>21</sup> Jenny C. Law Hardy to A. Bruce Bielaski, 17 Aug. 1918, OG 290766.

Minnesota Lutheran Synode [*sic*], dealing with the teaching of Luther and in these books, there are remarks that are absolutely not fit to be brought to the American people while this country is at war with Germany."<sup>22</sup> A third complained to the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety concerning the Lutheran hymnal:

Go to this address and ask for the hymnbook for the Ev-Luth. Congregations of the unaltered Augsburg Confession...This German hymnbook is used throughout the States, therefore also in Carver County [MN]. Turn to the index. Find the patriotic hymns. You look in vain. They are not there. I'll admit I have found a verse or two in the middle or at the close of some hymn. But there are no patriotic hymns indexed.<sup>23</sup>

This hymnal was published long before the war; Wisconsin Synod Lutherans traditionally did not sing hymns which glorified the state. This stemmed from their disapproval of a belief in a "tribal God," and a denial that America was "God's chosen nation." The synod often accused both American evangelicals and their own brethren in Germany of falling into this "dangerous" and "heathen" belief. To agents, especially the ones with an evangelical background, Lutheran doctrine was often harmful to the war effort, even un-American.<sup>24</sup>

### **Problem Areas**

Amid their crackdown on Lutheranism, the American Protective League focused particularly hard on two areas in the Midwest: the Minnesota River Valley in South Central Minnesota and Western Wisconsin near the city of La Crosse. Both these locations included towns and cities of high German Lutheran concentration, and included events which drew the authorities' attention. In the Minnesota River Valley, the anti-draft movement that commenced in New Ulm forced the APL to keep a close watch over the area for the rest of the war. An agent noted that New Ulm "gained quite a lot of notoriety on account of its element of pro-

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<sup>22</sup> M. Eberstein Report, 23 Jan. 1918, OG 133065.

<sup>23</sup> W.C. Rehwaldt to Chas. W. Henky, Publicity Director, 13 December 1918, 103.L.9.2F, CPS Records.

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 1 for Wisconsin Synod's rebuke of a belief in a "tribal God" during the neutrality period, or Hans K. Moussa, "The Fifty-fifth Psalm," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:7 (7 April 1915), 50-51. Hans K. Moussa even shared some misgivings concerning the effects of the popular Christian hymn "Onward Christians Soldiers" in his article, "Correcting Paul," *Northwestern Lutheran* 1:19 (7 October 1919), 153.

Germanism."<sup>25</sup> Another decried its effect on the Germans of Minnesota: "It cannot be denied that the effects of the New Ulm meeting have carried far, especially in sections of this state in which people of German race or extraction are of the majority."<sup>26</sup> In Western Wisconsin, Otto Engel's American Liberty League, based in Norwalk, held considerable sway in this part of the state during the neutrality period. Authorities worked extra hard to stamp out the peace sentiment that still pervaded at the outbreak of war. Investigations of Lutheran ministers in these two areas then proved to be particularly thorough and invasive.

Shortly after the outbreak of war, Rev. Henry Boettcher of Immanuel Lutheran in Gibbon, Minnesota withdrew his account from John W. Boock's bank of that city. The two were "at swords points" ever since.<sup>27</sup> Boock served as county

chairman of the Committee on Public Safety, and he hoped to use his position to "see the other fellow humiliated," and to make an example of Boettcher. On 18 July 1918, Boock wrote the American Protective League stating that Boettcher was "none to [sic] demonstrative in his patriotism," and he urged the APL to curb the minister. The APL did not appear to take the appeal seriously, replying that the German ministers



4.2: Rev. H. Boettcher, 1940

in that county were "not making any open statements and as long as they do not I waver to take no steps to antagonize them. I believe if we leave them alone they will come around alright."<sup>28</sup>

Everything changed once the New Ulm episode erupted a week later, in which Gibbon held an anti-draft meeting of its own. Boock told the APL that Boettcher was responsible for securing the speakers for the Gibbon meeting, and this time authorities were willing to listen.

<sup>25</sup> P.A. Neff to National Committee of Patriotic Societies, 3 June 1918, OG 213154.

<sup>26</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.

<sup>27</sup> W. O'Brien to Public Safety Commission, 18 July 1917, 103.L.8.4, CPS Files, p. 148.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

Boock labeled Boettcher a "radical pro-German," and listed examples to prove his supposition.<sup>29</sup> According to Boock, he advised his parishioners "not to read newspapers and periodicals printed in English," saying English papers were all bought up by England, and "to only believe what is read in the *Volkszeitung* and *Viereck's Weekly*." He claimed an elaborate picture of the Kaiser adorned the Boettcher home, and then told the following story to prove his opposition to patriotic programs. Two ladies visited the Boettcher home to solicit contributions for the Red Cross. The ladies called on Mrs. Boettcher and asked her to contribute, when "the Rev. in an adjoining room overheard the request and in scant attire and smoking a pipe entered the room where the ladies were" and launched a "tirade" against ladies and the Red Cross, "impugning the motives of the ladies saying the money would not reach the Red Cross." When the women attempted to explain, he told them to get out of the house. Prior to that incident, according to Boock, Boettcher gave \$5 to another Red Cross solicitor, "throwing it down, saying he would give it but it was the most unwilling money he ever parted with." Further investigation revealed a rumor that the minister told a soldier a story about a transport ship bound to France which "mutinied and started back for New York, and that a British warship fired upon the transport, killing many soldiers, [which] compelled it to go to France." Investigators attempted to visit Boettcher at his home, only to receive no answer at the door.

The congregation at Immanuel also received special attention. Boock attempted to compile a farm labor census to organize and maximize the crop output of the county. The farmers, however, "absolutely refused to fill out the blank," and "claimed in doing it they were working for the interests of J.P. Morgan and Company."<sup>30</sup> Boock was certainly under a lot of pressure to take care of this issue. One member of the CPS told the secretary to "write Boock and drive home the fact that he is the 'boss' of the county and it is up to him to see that the

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<sup>29</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.

<sup>30</sup> John W. Boock to Chas. W. Hanke, 18 July 1917, 103.L.8.4, CPS Files.

township chairman gets the reports from the farmers."<sup>31</sup> Red Cross workers also came across difficulty when dealing with congregation members. Boock claimed that "many if not all the ladies who were members of [Boettcher's] congregation refused to donate and all gave the same reason for refusing, namely: that the girls who collected this money used it to buy themselves new dresses and that it was a graft."<sup>32</sup> This made Boock believe that Boettcher instructed his members to give this response to solicitors. Due to Boock's activities in the CPS, congregation members also withdrew funds from his bank in droves. Thus his pocketbook also increased the vigor of Boock's crusade.

Of all the stories circulating about Boettcher, only the one concerning the mutinies in the Atlantic could be considered an indictable offense, but this statement was also considered the most questionable evidence against Boettcher. He was never taken into custody. An improved situation in the Gibbon area also appeased authorities. Boock reported to the CPS later that year concerning the Liberty Loan in Gibbon:

Things are coming my way...sentiment is changing fast and the people who were strongly anti are now working for the loan. You are at liberty to state that Sibley County is doing nicely and considering the circumstances, is going to do its share. The Liberty Loan Campaign has in my estimation done more than anything else in uniting people and putting them behind the government.<sup>33</sup>

While the Liberty Loan played its part, an ever looming government investigation certainly altered the behavior of Boettcher and his congregation. In the early months of the war, Lutherans openly dissented to government policies under the assumption of free speech rights. The investigation made clear that certain speech and behaviors would not be tolerated.

Ten miles west of Gibbon, community strife in Fairfax, Minnesota spilled over into a Justice Department investigation. An APL investigator noted "a great deal of strife between the

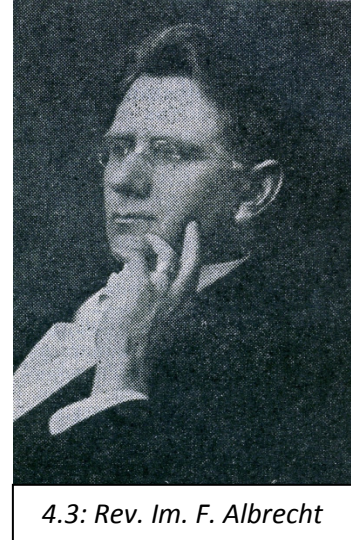
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<sup>31</sup> H.E. Wreisner to S.W. Fraiser, 18 July 1917, 103.L.8.4, CPS Files, P.148.

<sup>32</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.

<sup>33</sup> W. Boock to Chas. W. Hanke, 27 Oct. 1917, 103.L.8.2F, CPS Files, p. 101,2.

town and country around it."<sup>34</sup> The Minnesota governor primary election of 1918 highlighted this rift. The countryside, which consisted mostly of Wisconsin Synod farmers, voted solidly for Congressman Charles A. Lindbergh, an anti-war and anti-central bank candidate. The town, which consisted of a more English-speaking element, cast their votes completely—with the exception of two votes—for current governor J.A.A. Burnquist. The agent also noted that "practically all the farmers in that section belonged to the Nonpartisan League," an anti-war organization which the Justice Department detested. This discord escalated when the school superintendent, R.D.



4.3: Rev. Im. F. Albrecht

Bowden, gave public speeches in the school which contrasted "German inhumanity...with actions of other more humane nations." The following school year, the Fairfax school board voted to depose Bowden as superintendent. Because the majority of the school board were German Americans, the cry rang out that the superintendent was being persecuted for his patriotic speeches. The move led an APL agent to label Fairfax a "hotbed of sedition," and the CPS stepped in to halt the dismissal of Bowden.<sup>35</sup>

Patriotic informants in Fairfax revealed to APL investigators that the "disloyal influence centers around Im. F. Albrecht," pastor of St. Johannes Lutheran church in Fairfax. "This man is the moral backbone of the Hohenzollern influence here," claimed an informant, who also suggested the school board members were firmly under Albrecht's control.<sup>36</sup> They claimed Albrecht was "a vociferous shouter for every influence on the German side from La Follette down to local copperheads," and that "seditionists and disloyal agitators make this man's home

<sup>34</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, 27 Sep 1918, OG 213154.

<sup>35</sup> A.P. Neff to National Committee of Patriotic Societies, 27 May 1918 and 3 June 1918, OG 213154;

<sup>36</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, 27 Sep 1918, OG 213154.

their headquarters and evidently go to him for advice and aid." Any mention of German atrocities, "he immediately condemns as nothing but class hatred." To prove their theory that Albrecht fomented the move against superintendent Bowden, they shared an incident where Albrecht approached Bowden after one of his speeches. Albrecht told Bowden that he was "teaching class hatred and teaching enmity against the Germans and that he (Albrecht) would not stand for such falsehoods being taught in the schools and proposed to see that the talks stopped forthwith." The APL pursued an indictment of Albrecht, for this could teach the Lutherans in the countryside a lesson for opposing a patriotic superintendent.

The investigation into Albrecht searched deeply, but it completely faltered. The chief informant, P.A. Neff, "was unable to give any specific information or to make any direct charge" against Albrecht. The only proof he could give was that Albrecht opposed the war before the declaration was made. Frustrated, the agent wrote to his Justice Department superior that "whatever information [Neff] had was based entirely upon rumor." C.W. Heimann, a member of the school board and Albrecht's church, was subpoenaed, but his testimony put a dagger into the investigation. He revealed that superintendent Bowden lost the Fairfax school system its yearly \$1,100 state agricultural appropriation because of his "poor management," and that the opposition to Bowden was based on his inefficiency, not his loyalty talks. Heimann showed investigators his large contributions to the war effort to prove his patriotic sentiments. He also illustrated the not-so-guiltless characteristics of the vigilantes of Fairfax, stating that a "Vigilance Committee" painted his bank yellow shortly after declaration of war. As Lutherans from Gibbon pulled their accounts from Boock's bank in Gibbon, a better advertisement than the coat of yellow paint on Heimann's Fairfax bank could hardly be conceived.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 3-4.

In the heavily-watched region of western Wisconsin, Rev. Emmanuel Palechek's congregations at Chaseburg and Stoddard regularly received APL visitors. One week a German speaking informant reported that after a church service, Palechek read to members an article in the *Christian Herald* to inform them about the Conscription Act. When it quoted a part of Wilson's Proclamation claiming that the draft was "in no sense a conscription of the unwilling," Palechek in angst cast aside the paper and said it was "rotten." The agent reported the speech "seemed to be an effort to poison the hearts of the young men against America."<sup>38</sup>

The APL subpoenaed Palechek "in order that he may be thoroughly grilled."<sup>39</sup> He was interviewed by an APL agent and a United States attorney. "A storm scene ensued," according to the APL agent. Palechek admitted to the *Christian Herald* incident, but denounced other rumors circulating about him. He claimed that his young men would cross the seas and fight but "they would never approve of the war." The attorney was particularly strong in upbraiding Palechek for his positions, but "it seemed to have little effect on him." Palechek responded that he had not transgressed the law in any way. The APL agent agreed: "[this] seems to be true...In fact, he seems to be so well up on the definition of treason that Mr. Wolfe and myself feel he had been advised by some one." Nevertheless, the agent told Palechek that for his actions he would be listed as a suspect at Washington. This did little to curb the minister's activity. Three months later, Palechek was once again brought before the Grand Jury. This time, he made the alleged



4.4: Rev. Em. Palechek

<sup>38</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 16 June 1917, OG 26572. Palechek gave the speech because "he had been requested by the Governor to notify all young men to register." This is what led Palechek to read Wilson's proclamation to his congregation after the service.

<sup>39</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 16 June 1917, OG 26572.

statement, "I am an American citizen and as an American citizen I wish to see our boys kept at home and not supplying England and being the catspaw of England."<sup>40</sup>

The APL also investigated Palechek's work with the war programs. W.F. Goodrich gave testimony that he called Palechek and encouraged him to preach in favor of the Red Cross the following Sunday. He reported Palechek to have "been very abrupt and surly" when asked to do his duty, and shirked committing any sermon time to the cause.<sup>41</sup> His congregation at Stoddard represented two-thirds of the population of that town, but only five out of "some one hundred" Red Cross members in Stoddard belonged to Palechek's congregation. His congregation in Chaseburg fared no better during the first Liberty Loan drive. The cashier at the Chaseburg State Bank reported St. Peter's congregation "subscribed only \$2,500 worth of bonds out of a total subscription of \$25,000...which they could easily have done."<sup>42</sup>

Many of the church members were summoned by the APL and questioned concerning their minister. G.A. Wrobel, a member at the Stoddard congregation, said, "I have known Palechek for twenty-three years, and have never heard him make a derogatory remark about this country. Palechek has a son in the army at present; so it isn't likely that he would be in favor of anything that would injure his boy."<sup>43</sup> Zelma Wrobel claimed that Palechek mentioned the Red Cross at church, saying, "it is a good thing that we should give and help the soldiers. You can join if you wish." Charles Anderson of the Chaseburg congregation claimed that "while Paleshek [*sic*] did not advise his members to join the Red Cross, he said they should contribute since it was a good and worthy cause." The APL members considered the congregation members disloyal, so they received this testimony with a condescending ear. One agent claimed, "members of his church are so under his control that they will not say anything against him." To

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Daniel Fry Report, 17 Sep. 1917, OG 26572.

<sup>41</sup> D.H. Barry Report, 29 Dec. 1917, OG 119524;

<sup>42</sup> The German Lutheran was typically stereotyped as frugal and to have disproportionately large savings.

<sup>43</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 16 June 1917, OG 26572;

exemplify this, he alleged that, at Palechek's bidding, forty parishioners cancelled their subscriptions to the pro-war *La Crosse Tribune* and subscribed *en masse* to the *Milwaukee Free Press* and *La Follette's Magazine*.<sup>44</sup>

Despite intensive interviews and undercover work, an indictment could never be secured against Palechek. An agent reported his frustration: "he will continue these disloyal remarks right up to the point where he believes he will be amenable to the law."<sup>45</sup> Cases like Palechek's increased the APL's demands for a stricter sedition law, which they received in May 1918, too late to prosecute Palechek for his actions. Palechek, however, received a far worse punishment than any government could inflict. His son, Walter Palechek, was wounded in France.<sup>46</sup>

### **Into Custody**

While investigations served a good purpose, the real goal of APL agents was to put German spies and sympathizers behind bars. They succeeded six times in placing Wisconsin Synod pastors into custody. Some of these arrests left a more permanent trace than others. Not much is known today about the arrests of Revs. Gotthold Thurow of Wisconsin Rapids or H.M. Hendricksen of Gresham, Nebraska. Thurow, according to Rev. Otto Engel, was interned for a short time "by hotheads according to rumor."<sup>47</sup> This happened shortly after the outbreak in war, when the fear of German spies was at its height. In early 1918, Hendricksen was arrested for remarks in a private conversation which "obstructed recruiting and enlistment." On 18 April 1918, he was tried and convicted for his statements.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> D.H. Barry Report, 29 Dec. 1917, OG 119524.

<sup>45</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 16 June 1917, OG 26572.

<sup>46</sup> D.H. Barry Report, 29 Dec. 1917, OG 119524.

<sup>47</sup> Otto Engel to H.R. Zimmerman, 26 April 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>48</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, *War-time Prosecutions and Mob Violence* (New York: National Civil Liberties Bureau, 1918), 14, 18; Alleged Violation Conscription Act, OG 37082.

The other arrests left a much larger paper trail. Herman Atrops of Zion Lutheran Church in White, South Dakota was under suspicion because he "worked strong to keep America out of war."<sup>49</sup> In January 1918, an informant named Werner Hanni visited Atrops at his home. The two talked for four hours. When interrogated by Hanni about his beliefs, Atrops openly shared his convictions. "Athrop [*sic*] says is [*sic*] somebody would ask him what America's case was to enter the war, he would say, that the Americans were listening to the wrong God...they went in it for the money." Hanni specifically grilled Atrops about his position before the war broke out. He admitted he sent petitions to Washington, but "he thinks they were never read and have been thrown in the waste basket." When asked about the 1916 election, Atrops claimed he did not vote for president because "both men, Wilson and Hughes were Easterner's [*sic*] and controlled by Wallstreet." Hanni then inquired what Atrops did with the government requests to preach for the Liberty Bonds, Food Pledge, and other matters. Atrops responded that "he naturally did not do such a thing and the Government can't do anything with me, because the constitution of this country believes in having the church separated from the state." This response especially antagonized Hanni, who reported, "Athrop [*sic*] thinks he can do anything he likes on account of being American born."



4.5: Rev. Herman Atrops

Hanni then perused through White to determine the effect Atrops had on the community. He discerned that Atrops "is doing lots of harm in this section of the country."<sup>50</sup> For example, the editor of the *White Leader* once clipped an article from *Brookings News* which condemned the "Huns." Several German Americans from White went to see the editor and "told

<sup>49</sup> M. Eberstein Report, 23 Jan. 1918, OG 133065.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

him that if he prints another article like it they would stop the paper...today he has not the courage to say the least thing about Germany. The editor is dependent on his paper and the Germans made a coward out of him." Atrops's congregation also exhibited treacherous behavior. While they subscribed \$700 for the German Red Cross before the war, they donated only \$200 for the American Red Cross, "and after long arguments with the Red Cross Solicitors." White was such an "island of Germanism" that children of the second and third generations did not learn English, including Atrops's daughter, who "cannot speak English but speaks good German," which likely was not an exaggeration. Disgusted with his findings, Hanni recommended that "it is absolutely necessary to deal with Athrop [*sic*] very severe; conditions in White have become unbearable for the loyal Americans." The Justice Department agreed; Atrops was arrested for a short time by the U.S. Marshall of the Southern District of South Dakota for making seditious and pro-German statements, most of which were made in the interview with Hanni.<sup>51</sup>

Rev. Carl Auerswald served the congregations at Marinette, Wisconsin and Menominee, Michigan, both near the state borders in the Upper Peninsula. This region, by virtue of its abundance of coal deposits, was of heavy importance to the war effort. Price controls on coal and other fuels set by the Fuel Administration also deeply angered the local population, so investigators considered the towns of Marinette and Menominee to be high priority areas. Amid the policing, an agent visited a church service at Christ Lutheran in Menominee, whereby he alleged Auerswald made disloyal and seditious statements to his congregation. Anxious authorities called for his arrest, and he was taken into custody in November 1917.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "Report: Alleged Violation Conscription Act," 18 July 1918, OG 37082.

<sup>52</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 22 October 1917, OG 308131; A.A. Viall Report, 22 November 1917, OG 308131.

Auerswald chose not to be represented by counsel at his trial, "as he had signified his ability to conduct his own defense." His trial turned into a family quarrel. J.J. O'Hara conducted the prosecution against Auerswald for his alleged seditious statements. O'Hara's father-in-law, Michael Doyle, the mayor of Menominee, was not in sympathy with O'Hara's position on Auerswald. According to an APL agent at the trial, Doyle "forced himself into the proceedings, assuming the role of counsel for the defendant and used every means possible to secure the acquittal of his client."<sup>53</sup> Doyle secured another attorney to defend Auerswald, named Bruno Schultz. The APL agent described Schultz's demeanor as "such a flagrant miscarriage of justice that if the American flag which had been ordered for the court room, had been hanging at the time of the trial he would have taken it down." After this storm scene subsided, Auerswald was still convicted for his statements but received no further jail time. His punishment was a fine of \$100, more than a month's salary for a WELS minister.



4.6: Rev. Carl Auerswald

### **Rev. Edgar Guenther**

In 1911, Rev. Edgar Guenther, a first year seminary graduate, began his work at the Wisconsin Synod's mission among the Apaches in Arizona. After a year of hard work, he and his wife, Minnie Guenther, began a mission school at East Fork, Arizona. Minnie was especially popular among the Apaches and also in synod publications. She was even honored with the title of national "Mother of the Year" later in her career. At the time, the Apache mission was the only mission of the Synod which reached out to a different culture, so the Guenthers' work was often in the synod spotlight. For example, the *Northwestern Lutheran* reported a special trip made by the Guenthers and an "Indian boy," who "arrived at Milwaukee during the sessions of

<sup>53</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 22 October 1917, OG 308131.

the synod by auto, having covered the distance of 2,400 miles in sixteen days. The travelers carried a camping outfit with them....Their appearance plainly shows the benefits one may derive from living in the open. On Monday forenoon the missionary addressed the synod in behalf of our work in Arizona."<sup>54</sup>

Edgar Guenther's mission at East Fork was in close proximity to Fort Apache, where many soldiers trained during the war. Guenther often traveled to Fort Apache looking to serve any soldiers from the Wisconsin or Missouri Synods. One day at Fort Apache, the commanding officer there, A.J. Tittinger, reported that Guenther "failed to come to attention or a respectful attitude at retreat formation when 'to the Colors' was sounded by the field music."<sup>55</sup> A few days later, on 21 May 1918, he was arrested by orders of Tittinger. He reported that Guenther was "very anxious not to bring the name of his mission into publicity." In order to make reparations for this offense, Guenther agreed to Tittinger's request to "perform in public an act of fealty to the flag on the date and hour to be designated by the Commanding



4.7: E. Edgar Guenther and his wife, Minnie.

Officer...to express his patriotism to the National Colors, the ideals and government that it represents, thereby exonerating himself from the stigma of being disloyal and unpatriotic." Upon performing this, Guenther was free to leave. Unknown to Guenther, however, this was only the beginning, as Tittinger reported, "To allay his suspicions that he is under surveillance I have informed him that after he had complied with the agreement as mentioned...that I would consider the incident closed as far as my official capacity was concerned."<sup>56</sup> The Department of Justice was then brought up to speed of the situation and asked to cooperate in Guenther's

<sup>54</sup> *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1912, p. 32; Friedrich 170; NW 21 July 1917, "A Long Auto Trip."

<sup>55</sup> A.J. Tittinger to Wm. Neunhoffer, 1 June 1918, OG 209062.

<sup>56</sup> R.L. Barnes to A.J. Tittinger, 4 June 1918, OG 209062.

investigation. The Department happily replied they were "very much interested...for the reason that some suspicion has attached to other representatives of this same faith."<sup>57</sup>

The APL and the Justice Department travelled to the East Fork Mission to uncover Guenther's disloyalty. One of their first findings was that "he continued to keep a picture of the Kaiser hanging in his house in a conspicuous place."<sup>58</sup> Many of Guenther's fellow citizens at East Fork were eager to share evidence of disloyalty. One public teacher "in the Indian Service" reported Guenther saying to him, "I do not believe my church is the place for the flag (we were discussing the American flag having been taken down by a Lutheran preacher), anything pertaining to politics has no place in the church." The teacher claimed that Guenther expressed his intention to place a flag on top of his church, "but I have



*4.8: National Director of Military Intelligence M. Churchill consistently advocated a hard line for Guenther.*

noticed it has not been done and it is my belief he got uneasy and said this for a bluff."<sup>59</sup> A "House Keeper" at the United States Indian Schools informed investigators that she twice visited Minnie Guenther and asked her to assist the Red Cross by knitting, and that Mrs. Guenther both times turned her down, saying "she had no time to give to the Red Cross work."<sup>60</sup>

These findings caused Edgar Guenther to be arrested *again* by military authorities on 22 August 1918 for charges of disloyalty. He was held until his military trial eight days later. In the meantime, a "careful search in his house" attempted to find incriminating correspondence or enemy propaganda.<sup>61</sup> Agent Breniman reported that no evidence was found, "except a few

<sup>57</sup> Wm. Neunhoffer to Tittinger, 4 June 1918, OG 209062.

<sup>58</sup> E.T. Needham Report, 20 August, OG 209062.

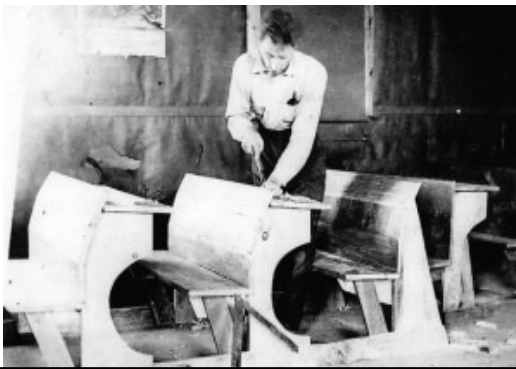
<sup>59</sup> Marlborough Churchill to A. Bruce Bielaski, 11 June 1918, OG 209062;

<sup>60</sup> E.T. Needham Report, 20 August 1918, OG 209062.

<sup>61</sup> G.H. Wende Report, 22 Aug. 1918, OG 209062.

letters which...related to church correspondence." Some of these letters were written in German, and "translated by me after careful search for hidden meanings or other incriminating matter." At the trial, the charges against him could not be substantiated for lack of reliable witnesses, who gave "evasive, indefinite answers....It turned out to be nothing more than friendly neighbors taking a too active interest in other peoples [sic] affairs."<sup>62</sup>

Guenther's second release from prison did not signal the end. Tittinger reported that "although the guilty [sic] of Mr. Guenther has not been established he will be under surveillance until further orders from Department Intelligence Office."<sup>63</sup> Another officer, H.L. Barnes, was



4.9: Rev. Edgar Guenther constructs desks at First Lutheran School on the Apache Mission from donated scrap wood.

enthused by Guenther's release. He told his superiors, "Now I believe I can get enough evidence to hang him."<sup>64</sup> Mr. Brittian, the Guenther's neighbor, told Barnes that "while he and Mr. Peterson were calling on subject, Mrs. Guenther opened amusements by playing 'The Watch on the Rhine.'" Once they met with Guenther and asked

him to contribute spiritually to the cause, Guenther stated "that the Church was not the place to talk about the Red Cross and Liberty Bonds, and that no flags should adorn the interior," although, he added, "he would place one outside his mission." Brittian also shared that "when he tells Gunther [sic] how the Allies are beating the Germans, he gets red in the face and walks away." Barnes noted that every two weeks Guenther took a trip to Globe, Arizona, to meet with other Lutheran ministers. Guenther's other neighbor, Mr. Funk, informed Barnes "that it has just been since the war that Rev. Gunther went to Globe, Arizona so often." This was, in fact, true. In

<sup>62</sup> Chas. E. Breniman Report, 5 Sep. 1918, OG 283505.

<sup>63</sup> A.J. Tittinger to H.L. Barnes, 5 Sep. 1918, OG 283505.

<sup>64</sup> E.T. Needham Report, 5 Sep 1918, OG 209062;

1918, the synod made Guenther the acting superintendent of all the missions in Arizona, and this required him to travel to Globe to complete his work as superintendent. Barnes and Bureau chief Bielaski concluded that further investigation into Guenther "and the other Lutheran ministers who attend these conferences," required the investigation to relocate to Globe, Arizona.<sup>65</sup>

The Department of Justice and the APL kept a close watch on Guenther for the rest of the war. In November 1918 an agent "was lying on the ground very close to Rev. Gunther's house," and claimed he heard the Reverend say, "The Captain kept him posted."<sup>66</sup> He naturally assumed this to be a captain heading a German spy organization, which would prove Guenther to be a German spy. A second search of his home resulted in the finding of a tripod. This could have meant that Guenther was surveying the defenses of Fort Apache in preparation for a German attack. Guenther, on being questioned, said he had been using the tripod to survey land for the Apaches. The end of the war did not result in the termination of the investigation, though it did remove its



*4.10: Minnie Guenther was awarded National Mother of the Year in 1967*

momentum. On 10 December 1918, a full month after the ceasefire, Bureau chief Bielaski prodded along his investigators, asking, "Please advise me as to the status of this matter, giving reference to reports rendered on the subject."<sup>67</sup> One agent apologized that "the influenza epidemic has kept me very busy." This appears to be the end of the investigation into Guenther, who continued his work at the Apache mission until his death in 1961, completing a half century

<sup>65</sup> VH Report, 12 Nov. 1918, OG 2090962.

<sup>66</sup> H.L. Barnes Report, 6 November 1918, OG 209062.

<sup>67</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to G.H. Wende, 10 December 1918, OG 209062.

of work there. In 1950, he became the first and only non-Apache to be honored with membership in the White Mountain Apache Tribe. Minnie survived her husband by twenty years and continued her work among the Apaches until her death.<sup>68</sup>

### **Rev. John Gauss**

At the "German island" of Jenera, Ohio, Rev. John Gauss of Trinity Lutheran Church earned a reputation for his outspoken nature. Because of this characteristic, he became one of the dominant personalities of the Wisconsin Synod. His hometown in Jenera hosted two monumental Michigan Synod conventions, in 1912 and 1916. He then served as secretary for the newly formed Michigan District of the Wisconsin Synod in 1917. At the advent of an unpopular war for German Americans, however, these characteristics also made him one of the likeliest candidates in the synod to incite an investigation. Indeed, the Justice Department eventually took notice of Gauss and the town of Jenera, which could have reasonably boasted to host the most investigators per capita during the war.

It did not take long for the first complaint to arrive at the Justice Department. In May 1917, Dr. M.S. Williamson, a surgeon from Findlay, Ohio, wrote to the Department of the Interior protesting about the German Americans in Jenera, who were "walking confidentially among their friends and spreading arguments among people who [were] not well informed."<sup>69</sup> This behavior was detrimental to the interests of the country, according to Williamson. Furthermore, "The principal leader is the Rev. John Gauss of the German Lutheran church...he doesn't preach denunciatory sermons to his congregation, but is still so Pro German that he can't hide his



4.11: Rev. John Gauss, 1918

<sup>68</sup> "Rev. Guenther, 50-Year Apache Missionary, Dies," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, 1 June 1961.

<sup>69</sup> M.S. Williamson to E.M. Salzgeber, 25 May 1917, OG 20186.

animosity in public." Gauss joined the Red Cross "after he learned that he was liable to be reported to the authorities...but his Pro German propoganda has not ceased and his [*sic*] is now he thinks immune from suspicion." To keep his reporting a secret from the eyes of stenographers, Williamson wrote this letter in pen. The Department of the Interior then passed this letter over to the Justice Department for further action.<sup>70</sup>

The Department of Justice, although aware of the situation, did not investigate immediately, as "all agents were now swamped."<sup>71</sup> The APL chief of northern Ohio, O.D. Donnell, was furious that the department let precious time lapse, and "demanded a warrant for Rev. Gauss."<sup>72</sup> Finally, in September, an agent named R.E. Pfeiffer and "other volunteers" visited the city and reported their findings. Pfeiffer claimed that "Rev. Gauss educates town (possibly 1,000 population) and farming community mostly German to argue German side and against U.S. policy." The attitude of Jenera was rotten to the core. The town marshal "orders anyone who makes patriotic statements to 'shut up.'" National Guard officers visited Jenera to try a recruiting speech, and said "they never saw such a cool reception." Citizens were alleged to have said, "I'd like to stick a knife in Wilson's heart," and, "I'd like to tie Wilson to a horse and drag him thro [*sic*] the clearing and burn him on a brush pile." No U.S. flags were displayed in Jenera. The volunteers believed the community was still raising funds for the German Red Cross. A local store continued to publicly display medals commemorating a German battle victory over Russia in August 1914. Pfeiffer begged Washington "to send secret service man who can speak German, and let him spend a week painting, or working, in Genera [*sic*], and they claim he can send at least ten men to the penitentiary."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>E.M. Salzgeber to A. Bruce Bielaski, 29 May 1917, OG 20186.

<sup>71</sup>R.E. Pfeiffer Report, 25 September 1917, OG 20186.

<sup>72</sup>L.M. Cantrell Report, 7 February 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>73</sup>R.E. Pfeiffer Report, 25 September 1917, OG 20186.

Pfeiffer himself secured the services of Joseph Gerstner, a private detective for a steel car company and a former member of the Austrian secret service. Gerstner had experience investigating discontented German American laborers and seemed like a good fit for the job. Gerstner worked as an insurance salesman in Jenera, setting his prices too high to actually have to sell the insurance. On the first day he attended a meeting on behalf of the Liberty Loan, at which only seven people in the entire community appeared. Before long the lights mysteriously went out "and being unable to find the cause, the meeting adjourned."<sup>74</sup> Gerstner had difficulty securing information, noting that "the few loyal citizens are afraid and refused to testify, although, they relate on hearsay that different men have made threats against the president." He was "unable to get acquainted with Rev. Gauss, but heard he received much of his mail from Milwaukee." He even invaded the home of one of the suspected German sympathizers, finding copies of *Viereck's Weekly* and *The International*, a socialist publication. Despite the extra effort, this weeklong stay in Jenera achieved very little toward securing any indictments.

By November 1917 the German Americans of Jenera became painfully aware of the ongoing investigation. Chief Donnell, while still upset at the lack of indictments, "feels that indirectly our activities has [sic] produced good." Rev. Gauss "has suddenly had a change of heart and reported to Theodore Bayless, County Chairman, 50 food pledge cards."<sup>75</sup> Trinity Lutheran Church also published a resolution in the county newspapers expressing their patriotism and specifically denying alleged rumors that Gauss "ever designated resistance to law or to our land." This changed attitude was more genuine than the investigators perceived. In a private letter to one of his congregation members in the army, Gauss urged him to "try to be a good soldier, do your duties with joy and show that you, as a Christian boy, learned to obey your officers." Gauss also told the soldier, "nothing new and interesting has happened here since

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<sup>74</sup> R.E. Pfeiffer Report, 11 and 13 Oct. 1917, OG 20186.

<sup>75</sup> Robert E. Pfeiffer Report, 15 Nov. 1917, OG 20186.

your departure," conveniently leaving out the widespread investigation of the town.<sup>76</sup> Due to this changed nature of the citizens of Jenera, any further investigations would likely reveal few ongoing disloyal activities. The Department of Justice and APL thus changed their approach; they now sought out loyal citizens in the area who could give testimony of previous disloyalty. While their search revealed many offenses, this type of evidence held less weight in the court of law.

The investigation found several witnesses who testified against Gauss. George Turner, a loyal barber in Jenera, claimed that Gauss, who had never previously conversed with Turner, confronted him while he was standing in front of a store in August 1917 and "read from a book written by Henderson, which book is well known and supposed to be against the Allies."<sup>77</sup> Reverend Gauss opened the book on the street and read a selection as follows: "It wasn't so about [Germany] cutting off hands and dismembering women and children." Gauss then allegedly told Turner, "You don't like that, do you barber? That's in favor of Germany. We know what you talk about in your shop." He also claimed that Gauss and his fellow Germans often could be seen "standing in a very heated discussion, shaking their hands and talking in animated conversation....The instant an American walks up this conversation will stop immediately." Alvin Reeder, a "staunch American," informed investigators that Gauss told him "[We] are getting tired of the people saying that the Germans here are burning grain elevators, blowing up ships, destroying shipyards, planting bombs, etc., and they are not going to stand for it much longer. There is one fellow in this town that has already gone too far and this person has had his day." Reeder construed this statement as a threat to the individual who spread those stories. Peter Bormuth of Jenera made an affidavit that Gauss claimed that President Wilson ought to be shot. Investigators appreciated this testimony, but looked for stronger evidence to convict Gauss with violation of the Espionage Act.

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<sup>76</sup> John Gauss to Pvt. John Marquart, 14 Oct. 1917, Gauss Family Records.

<sup>77</sup> L.M. Cantrell Report, 17 March 1918, OG 20186.

The "star witness" in the case against Gauss became Oren J. Urban, a twenty-six year old APL agent and drafted soldier. Urban recorded many conversations he had with Gauss which proved his disloyalty. Shortly after he was drafted, Gauss allegedly told him, "You will not have to go to war. Wilson will back down on the attitude he has taken against Germany." Urban, instead of being reassured, claimed he took offense and declared he was going to France either way. Gauss then told him, "None of the Americans will ever get to Germany—they will be sunk on the ocean by submarines and they should be sunk, for we're meddling in something that isn't our business."<sup>78</sup> This conversation had no witnesses, but another one in a jewelry store did, Urban remembered "that Gauss said he had just returned from Wisconsin and that [Urban] should not believe the American papers."<sup>79</sup> This statement set off another "hot argument" between the two. Urban then reported activities at Trinity's church choir practices, where Gauss allegedly said, "Germany never intended to come over here."<sup>80</sup> Since Urban was supposed to leave for camp in mid-May, agent William Cuff suggested a deferment for Urban because of his importance to the case against Gauss.<sup>81</sup>

On 11 April 1918, the Justice Department issued warrants for the arrest of Gauss and three others in Jenera. Two days later, agents flooded the town. A report had surfaced that "a large quantity of arms and ammunition were stored in the Lutheran Church."<sup>82</sup> These were reported to be in such sufficient quantity as to "blow up the whole town."<sup>83</sup> The church was searched "from the cellar to the tower, also barn in the rear of church, and Rev. Gauss' home, but found nothing in the line of arms and ammunition." After this fruitless search, agent M.F.

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<sup>78</sup> *United States v. John Gauss*, The United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, 7-12 October 1918.

<sup>79</sup> William A. Cuff Report, 23 April 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>80</sup> William A. Cuff Report, 25 April 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>81</sup> William A. Cuff Report, 10 Sep. 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>82</sup> M.F. Cantillon Report, 13 April 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>83</sup> *Lima News*, 15 April 1918.

Cantillon requested Gauss to accompany him to the post office, where he met United States Marshall Bartley. Bartley then served the warrants on the four men present, whereby he took the prisoners to Toledo, with Cantillon "acting as guard." After setting a "not guilty" plea, Gauss was detained in jail. The United States Commissioner set the bond for the four men at \$90,000. Adjusting for inflation, this amount equates to a bail of over one million dollars in 2012. Members of Gauss's congregation raised this exorbitant sum within two days and bailed out their minister and his fellow prisoners. This development perturbed one agent, who complained he had been warned "in the case Rev. Gauss was arrested the Pro-Germans would furnish all the money Gauss needed."<sup>84</sup>

Now set free, Gauss began setting up his defense. First, he attempted to discern what had been said about him in testimony. He visited Bixel's Jewelry store and asked the owner, David Bixel, if he remembered anything from his reported conversation with Urban. Bixel told Gauss that he did not remember the specifics, but that from the conversation he figured Gauss to be pro-German. Gauss replied, "That is a conclusion, you can't go by conclusions...Don't you know that my wife is sick, don't you know what this means to me?"<sup>85</sup> Instead of this plea melting Bixel's heart, he reported this conversation to the Department of Justice. Gauss also called Chris Arras of Jenera over the telephone and asked him if he had ever said anything to Arras which might be actionable. Arras could not recall anything specific. After he hung up the phone, Arras instantly received another call from an APL agent. The agent "took Arras by surprise when he asked him what it was Gauss had said over the telephone." Arras did not give any particular information, only that "Gauss is very much worried over the predicament he finds himself in."<sup>86</sup> Gauss had other reasons to be worried as well. His original attorney, Mr. Campbell, did not

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<sup>84</sup> William A. Cuff Report, 23 April 1918, OG 20186. This figure is nearly twice the amount that Jenera raised for Liberty Bonds throughout the entire war.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 2-3.

<sup>86</sup> William A. Cuff Report, 25 April 1918, OG 20186.

enthusiastically work for the interests of the defendants, even later telling investigators that he "believed them to be guilty of disloyal activities." Even though they already paid him \$3,200, they left Campbell and switched to the law firm Graves & Stahl, who had earned a reputation for defending individuals indicted under the Espionage Act. When informing Campbell that they must seek other counsel, Campbell told the defendants to "plumb to Hell."<sup>87</sup>

The prosecutors also made the most of their time to build the case against Gauss. Nearly every aspect of Gauss's life became material for the investigation. While following Gauss, one agent spotted him "shooting a squirrel out of season."<sup>88</sup> Gauss received a \$25 fine for this infraction. Agents reported that Gauss three times received a package from Milwaukee, "about one foot square and 18 inches long." After further digging, they discovered these packages "were mailed out by the Northwest Publishing Co., Milwaukee, Wisc."<sup>89</sup> The packages contained German language books for the school at Trinity Lutheran. Investigating further, agent Cantrell reported "Gauss teaches German and German ideas to about 20 German children in that settlement, in the basement of his church on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of every week...He is supposed to be preparing them for confirmation under the Lutheran Church principles."<sup>90</sup> This school especially irked the "stanch Americans" because it kept the children out of the public schools the last two days of each week, where they could be taught true American ideals. During this time period, Mr. Urban—the father of the star witness—and other prominent men from the county travelled to Columbus in an effort to have the school discontinued. Cantrell lamented that they "were unsuccessful in this effort."

The prosecution anticipated that the defense would use Gauss's record with the Red Cross and Liberty Loans to portray his loyalty. Thus they attempted to undercut this strategy.

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<sup>87</sup> T.H.B. Patterson Report, 10 October 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>88</sup> "Ohio Briefs," *Newark Daily Advocate*, 12 Dec. 1917.

<sup>89</sup> L.M. Cantrell Report, 17 March 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>90</sup> L.M. Cantrell Report, 26 March 1918, OG 20186.

They found witnesses to testify that Gauss was not emotionally involved in his Red Cross work. J.O. Shine, an APL agent and distributor of express mail in Jenera, reported that in December 1917 Gauss asked him if he had any express for him. Shine responded that he had an express bill from Cleveland, but the package had not arrived, to which Gauss responded, "Oh, well, that doesn't make any difference anyhow. It's only that Red Cross stuff." Gauss made this comment in the presence of two visitors from out of town. One of them spoke up after Gauss left, which was included in the report as follows, "What sort of a g- d- s- o- b- is that fellow? If he would come into our town and say such a thing he would get his g- d- head knocked off."<sup>91</sup> Roy Thomas, a farmer from out of town, reported that while Gauss was distributing Red Cross literature, he handed a leaflet to Thomas and said, "The biggest piece of hypocrisy about this thing is that they...claim to treat friend and foe alike, but they let the German soldiers bleed to death."<sup>92</sup> The prosecution also tried to prove that all monetary displays of patriotism only served a defensive purpose. The first and second Liberty Loan drives, which took place before the investigation, accrued a combined \$1,700 from Jenera. The Third Liberty Loan took place well after the investigation became apparent, and \$46,000 was raised.<sup>93</sup> Investigators tirelessly worked around the clock until the final days to pursue this evidence. They were able to hand in their report one day before the trial began.

The long awaited trial commenced on 7 October 1918. Having invested countless hours toward putting Gauss behind bars, several APL and Justice Department agents attended the trial. The developments in the trial both shocked and outraged them. One agent who attended the opening statements bemoaned "the liberty allowed Scott Stahl of the firm Graves & Stahl," who took over an hour and "was permitted to make a complete argument of the case in which

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<sup>91</sup> L.M. Cantrell Report, 17 March 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>92</sup> William A. Cuff Report, 25 April 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>93</sup> T.H.B. Patterson Report, 5 Oct. 1918, OG 20186.

he mentioned names of the witnesses that would be called by the prosecution and informed the jury how he would contradict their evidence."<sup>94</sup> The agent had never in his twenty years of experience "heard an attorney mention the witnesses and state his methods of contradicting their evidence" in the opening statements. The following days proved to be worse. United States Commissioner Frank G. Crane commented to an APL agent, "I left that Gauss trial and think it's the most unusual trial I ever heard, I listened to that man for 45 minutes preaching a sermon on the stand to impress the jury with his innocence." The agent responded, "I understand that yesterday he was upon the stand for an hour and a half doing the same thing." Crane then shared an encounter with Scott Stahl, Gauss's attorney. Coming up an elevator together, Crane asked Stahl, "Well, is your client innocent?" Stahl "looked at me with that grin of his and said, 'All our clients are innocent,' as much as to say that all a defendant needed was to retain the firm of Scott & Graves in order to be found not guilty."<sup>95</sup>

After the closing statements, the jury deliberated for eighteen hours, then returned with a verdict of "not guilty." The ruling left the investigators completely dejected, and they found little solace that the affair was "being criticized by various persons about the Federal Courts."<sup>96</sup> After the verdict, even the judge mentioned his surprise and admonished Gauss to "avoid further suspicion by adopting anglicized [church] services."<sup>97</sup> Having failed to catch their big fish, the Justice Department dropped all charges against the other defendants.

Gauss could not rest easy yet. On Friday, 18 October 1918, a "trophy train" carrying roughly twenty-five marines stopped at Jenera to display souvenirs from the war. One marine addressed the crowd that gathered: "I have been told by many people that Jenera is a pro-German place. My plan would be not to line these pro-Germans up against the wall and shoot

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<sup>94</sup> T.H.B. Patterson Report, 7 October 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>95</sup> T.H.B. Patterson Report, 10 Oct. 1918, OG 20186.

<sup>96</sup> T.H.B. Patterson Report, 9 Oct. 1918, OG 2018.

<sup>97</sup> "Pastor is Found Not Guilty of Disloyalty," *Toledo Blade*, 12 October 1918.

them but to place them in their wooden shoes and...send them back over to Germany."<sup>98</sup> After smashing the saloon sign in town—the only saloon in Hancock County—into "toothpicks," a party of ten marines were shown to Gauss's home. Gauss had just returned from a synod conference and was unaware of any trophy train in town. One of the marines entered the home to find Gauss tending to his wife and four daughters, who were ill with influenza. The marine ordered Gauss to accompany them to the trophy train. They marched him down the street and placed him in front of the train, demanding that he must buy another \$100 worth of Liberty bonds. Gauss replied that he already bought all that he was able. It was then suggested that Gauss could meet this requirement by taking out a loan, to which Gauss agreed. After signing, Gauss was permitted to leave, whereby the marines forced two other Jenera men to do likewise and then left town.

While one of the most dramatic examples, Jenera was one of countless "German islands" that were harassed and investigated during the war. Their existence alone irritated anxious public officials who labeled these towns as proof of the failure of Americanization. The smashing of the saloon sign also epitomized their frustration at these immigrant groups' failure to conform to "American" morality. The attempt to shut down Trinity Lutheran's confirmation school suggests the religion's association in the minds of investigators with foreign customs and morals. Lutheran ministers also served as a public symbol toward those ends. Rev. Gauss's electric personality, however, made his a higher profile case than many of the others. His perseverance also allowed him to weather this storm. In the summer of 1919 he followed the advice of the judge and started supplementary English services at Trinity.<sup>99</sup> He served the congregation for a total of fifty-two years, and later became president of the Michigan District of the Wisconsin Synod. He passed away at Jenera on New Year's Eve, 1949.

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<sup>98</sup> "World War I," *The Echo Examiner* 10:36 (Winter 2011), Eagle Creek Historical Organization.

<sup>99</sup> John Gauss Biographical Folder, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Archives.

### Rev. Otto Engel

Two days after President Wilson delivered his war message to Congress, G.B. Horner of Ripon, Wisconsin forwarded to the White House peace propaganda he received from the American Liberty League, whose president was Otto Engel.

Horner believed that "it is likely that this man Engel is being watched," yet he wanted to ensure that the government was aware of his activities.<sup>100</sup> Horner need not worry. For good measure, numerous other circulars from the American Liberty League poured into Washington from other disgusted citizens.



4.12: Rev. Otto Engel

The Justice Department was then forwarded all these complaints, whereupon they added them to their already existing file on Engel. The subsequent investigation of the minister proved to be the most thorough and intrusive for any member of the Wisconsin Synod. The Justice Department placed such a high importance on Engel's case that Bureau director A. Bruce Bielaski was consistently briefed on its undertakings. The thoroughness of the investigation of Engel exemplifies the importance the Justice Department placed on proper wartime opinion and speech.<sup>101</sup>

Less than a week after the declaration, operative A.L.S. travelled to Milwaukee on a fact-finding mission for the Justice Department. He interviewed Henry C. Campbell of the *Milwaukee Journal*, who supplied A.L.S. with the particulars. Engel, the pastor at St. Jacob Lutheran Church in Norwalk, Wisconsin, was "a young man, 32 years old, 5'7 or 8" tall, 170 lbs., dark hair and a clean cut fellow."<sup>102</sup> Engel was born in Lodz, Poland, and he "organized the American Liberty

<sup>100</sup> G.F. Horner to President Wilson, 4 April 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>101</sup> Henry P. Hamilton to Col. James Stewart, 6 April 1917, OG 5025; Jessie A. Clason to Paul Husting, 6 April 1917, OG 5025; J. Clabaugh to J.N. Jefferson, 14 April 1917, OG 5025; J.Clabaugh to R.D. Hood, 14 April 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>102</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, 10 April 1917, OG 5025.

League in an attempt to preserve peace." After discovering that Engel was also currently visiting Milwaukee, A.L.S. sought out Engel and questioned him about his activities. Engel "declined to state how much money had been spent by his league or how many members he had," stating his records were all up at Norwalk. While A.L.S. wrote dismissively of Engel's case, Military Intelligence Director Marlborough Churchill felt convinced that Engel was a high profile target:

Engel is somewhat of a confused character, so that at first sight he may be considered as a harmless idealist, an eccentric, whose observation and investigation does not pay. But I have no doubt on account of my personal knowledge, that he is a rabid pro-German, who would not even spare his own life, if he can aid Germany and German agents.<sup>103</sup>

Now aware that he was being watched, the prudent move would have been to tread lightly. Engel, however, remained combative. A letter, signed "A Disgusted American," was furtively sent from Engel to select United States Representatives, calling the proposed Espionage Bill "a reign of terrorism....Every man's liberty, property, right of ordinary free speech, or opinion is henceforth without constitutional guarantee....If we have no more constitutional rights then abolish the Constitution."<sup>104</sup> He then drafted a letter to his chief writer, Ernst Goerner, urging that the German Americans "must be mobilized for this time that is coming...We have formed an American Legal Defense Committee, whose object it will be to protect those people who are pestered by ultra-patriots."<sup>105</sup> Engel refused to disband the American Liberty



*4.13: Bureau Chief A. Bruce Bielaski personally oversaw investigations into Revs. Ed Guenther and Otto Engel.*

League, and continued to collect and distribute pamphlets which bemoaned the high cost of living and other ill effects of the war. He travelled twice to Minneapolis to take part in a

<sup>103</sup> Marlborough Churchill to A. Bruce Bielaski, 28 September 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>104</sup> Otto Engel to Senators or Representatives, 14 April 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>105</sup> Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 24 April 1917, OG 5025.

convention of the People's Council, the organization which opposed the draft and helped instigate the episode in the New Ulm area.<sup>106</sup>

All this while, Engel's indignation for the "ultra-patriots" refused to abate. In personal correspondence with Goerner, he called them "howlers," "conspirators," "professional snoopers," "insolents," and "traitors," which worked for the "establishment of an absolute tyranny."<sup>107</sup> One of the publications of the Liberty League, "Shameful Facts," exposed the actions of the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, "the pack that claims patriotism as its own." He even taunted their efforts, telling Goerner, "The Wisconsin State Council of Defense wants to get at me...this affair can become interesting." In February 1918, when telling Goerner of a "government spy" in Norwalk, Engel claimed he was there "probably to find out if I am a descendant of a Chinese Prince."<sup>108</sup> Around this time, Engel started "collecting material pertaining to the curtailing of the rights of German Americans, including cases in which German school-books and manuscripts or other property [were] being destroyed, contrary to law." Engel ultimately planned to write a book of his discoveries.<sup>109</sup>

Investigators increased their vigor in 1918 when they attempted to decipher Engel's mailings. The Wisconsin Synod's Northwestern Publishing House received a visit "with a view of ascertaining the extent of dealings Engel may have had with them."<sup>110</sup> The publishing house claimed it only executed one order for printing for Engel, which were eight hundred postcards carrying a poem entitled "Pirate Island," which was "a typical expression of German Anglo-phobia [*sic*]." These were produced during the neutrality period, so it did not violate the Espionage Act.

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<sup>106</sup> Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 5 August 1917, OG 5025; See Chapter 3 for the relationship of the People's Council in the New Ulm Episode.

<sup>107</sup> Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 25 November 1917, OG 5025; Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 27 March 1917, OG 5025; Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 18 April 1918, OG 5025; Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner 7 March 1918, OG 5025; Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 3 December 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>108</sup> Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 25 February 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>109</sup> Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 1 March 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>110</sup> John E. Ferris Report, 16 March 1918, OG 5025.

Not completely satisfied, an agent returned ten months later and personally inspected the records of the publishing house. Finding only religious purchases by Engel, it became apparent the publishing house was a dead end.<sup>111</sup> Also busy during this time was John Kerrigan, the postmaster at Norwalk, who recorded every piece of Engel's incoming and outgoing mail. He informed the Justice Department that "on several occasions he sent out five hundred first class letters at one time, and once he sent out about one thousand letters."<sup>112</sup> Engel often evaded observation by receiving his mail directly through the railroad station agent, Charles Cronk. Cronk was a member of Engel's American Liberty League and in sympathy with his work. Frustrated, investigators then decided to intercept Engel's mail, noting that "several pieces of printed matter have been withdrawn from the mail and turned over to the United States Attorney."<sup>113</sup> Postmasters across the country, from Seattle to New York, intercepted mailings from Engel and rerouted them to Washington.

In April 1918, APL operative C. Wesley Bong and Rev. J.G. Smith of Tomah, Wisconsin conspired to go undercover to catch Engel in disloyal talk. Rev. Smith travelled to Norwalk and addressed the expectedly unreceptive crowd on the subject "Why We Entered the War." At the end of his presentation, as planned, he opened up the floor for questions. As a "member of the audience," operative Bong vociferously asked Smith questions which "branded [Bong] as a red-hot pro-German socialist."<sup>114</sup> Bong asked these prearranged questions in a way to allow Smith to give him a good drubbing. This maneuver had its desired effect. Having gained the confidence of those present, Bong and N. Neuman of Norwalk engaged in a conversation about the war. Bong pleaded ignorance on many of the war questions and asked Neuman for information to avoid future embarrassments. Also uninformed, Neuman was unable to give information, but

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<sup>111</sup> Leo J. Brennan Report, 11 January 1919, OG 5025.

<sup>112</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 5 April 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>113</sup> J.F. Nicholson Report, 21 May 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>114</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 5 April 1918, OG 5025.

suggested "that if I would ask the minister that had charge of the brick church in Norwalk, he could give me the information." So far, everything worked according to plan.

The next morning, Bong visited Engel's home. Bong reported that he attempted to appear "much worried and disturbed over the publicity I had given myself by making the questions at the meeting the night before, and said to him that I guess I had 'slopped over' pretty badly...that I wanted to ask him some questions...so that I could have a further talk with Rev. Smith."<sup>115</sup> Engel turned suddenly to him and said, "Mr. Bong, you are a stranger to me." Bong reassured him that he visited on Neumann's suggestion and that he was trustworthy. Persuaded, Engel asked Bong what he wanted to know. Bong asked Engel concerning a few "commonplace and unimportant matters." Engel "seemed disposed to dismiss the matter with a wave of the hand," and said, "Oh, it is very easy to answer questions like that." Yet he still refused to give Bong information, telling him "We are in war now and it doesn't matter what a man is at heart, he must appear to be loyal." Engel then gave some advice to Bong concerning his fake life insurance business, and Bong went on his way.

In the last statement of his report, Bong informed his superiors that "Engel is moving to Randolph, Wisconsin."<sup>116</sup> Indeed, Engel had recently accepted a call to Friedens (Peace) Lutheran Church in Randolph, and moved within a week of Bong's investigation. The *Gemeindeblatt* recorded Engel's installation in Randolph on 7 April 1918, and closed with a prayer that "God put on him many blessings!"<sup>117</sup> Since this move crossed Justice Department district lines, it caused an entire overhaul of the investigation. Supervision transferred from Agent W.N. Parker of the Western Wisconsin District to Agent R.B. Spencer of the Eastern

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>117</sup> "Im Auftrage," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:9 (28 April 1918), 140. In the Wisconsin Synod system, individual congregations themselves make a "call," or request, to certain synod ministers whenever they have a vacancy. The minister, Engel in this case, deliberates this new "call" and current "call." It is unlikely that the Randolph congregation knew about the ongoing investigation when they "called" Engel.

Wisconsin District. Spencer, the more aggressive of the two, was brought to speed on the investigation through memorandums prepared by Bureau chief A. Bruce Bielaski and Military Intelligence director Marlborough Churchill, who also requested that "a cover be placed on his mail" at his new address.<sup>118</sup>

On 25 August 1918, Engel preached a dedication sermon for the new church of St. Johannes (John) in Pardeeville, Wisconsin.<sup>119</sup> Around the same time, Agent Spencer made final preparations for a raid of Engel's premises. Less than a week later, a U.S. Commissioner issued a search warrant, and three agents descended upon Randolph and entered Engel's home. They conducted a "painstaking and thorough search of the entire premises and residence of Rev. Otto Engel."<sup>120</sup> Pamphlets, books, letters, circulars, and other correspondence were taken—"five large sacksfull"—and brought to Milwaukee for inventory and translation.<sup>121</sup> Not satisfied that the search was thorough enough, four agents returned to Randolph ten days later, "where a further search was made of the personal effects and everything in the dwelling occupied by Rev. Otto Engel."<sup>122</sup> The agents then worked their way over to the church, going through "approximately fifteen thousand pounds" of printed matter and newspapers from various parts of the world, and also the library of about two thousand volumes. Everything that appeared to be of a contraband nature was brought to Milwaukee. Still unsatisfied, agents made a *third* raid of Engel's home on 14 September 1918, this time removing Engel's entire card index system from his home.<sup>123</sup> Since most of the confiscated material was in German, numerous agents were assigned to translation and laboriously worked this assignment for months. Several letters between Engel and Germans were unearthed and inspected, and not-yet-mailed pamphlets

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<sup>118</sup> M. Churchill to A. Bruce Bielaski, 10 August 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>119</sup> "Kircheweih," *Gemeindeblatt*, 29 September 1918, 53:20, p. 311.

<sup>120</sup> Wm. H. Steiner Report, 1 September 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>121</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, 1 September 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>122</sup> Wm. H. Steiner Report, 12 September 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>123</sup> Wm. H. Steiner Report, 14 September 1918, OG 5025.

were collected and stacked. His largest collection was about 400 pamphlets entitled "The German-Americans in War," criticizing home front policing. These and others were taken into evidence.<sup>124</sup>

After the searches, Special Agent in Charge Spencer arranged his most daring maneuver yet. He struck a deal with Ernst Goerner, who was Engel's most prominent writer for the American Liberty League. If Goerner could accompany an agent on a mission which secured evidence from Engel, his punishment would be reduced. Goerner and a "confidential informant" arrived in Randolph early morning on Sunday, 29 September 1918. They took separate trains from Milwaukee to not raise any suspicion, and waited outside Friedens Lutheran Church until the services were over. The two met Engel around noon as he was leaving the church. The informant reported that Engel "was very disappointed that Goerner came to visit him, as he said the town was so small, and that the secret service knew of every step he made."<sup>125</sup> Goerner asked Engel to have an interview with him and his "friend," but Engel "said he was very busy, it being Sunday." He did, however, agree to meet Goerner at a hotel at 3 p.m., "and told us in a sneering way that if we could stomach some Liberty Bond and patriotic talk, that we should come to the aviation field at 2:30 in the afternoon." At the field, Engel gave a talk in honor of a lieutenant belonging to his congregation who was in Randolph with the "flying machine" that he piloted. Engel addressed the large crowd for fifteen minutes, where "he spoke mostly about the loyalty of the Lutherans, and of the Germans."

Although he agreed to meet Goerner at 3 o'clock, Engel did not arrive at the hotel until 4:15.<sup>126</sup> He took them to a private room to have a conversation. Once in the room, the agent reported that Engel "told us that he had only been asked that morning after church to make the

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<sup>124</sup> Wm. H. Steiner Report, 4 October 1918, OG 5025; Frank F. Wolfgram Report, 7 November 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>125</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 1 October 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>126</sup> This was likely a calculated move to reduce the amount of time he would meet with Goerner.

talk at the aviation field, and that he jumped at the chance, he said he would take every chance he could get to do any patriotic speaking in the town in order to clear himself." The informant also observed that "I never saw a man as nervous as Engel was while we were in the hotel, his hands shook so that he could not hold a piece of paper." The informant asked Engel what made him so nervous. Engel was "surprised to think that I knew he was in such a state," and then said that "the secret service people knew where he was that very minute...that they have watched him for the past three years. That he was receiving no mail...[and] that a couple of men in his church had already asked him who the two strangers were." Engel then told them what they already knew, that his place had been raided three times, and he "partly blamed Goerner for his troubles." Engel told Goerner that he "was too CARELESS," and also too reckless in distributing his propaganda. Engel claimed he appealed to Governor Philipp after the raids but it did not do him much good. He was certain he would be indicted, and that "he would have to make arrangements for his family, before they were indicted." After this statement, the informant inserted in the report, "My opinion is that he might attempt to make a getaway."<sup>127</sup>

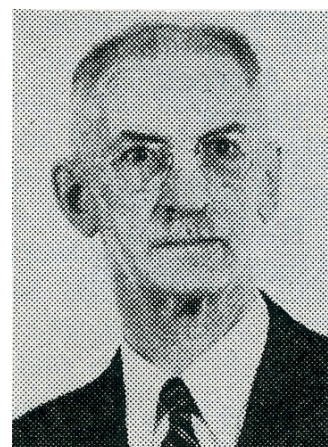
At this point, Engel "was more nervous than ever," and, knowing that Goerner's train left at 4:45, he often checked his watch and reminded the visitors that they should be leaving. Before they left, both men quickly tried to secure any evidence against Engel. Goerner handed Engel some letters and asked him to read his views on the draft law, but "Engel was so nervous that he could not hold the paper, and did therefore not read it." The informant then asked Engel which of his activities he considered the most damaging, to which he replied his international correspondence from before the war which were taken in the raids. Engel then said his greatest fear was that other pastors would be implicated from his correspondence with them. Running out of time, Goerner and the informant had to leave. Goerner gave Engel the address of a man

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 206-210.

named Pearson through whom he could reach Goerner. On their way back to the train, the informant judgmentally scribbled, "There are a bunch of autos in the yard of the church. No auto-less Sunday in Randolph."<sup>128</sup>

Engel's greatest fears were realized in early October when the Justice Department simultaneously raided the homes of four others—including three Lutheran pastors—on account of their acquaintance with Engel. Revs. J.J. Bizer of Brillion, Wisconsin and William Stehling of Waupun, Wisconsin had their homes and churches scrupulously searched, but "nothing of a contraband nature was found."<sup>129</sup> WELS minister Herman Zimmermann of West Salem was also given a surprise search because it "appears he has been closely connected with Otto Engel." Both his home and Christ Lutheran Church were thoroughly searched, and the agents found "several letters, pamphlets, magazines, and books...considered to be of value to the Department." These items were seized and taken to Madison. Agent J.C. McFetridge then interrogated Zimmerman concerning



4.14: Rev. Herman R. Zimmermann

his relationship to Engel. Zimmermann claimed he recently "had not been in regular contact with Otto Engel, nor has he received for distribution from Engel any pamphlets" for pro-German propaganda. Instead of trying to clear himself by disowning Engel, Zimmermann stated "that Engel is a man who had been very much wronged, as Engel was far more loyal than lots of others."<sup>130</sup> This led McFetridge to report that "regardless of subject's statements to the contrary, Agent feels satisfied that subject has been closely connected with Engel." Engel's

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 209-210.

<sup>129</sup> Frank F. Wolfgram Report, 2 October 1918, OG 5025; Wm. H. Steiner Report, 2 October 1918, OG 5025; H.W. McLarty Report, 2 October 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>130</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, 2 October 1918, OG 5025.

family members did not escape the investigation. An agent inspected the bank accounts of Julius Engel, the father of Otto, and concluded that "Julius likely helped fund [Otto's] activities."<sup>131</sup>

Eventually, the Department considered nearly all of Engel's acquaintances as material witnesses, including children. Agents travelled to Norwalk to find Engel's former catechism students. One searched the town and found twelve year old Phillip Koepke, who took private lessons from Engel during the winter of 1917-1918. Koepke told investigators that Engel was always busy reading and writing, but he had no idea for what purpose.<sup>132</sup> Eleven other former students were tracked down and questioned, their ages ranging from twelve to sixteen. One twelve year old student admitted that she helped Engel fold circulars right before war was declared, and another claimed she addressed some envelopes. Gretchen Neuman admitted to the most work for Engel. She "did typewriting last summer, addressed envelopes, and also wrote some personal letters, though she cannot identify the letters she wrote as she did not put her initials or any other mark on the letters."<sup>133</sup> When asked to identify any circulars, none of the students were able to. Most of the students appeared short in their answers to the agents, likely out of fear and intimidation. The interrogation of young adolescents exemplifies how far the Justice Department was willing to go to secure an indictment for Otto Engel.

At this point, Special Agent in Charge Spencer received a report that Engel "was in a very nervous state and would make a full statement to a representative of this Department if he was approached."<sup>134</sup> Spencer assigned himself the task of the visit, and brought along a stenographer. Finding Engel at his house, he advised Engel that "there was no compulsion on him to make a statement." Engel "appeared to be very nervous" but made the statement that "he had not knowingly done anything since...the declaration of war against Germany, which

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<sup>131</sup> Wm. H. Steiner Report, 29 January 1919, OG 5025.

<sup>132</sup> W.D. Bird Report, 15 November 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>133</sup> Frank F. Wolfgram Report, 27 November 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>134</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 4 October 1918, OG 5025.

according to his heart and conscience, was hostile to his country." He told Spencer that he was willing to answer any specific questions concerning his international correspondence. Spencer did not demand explanation on account that "evidence against Engel looking to a violation of the Espionage Act seems to be strong and the disclosure of the Government's evidence did not seem to be wise at the time." Engel then repeatedly stated that in the past few months he had been making patriotic speeches and doing everything he could to assist the government in war work. Several times, Engel asked Spencer for advice as to how he should proceed or what he could do in the future to make himself right with the government. "No advice, of course, was given." Spencer on the whole found the interview unsatisfactory. Before he left, he chastised Engel, saying that if his conscience truly was clear concerning his activities, "then he must be a German and not an American."

Fearing an indictment to be inevitable, Engel approached a WELS lawyer, Ernst von Briesen, who had previously criticized Engel for taking part in politics. Engel asked von Briesen if he would take care of his legal matters should he be indicted by the Grand Jury. Von Briesen refused, however, and told him he "did not wish to have anything to do with matters of this kind."<sup>135</sup> In another private conversation, Engel told an acquaintance that he expected an indictment at any time.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, the Justice Department at one point seemed as assured of an indictment as Engel. However, after all the translating and undercover investigations, the Department was never able to uncover a "smoking gun" which could prove a clear violation of the Espionage Act or Sedition Act. In late November, one month after confident reports to his superiors, Agent Spencer admitted the case to be "very weak."<sup>137</sup> In desperation, Military Intelligence Director Churchill even suggested to Bielaski that he "ascertain Engel's citizenship

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<sup>135</sup> Frank Wolfgram Report, 18 February 1919, OG 5025.

<sup>136</sup> Frank Wolfgram Report, 28 February 1919, OG 5025.

<sup>137</sup> R.B. Spencer to A. Bruce Bielaski, 25 November 1918, OG 5025.

with a view to interning him in the event that no more stringent action can be taken in the case."<sup>138</sup> In early 1919, with the war over and passions subsiding, investigators made one last ditch effort to prove a connection between Engel and the German government. One witness even testified that Engel wrote German Attaché Heinrich Albert in 1916 requesting propaganda material, and that the German government even included Engel in their list of German agents and sympathizers. Not only was this witness somewhat unreliable, but this action took place during neutrality.<sup>139</sup> The Engel case, at one point roaring hot, continued to dwindle as the months of 1919 passed. The Justice Department consoled themselves by becoming fully occupied in the new communist scare.

After enduring years of torment, Engel could finally begin to place this episode behind him. In 1923, he became the synod's first foreign missionary, as he was assigned to work among the war weary Germans in Lodz, Poland.<sup>140</sup> In a twist of irony, Rev. John Gauss, who also received a thorough investigation, wrote to the Department of State claiming Engel's "mission is of a purely religious nature."<sup>141</sup> When applying for his passport, however, a reverberation of the former investigation arose, as an investigator noted that during the war Engel was "considered a pro-German and was a member of the Worlds Peace Association."<sup>142</sup> After deliberation, it was eventually decided to disregard this infraction and allow Engel to do his work. He was especially active at this mission, and even established the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Poland, which broke away from the Augsburg church, the state-subsidized Lutheran church of Poland.

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<sup>138</sup> M. Churchill to A. Bruce Bielaski, 21 October 1918, OG 5025;

<sup>139</sup> M. Churchill to A. Bruce Bielaski, 28 September 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>140</sup> Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 164, 166.

<sup>141</sup> John Gauss to Department of State, January 1922.

<sup>142</sup> M. Adam to M. Brist, 31 January 1922.

Engel's later work in the spiritual and physical relief efforts in Poland are well-documented in Wisconsin Synod history.<sup>143</sup>

While fighting for a cause to benefit his people, Engel put himself far too deeply into the political spotlight for a Wisconsin Synod preacher. Ernest von Briesen's reprimand shows that not all German Lutherans approved of Engel's extracurricular activities away from the pulpit. However, the Justice Department's obsession for correct public opinion on the home front can hardly find a better archetype than Rev. Engel's case. The cooperation of opposing preachers, postmasters, newspaper editors, and other public figures in the investigation of Engel show how all-encompassing this crusade against dissent could become.

Otto Engel's case was an anomaly to the other investigations of Wisconsin Synod ministers. Most other ministers received attention for activities and statements they made with naive perceptions that they were not being watched. Even those arrested, like John Gauss and Edgar Guenther, conscientiously modified their behavior after it became apparent they had a target on their backs. Engel, on the other hand, continued to protest developments during the war through the American Liberty League, even though he became plainly aware that investigators were watching him. This behavior lasted until the numerous searches of his home and the apparent inevitability of his indictment.

Engel, as with all the synod pastors, could have quashed all suspicions by complying with the perception that religious leaders should serve as propagandists for the war effort. As shown in this segment, agents frequently grilled the "erring" ministers and asked why they refused to act like other ministers and propagate behavior from the pulpit to help win the war. Typically, however, this was where Wisconsin Synod ministers remained most defiant. Not only would this have caused antagonism from members of the congregations, but the Wisconsin Synod jealously

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<sup>143</sup> Otto Engel, "The Wisconsin Synod Mission in Poland," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 6:2, Fall 1988, 37-47.

guarded its autonomy from the state. Additionally, most could not stomach to scrap the sermon topic covering the doctrine of spiritual justification and replace it with the doctrine of food conservation, let alone preach the virtues of a holy war in Europe. The most an agent could usually hear from the Wisconsin Synod pulpits was a plea to obey the laws of the government in this difficult time. Indeed, even though agents frequented Wisconsin Synod worship services, only two investigations discovered "seditious" activities within the church walls, that being of Emmanuel Palechek and Carl Auerswald. Even in these cases, however, both statements came after the end of the worship service, not from the pulpit. Lastly, these investigations usually deflected into the decadent behavior of the German Lutherans of the community, from the saloon element to the parochial schools and preservation of the German language in the church and community. The overarching theme of these investigative reports became that Americanization had somehow escaped this religious community.

## Chapter 5: Aliens, Slackers, and Lukewarm Americans

As the war effort encompassed Americans to an extent never seen before, nearly every aspect of the lives of German Lutherans came under scrutiny. In an atmosphere where every citizen was expected to do his or her share, Wisconsin Synod members were accused of "slacking" in a myriad of ways. Those not under the umbrella of citizenship had their difficulties compounded. Thus an immigrant community which had been incessantly reminded throughout previous decades of their lack of an American outlook and morality confronted yet another aspect by which they failed the Americanization process. Finally, their frustration and exhaustion—as well as their stubbornness—became apparent at the ballot box in 1918.

### **Alien Enemies**

Still citizens of their former country and technically under an oath of allegiance to the Kaiser, unnaturalized German Americans found themselves in a peculiar situation during the war. Since government officials believed these denizens to be the most probable spies and saboteurs, they felt it necessary to classify and monitor these individuals. In early 1918, after a revival of the ancient 1798 Alien and Sedition Act, all "German alien enemies" were required to fill out registration affidavits, giving information about their birth, family members, real estate, financial holdings, and other information deemed material. They were to take these affidavits and register themselves as an "alien enemy" to U.S. Marshalls around the country. Wisconsin's registration ran from February 4th to the 9th, 1918. Minnesota declared February 25th, 26th, and 27th as "Alien Registration Days."<sup>1</sup> In a telling sign of their opinion about German aliens, some states reused their state penitentiary forms to collect their information, crossing off "Description of Convict" and rewriting "Description of German Alien."<sup>2</sup> The Minnesota

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<sup>1</sup> CPS Proclamation, 103.L.8, Folder 163, CPS Files.

<sup>2</sup> Various DOJ Files, OG 114041.



citizens to keep a more vigilant watch over these particular individuals."<sup>6</sup> The CPS appreciated this idea, writing Marlow that his suggestion "is now under consideration and preparation by authority of the Commission."<sup>7</sup>

All aliens who neglected to register either through ignorance or obstinance were tracked down by the Department of Justice. John and Minnie Racisperger, Wisconsin Synod members from Portland, Oregon, were among the many who failed. APL agent W.M. Hudson travelled to the Racispergers' home and places of employment, but neither of them could be found. He then tracked down Rev. F.J. Epling, their pastor, and interviewed him to discover their whereabouts.<sup>8</sup> Finding the Racisperger's new location in Epling's records, he notified the Sheriff at Hillsboro, Oregon, who "promised to place the subjects in custody if apprehended."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, as aliens, John and Minnie could not be afforded the protection of constitutional guarantees. Internment could last for an unspecified period of time, or until the end of the war.

Aliens surrendered numerous other rights during the war. If they wished to change their residence to a new registration district, they needed to obtain a permit to do so. This required a screening from the American Protective League. A change in residence without following this process subjected German aliens to arrest and detention for the period of the war, among other penalties.<sup>10</sup> Several Midwestern states which had previously granted suffrage to aliens holding first naturalization papers rescinded these laws. Aliens were also expelled from all ships and boats except public ferries, as well as anything deemed to have military importance, from wharves to railroad depots.<sup>11</sup> Idleness even became illegal. The Wisconsin State Council of

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<sup>6</sup> J.C. Marlow to CPS, 6 April 1918, 103.L.8, Folder 163, CPS Records.

<sup>7</sup> CPS to J.C. Marlow, 8 April 1918, 103.L.8, Folder 163, CPS Records.

<sup>8</sup> W.M. Hudson Report, 27 August 1918, OG 276759.

<sup>9</sup> W.M. Hudson Report, 13 September 1918, OG 276759.

<sup>10</sup> "Notice!" *Gemeindeblatt* 53:19 (16 September 1918), 300.

<sup>11</sup> Joan Jensen, *The Price of Vigilance* (Chicago: RandMcNally, 1968), 166.

Defense displayed posters telling aliens to "Work or Go to Jail."<sup>12</sup> The penalty for listlessness was three months at hard labor. This atmosphere spurred thousands of German aliens to seek citizenship to protect themselves. As Herman Roeder, a Lutheran from Peshtigo, Wisconsin, applied for citizenship, he, like everyone else, received a thorough investigation during the application process. Bureau chief Bielaski told his agent to be especially scrupulous with this German Lutheran, requesting, "Please make a very careful investigation of this party regarding his loyalty."<sup>13</sup> With numerous opportunities to either participate or "slack," Roeder's loyalty could usually be ascertained from his wartime contributions, or lack thereof.



5.2: Herman Roeder's Photograph for his naturalization form.

### Slackers

The Selective Service Act of 1917 subjected men ages 21 through 30 to register for the draft. With Registration Day approaching, the Wisconsin State Council of Defense distributed a circular "To All Drafted Men in the State of Wisconsin," which told these men that "Your government is about to apply the acid test to your manhood and your patriotism."<sup>14</sup> Registration Day passed on 5 June 1917 without a major incident. Nonetheless, an unknown number of slackers—those who failed to register—still roamed the streets, to the abhorrence of patriotic citizens. The matter of rooting out these slackers remained an open question during the early days of the war. During the summer months of 1918, with collective patience waning, the advocates of "slacker raids" saw their dream become reality.

<sup>12</sup> Rutherford Pixley, *Wisconsin in the World War: An Account of the Activities of the Wisconsin Citizens in the Great War* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin War History Company, 1919), 292.

<sup>13</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to R.B. Spencer, 19 November 1918, OG 327164.

<sup>14</sup> Pixley, 119.

The APL supplied the manpower for these raids, in which "the innocent and ignorant conscript and the veiled enemy alike got the largest and swiftest lesson in Americanism this country ever had."<sup>15</sup> Raids targeted public events, movie theaters, and even residential areas. Locales with a high foreign population, particularly German, received first priority. During these raids, agents rounded up all the men who appeared to be within the draft age. Those who carried a registration card were allowed to leave, the rest were taken into custody. The largest slacker raids netted thousands. Simultaneous slacker raids in New York and New Jersey rounded up 32,000 potential slackers. Thousands were brought into custody and examined, whereby 200 slackers were filtered from this group.<sup>16</sup> Slackers in Atlantic City, New Jersey even "jumped into the ocean" rather than being taken into custody.<sup>17</sup> A raid in Racine, Wisconsin gathered 3,000, including "a number of real dodgers and deserters."<sup>18</sup> In Madison, Wisconsin, a carnival at a baseball park was interrupted by a slacker raid, where 360 men were brought into custody for not carrying registration cards. After 360 court sessions, forty-two spent the night in jail. Five of these men—four from out of state—were unable to furnish proper credentials within a week. Agent W.N. Parker reported to Bureau chief Bielaski that the Madison raid "was largely educative, as men of draft age in the city seemed utterly ignorant of the requirement to carry questionnaire receipts with them."<sup>19</sup>

For those within the draft age, a registration card became an essential accessory for protection. Those too young or old to register, but still liable to suspicion, could not be protected in this way. It therefore became essential to carry some proof of age. In August 1918—about a month after the raids began—The *Gemeindeblatt* advertised a "Certificate of Baptism"

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<sup>15</sup> Emerson Hough, *The Web: The Authorized History of the American Protective League* (Chicago: The Reilly & Lee Company, 1919), 144.

<sup>16</sup> *New York Times*, 4 September 1918;

<sup>17</sup> Hough, 406.

<sup>18</sup> W.N. Parker Report, 21 June 1918, OG 16291.

<sup>19</sup> W.N. Parker to A. Bruce Bielaski, 29 July 1918, OG 16291.

for "young men nearing draft age to prove their age."<sup>20</sup> Churches could buy a dozen of these for fifteen cents and distribute them to the young men of their congregation. These certificates were small enough for the young lad to "wear it in an envelope in his pocket." Furthermore, "As it is written in the English language, one also avoids unpleasant remarks, which are often made about the German certificates." This certificate would have come in handy for E.J. Beckmann, a member of Salem Lutheran Church in Milwaukee who was taken into custody by draft officials. Beckmann was a large man, wore a heavy mustache, and "would easily be taken for 30 years of age."<sup>21</sup> Instead, Rev. Hagedorn had to forward a copy of Beckmann's birth records to officials to prove Beckmann was only twenty years old on the registration date. A slacker raid in Minneapolis and St. Paul also netted at least four Lutherans who had to await documents from their churches to prove their birth age. There being no violation, the subjects were released from custody.<sup>22</sup>

Authorities often became aware of alleged slackers through citizen complaints. In September 1918, when the draft registration extended to those of eighteen years, several citizens in Plymouth, Michigan complained to authorities that Albert Minehart was eighteen years of age but did not register. An investigator reported that "there has been so much discussion that the boy is somewhat afraid...he refuses to go to Northville, Michigan for fear the boys in that town will do him violence."<sup>23</sup> A member of the local board requested Albert's mother to come into the office with the boy. Mrs. Minehart produced a baptismal certificate which showed Albert and his twin sister were born September 11, 1901 and baptized by Rev. George Ehnis of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Plymouth, Michigan. This certificate did not convince everyone. Prompted by further complaints, agents sifted through school records and

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<sup>20</sup> "Certificate of Baptism," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:17 (18 August 1918), 271.

<sup>21</sup> John Ferris Report, 8 November 1917, OG 87124.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph J. Joyce Report, 14 August 1918, OG 266865.

<sup>23</sup> A.L. Barkey Report, 21 April 1919, OG 366352;

census reports in a search for conflicting evidence. In two other cases, complaints about Wisconsin Synod members forced investigators to track down Revs. John Brenner of Milwaukee and John Witt of Norfolk, Nebraska, to examine church baptism and confirmation records.<sup>24</sup>

Synod pastors were occasionally accused of doctoring evidence to secure draft exemption for their members. William Raddatz of Doylestown, Wisconsin got himself and his minister into trouble when he submitted an exemption claim on the ground that he was a member of the Lutheran religion, "whose existing creed forbade its members to participate in war in any form."<sup>25</sup> The bottom of this claim included a signed affirmation from Rev. Hugo Koch of St. Johannes Lutheran Church in Doylestown. The State Council of Defense subpoenaed Koch to appear before the Council on 12 September 1917. The alarmed minister claimed he did not willingly make the statement on Raddatz's exemption form. In a sworn statement, Koch claimed he was in Milwaukee when he received a letter from Raddatz requesting him to sign his exemption claim, "and that he, Koch, wrote to W.J. Kirley, cashier of the State Bank of Doylestown," and requested that Kirley sign the exemption using Koch's signature, "on condition that Kirley not sign anything which in his, Kirley's, opinion was not proper."<sup>26</sup> Koch freely admitted there is no teaching of the Lutheran Church which forbids its members from engaging in war. After careful analysis of Koch's signature and letters proving his presence in Milwaukee, Koch was allowed to leave.

While exemption for Lutheran beliefs was not an option, clergy from all denominations received draft exemption. Some believed that German Lutherans took advantage of this situation. A U.S. attorney wrote Bielaski and reported that "German ministers are seeking to have their sons exempted from service by sending them off to school and claiming that they are

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<sup>24</sup> Harry P. Meurer Report, 23 July 1918, OG 256799; Wade A. Wilson Report, 11 June 1917, OG 26693.

<sup>25</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 11 September 1917, OG 66555.

<sup>26</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 12 September 1917, OG 16935.

ministerial candidates, whereas, as a matter of fact they are simply preparatory students and not members of any regular theological seminary or divinity school."<sup>27</sup> Rev. Harvey Kerstetter, of the Methodist-Episcopal Church in Mobridge, South Dakota, alerted authorities of a former German Lutheran minister, F. Wittfaut, who was employed as a bank clerk, but "resigned to re-enter Lutheran work when he learned that the extension of the draft age would include him."<sup>28</sup> He later revealed Wittfaut to be in contact with Wisconsin Synod minister Arthur Blauert, who was helping Wittfaut reenter the ministry.<sup>29</sup> Kerstetter then helped authorities track down the two men for an interview. Documentation of the interview appears to be no longer extant.

Other tactics for improving one's draft status were investigated. Near Antigo, Wisconsin, a report claimed "that there have been some transfers of farms made from father to son with the evident purpose of enabling the sons to make claim for deferred classification and evade the draft."<sup>30</sup> Agents proceeded to Antigo and interviewed five German Lutheran farmers who had made the transfer. Agents inquired about their finances, real estate holdings, farm machinery, and other factors which could help determine if the sons could reasonably claim their parents as dependants. Many of the deferments were allowed to stand, but the investigation eventually spilled over to the Lutheran minister at Antigo. Even marriages were investigated for false motives. Although they were engaged two years, authorities investigated the wedding of Herbert Fritschel and his wife in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They suspected these two rushed their ceremony with an intent to improve Herbert's draft status.<sup>31</sup>

Local boards set the draft status for the eligible men of the locality, and typically did honest work, but sometimes German Lutherans were victimized by receiving a worse draft

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<sup>27</sup> Attorney to A. Bruce Bielaski, 13 August 1917, OG 37083.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. Harvey Kerstetter to E.W. Fiske, 7 September 1918, OG 22490.

<sup>29</sup> Rev. Harvey Kerstetter to J.F. McAuley, 14 September 1918, OG 22490

<sup>30</sup> Harmon Stacy to Julius Rosin, 10 October 1917, OG 67847.

<sup>31</sup> A.A. Viall Report, 1 July 1918, OG 67847.

status than deserved. School teachers were not automatically exempted from the draft, but their inclusion was a rare occurrence. The local board in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, however, took exception with First German Lutheran Church's teacher, Ernest Krause, and he was forced to abandon his students and sail for France.<sup>32</sup> In Reeseville, Wisconsin, Rev. Frederich Raetz filed a formal complaint concerning the local board. In numerous letters, he described the local board's decision to provide deferred classification to a number of English citizens, which in turn moved the members of his congregation into Class I, the most likely to be drafted. Raetz felt this action was done intentionally. To exemplify the prejudice in Reeseville, he included persecutions of his congregation by the local chapter of Wisconsin Loyalty Legion. Because Raetz had been previously investigated for pro-German views, authorities were slow to believe Raetz, and it appears nothing was done to remedy the situation.<sup>33</sup>

In June 1917, Carl Fenska, a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran living in Chicago, drew the attention of investigators by "talking very badly about the United States and the President."<sup>34</sup> People who had come into contact with Fenska claimed he was "Pro-German to the core and probably gathering information for German consumption." Fenska was subpoenaed by the Justice Department, where it became apparent he was no German spy. However, Fenska, a naturalized citizen, appeared to be within the age range for the draft. When asked of his age, Fenska "replied without hesitation, that he was born November 8th, 1886."<sup>35</sup> After a few moments, he stated "with some confusion that he had made a mistake, that he was born November 8th, 1885 in Berlin, Germany." Unfortunately for Fenska, investigators perked their ears to the 1886 date. Upon further investigation, they found that Fenska "was confirmed at a young age in the German Lutheran Church in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, and that his mother was

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<sup>32</sup> WLS Archives, Manitowoc Congregation.

<sup>33</sup> L.E. Sawyer Report, 17 August 1918, OG 273121; Ralph Iazard Report, 30 November 1917, OG 100489.

<sup>34</sup> John P. Wilson Report, 13 June 1917, OG 45176.

<sup>35</sup> Ward E. Thompson Report, 23 July 1917, OG 45176.

now living at that place." The investigation moved to Rhinelander to prove that Fenska was a slacker who lied under oath.

Agent William Steiner visited the Fenska home on 25 July 1917 and found Ida Friday, Carl's sister. Steiner asked Friday if her mother had the birth records of her children. She showed Steiner a German prayer book which contained the names and birth records of the Fenskas on the inside cover. Carl Fenska's date read "Nov. 8, 1885." However, agent Steiner noted, "The date...appeared as though the figure six had been erased, and the figure five written instead, as the other dates of birth were very plain, and that of Carl Fenska appeared to be very faint and almost impossible to read it."<sup>36</sup> Steiner then visited Rev. John Dejung of Zion Lutheran Church to look at his records. Steiner found eerily similar results on Carl's confirmation records. When



5.3: Rev. John Dejung, Jr.

he questioned Dejung about this, Dejung admitted that he received a visit from Carl's mother three days prior, whereby she requested him to change the date of birth of Carl from 1886 to 1885, claiming that was the year he was born. The postal system also intercepted a letter from Ida to Carl which corroborated this testimony:

Dear Brother: Chief of Police Strobe was over to the house this morning and asked mother about your age. You were born in Mansfeld, Germany, November 8th, 1885 and was thirty-one years old November 8th, 1916, your last birthday. We went over to [Dejung's] house and found out that you had made a mistake when you gave him your age at the time you were confirmed. In looking over the Church book, I noticed that he also made a mistake on my paper by one month. My birthday comes in September and he had it in October. We told him about these errors and of course he corrected them to have it right. With love, your Sister Ida."<sup>37</sup>

The facts brought out during the examination led Steiner to report, "[We] believe that Rev. J. Dejung, Karl Fenska and Fenska's mother, [and] Mrs. Ida Friday, may be involved in a

<sup>36</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 25 July 1917, OG 45176.

<sup>37</sup> Ida Friday to Carl Fenska, 24 July 1917, OG 45176.

conspiracy to obstruct justice."<sup>38</sup> Fenska was detained on 9 August 1917, whereupon he was released after paying a \$1,000 bond. An agent present at the Grand Jury reported, "This case was strongly contested, Fenska being represented by three attorneys. His mother appeared for him at the hearing and her testimony was to the effect that he was born November 8, 1885."<sup>39</sup> Investigators visited anywhere they could possibly ascertain Fenska's age, including his former employers, his school records, his National Guard service, and his immigration records.<sup>40</sup> In January 1918, Steiner returned to Rhinelander "for the purpose of making a thorough investigation of the effects of Rev. J. Dejung" to secure further evidence in a prosecution against Fenska.<sup>41</sup> Steiner searched through Dejung's effects in his home and church. All essential items he packaged for Chicago, "including birth records and correspondence to and from Carl Fenska."<sup>42</sup>

The prosecution arrived at the trial on 4 February 1918 with a mountain of evidence to show that Carl Fenska was born on 8 November 1886, making him 30 years old and eligible for the draft. Despite a rigorous defense, the jury declared Fenska guilty of violating section five of the Selective Service Act. He was sentenced to one year in the House of Correction at Chicago, and instructed to register for the draft before being committed to the institution.<sup>43</sup> Fenska was put in Class 1A, the second highest draft position, but was never called. He served time at the House of Correction until his release on 9 December 1918.<sup>44</sup> No action was taken against Rev. Dejung or any other members of the Fenska household. Fenska's attempt to circumvent the draft likely stemmed from his dislike of the war combined with regret of being on the outskirts

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<sup>38</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 15 January 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>39</sup> Ward H. Thompson Report, 9 August 1917, OG 45176.

<sup>40</sup> Peter P. Mindak Report, 14 January 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>41</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 16 January 1917, OG 45176.

<sup>42</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 1 February 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>43</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 6 February 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>44</sup> J.C. Drautsburg Report, 9 December 1918, OG 45176.

of age eligibility. The Justice Department's resolve to put Fenska behind bars exemplifies how seriously they considered "slacking" to be an issue. Eventually, the concept of slacking would expand beyond the realm of the absent draftee.

### **Other Forms of Slacking**

Despite the belief among many German Lutherans that non-resistance to the war was good enough, few could escape unscathed without making financial or physical contributions to the war effort. Officials spent as much time tabulating contributions as they did soliciting them. A poor report concerning one's community could spell trouble. An APL agent submitted a report to his superiors which contrasted the German Methodists of a small town, "always buying very liberally and being very patriotically inclined," to the German Lutherans, to whom the "bonds were scarcely sold."<sup>45</sup> An informant then frequented the Lutheran church services in order to discover the root of the problem. Theodore Cashman's letter to the CPS exemplifies the need to expose all Liberty Loan slackers: "I don't think that any fellow should be allowed to escape on this proposition. The man who is able to pay and is allowed to go on without subscribing, will try to find an excuse and will continue excusing himself for not doing his part and become stronger and more seditious all the time."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the Liberty Loan became the best documented—and least escapable—form of contribution.

Pressure for the Liberty Loan was exerted from all directions. Even citizens got in the act. A Congregational pastor in New Ulm publically admonished Lutheran preachers in the surrounding area during the third Liberty Loan drive for their lack of pulpit contribution.<sup>47</sup> Pressure from members of the APL or State Councils of Defense had an official aura. State representatives would visit homes, insist upon a statement of earnings, expenditures, and

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<sup>45</sup> J.H. Lege Report, 13 November 1918, OG 316240.

<sup>46</sup> Thos. E. Cashman to Sec. H.W. Libby, April 1918, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.

<sup>47</sup> Rehwalt to Chas. W. Henke, 13 December 1918, 103.L.8.4, Folder 148, CPS Records.

savings, and then "calmly announce the amount of the contribution" these individuals were expected to make.<sup>48</sup> This tactic succeeded in Two Rivers, Wisconsin. W.H. Phillips reported visiting "several farmers who are members of the German Lutheran Church of Two Rivers, who were reported as pro-German in their attitude."<sup>49</sup> Phillips interviewed each of them and "succeeded in obtaining their subscription for Liberty Bonds." Not everyone gave into pressure, however. Interviewing a Lutheran farmer in Hutchinson, Minnesota, Theodore La Mott was told by the farmer, "No, I haven't got a red cent for Liberty Bonds. You quit right here. Let the people that make their money out of the farmers buy Liberty Bonds."<sup>50</sup> La Mott concluded this man had been seduced by Nonpartisan League propaganda. When visits failed, many slackers were often handed a legal-looking summons requesting them to appear before an examination board at a specific time and date to explain their slacking. County directors of the CPS repeatedly requested additional forms, as they found them to be the most useful tactic in garnering adequate contributions.<sup>51</sup>

During the second year of the war, Liberty Loan campaigns were more successful because of this pressure. For example, for the first Liberty Loan, the heavy German Lutheran Minnesota counties of Brown and Sibley subscribed to less than half their allotments. Only nine percent of Sibley residents subscribed, ranking it among the worst.<sup>52</sup> During the third Liberty Loan, statisticians noted that "the final results are going to surprise many people in those sections where they least expect it."<sup>53</sup> Another CPS official noted, "Germans are subscribing generously...Many of these were those that were openly disloyal some time ago. Over

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<sup>48</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 180.

<sup>49</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 31 October 1917, OG 20595; W. H. Phillips to Ralph Izard, 20 October 1917, OG 20595.

<sup>50</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 9 January 1918, OG 81572;

<sup>51</sup> Minnesota Liberty Bond Subscription Summons, 103.L.9.4F, Folder 44, CPS Records.

<sup>52</sup> County Liberty Loan Reports, First Liberty Loan, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 103, CPS Records.

<sup>53</sup> A.B. Stewart to CPS, 24 October 1917, 103.L.8.24, Folder 101, CPS Records.

subscription will probably be reached [in Brown County]."<sup>54</sup> One APL agent reported that not one German Lutheran Farmer in Penn township subscribed to either the first or second Liberty Loan. However, these same farmers "went over the top" in the third Loan after "receiving instructions from the German Lutheran minister to subscribe liberally or he 'would get into awful trouble."<sup>55</sup>

Slacking from the pulpit was deemed unacceptable and was vigorously watched. A German Lutheran minister, E. Schroeder, had to flee his hometown after he received threats for his refusal to display a Liberty Loan poster on his pulpit.<sup>56</sup> In Ohio, APL agent Henry McLarty confronted a German Lutheran minister, Gustav Meyer, and requested his excuse for "not observing National Prayer Day" in his church. Meyer told McLarty that he "had forgotten it."<sup>57</sup> Meyer was then informed he would be watched. Another agent was both angered and mystified at Lutheranism's lack of pulpit support for the YMCA, especially in an age where "there is a universal yearning for a religion devoid of denominational distinctions."<sup>58</sup> In another report entitled "No Patriotic Preaching," the Justice Department noted that "whatever the other denominations did, the Lutherans have lagged behind."<sup>59</sup> Most Lutheran sermons "failed entirely to touch the cord of patriotism, to rouse enthusiasm for the war aims, for the devotion of the United States to a lofty unselfish purpose." Instead, they "confined themselves to purely religious themes." The writer shuddered at the thought of what might have happened if all denominations had acted in the same manner. By the end of the war, Justice Department and APL agents visited Lutheran churches and requested English "copies of points made in sermons" to determine their adequacy for the righteous cause.

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<sup>54</sup> CPS to A.B. Stewart, 27 October 1917, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.

<sup>55</sup> L.A. Fritsche Report, 29 July 1918, OG 17438.

<sup>56</sup> J.H. Lege Report, 27 May 1918, OG 182986.

<sup>57</sup> Henry W. McLarty Report, 13 December 1918, OG 341691.

<sup>58</sup> DOJ Report: Alleged German Activities, OG 37083, 42-43.

<sup>59</sup> J.C. Lemar Report, 4 February 1919, OG 345618.

In addition to war bond and Red Cross purchases, a general lifestyle of thrift and conservation was expected of each individual. All extra yard space was to be converted to a "victory garden." President Wilson asserted that "every one who creates or cultivates a garden helps."<sup>60</sup> Those who failed drew unwelcomed attention. A female informant named "Fifty" reported a subject lived "in a filthy condition and [had] appearance of 'poor white trash;' that there is no evidence of thrift as the yard has grown to weeds instead of a vegetable garden."<sup>61</sup> She felt it necessary to remind this subject that "this is the time to work and not to loaf." To promote food conservation, a "housewife" food pledge campaign originated in various states. In Wisconsin, 87 percent of homes in Dane County and near 100 percent in Green Lake County pledged to save food. The more German counties like Washington, Dodge, and Jefferson helped lower the state average to 44 percent, with a "total of 247,814 housewives having signed the cards."<sup>62</sup> For the opposite behavior, the Department of Justice created a subdivision titled "Destruction of Foods." Many claimed that German Americans purposefully destroyed foods to hinder the war effort. Charles Chrisman, for example, reported to the CPS rumors of German Lutheran farmers destroying food, and claimed his friend "dug up over 2,000 [bushels] of old wheat" which were strategically hidden by these "descendants of Prussia."<sup>63</sup> Fuel became a major item of concern as well. The APL assigned 3,500 agents to check for fuel violations in restaurants, hotels, saloons, and other places. Monday and Tuesday nights were to be lightless. No gasoline was to be used on Sundays for pleasure. "Heatless" days were instituted and buildings were thoroughly checked for working radiators on those days. The majority of reports that claimed violations surfaced not from the APL, but nosy neighbors. The APL historian rosily

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas, *Unsafe for Democracy*, 61.

<sup>61</sup> Fifty Report, 20 June 1918, OG 231053.

<sup>62</sup> KarenFalk, "Public Opinion in Wisconsin during World War I," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 25 (June 1942), 211.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Chrisman to CPS, 24 August 1918, 103.L.9.2F, CPS Records.

attributed this to a "sternly roused sense of American loyalty which would brook no traitor or near-traitor under the Stars and Stripes."<sup>64</sup>

### **Hotbeds of Kaiserism**

The title of this subsection received its inspiration from Gustavus Ohlinger's 1919 book, *The German Conspiracy in American Education*. Inside, he described the Lutheran parochial school system and its role in preserving German *Kultur* beyond its borders. He wrote, "The evidences of this [Pan-German] programme, a definite part of Germany's higher strategy, are writ large over the parochial schools."<sup>65</sup> Testifying before the United States Senate, Ohlinger read from a book published in Germany which laid out a strategy to spread German influence, "The principal matter would be the foundation of independent German schools, society and congregational schools, in which the language of instruction would be German, and with English as the foreign language."<sup>66</sup> Ohlinger was not alone in suspecting sinister intentions behind the parochial school. The author of the "official" APL history also distrusted the parochial schools, "taught by their German Lutheran ministers under the pretense of teaching religion."<sup>67</sup> Rumors spread about un-American practices inside the school walls. Charges included that the national anthem was neglected, no American flags adorned the interior, and that students studied German cultural heroes instead of Washington, Franklin, and Lincoln.

Popular indignation against the Lutheran schools reached its peak during the war. German schoolbooks often became symbols of this anger. In Elkton, South Dakota, the local public school dumped all its German textbooks into the outhouse of Trinity Lutheran Church

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<sup>64</sup> Emerson Hough, *The Web: The Authorized History of the American Protective League* (Chicago: The Reilly & Lee Co., 1919), 183, 187.

<sup>65</sup> Gustavus Ohlinger, *The German Conspiracy in American Education* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1919), 16.

<sup>66</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, *Hearings on the National German-American Alliance*, 65th Cong., 2d sess., 1918, p.70.

<sup>67</sup> Hough, 73; Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (Dekalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 254.

located near school property.<sup>68</sup> In Menominee, Michigan, students of the public school gathered together and burned their German textbooks in a great public demonstration. The crowd challenged Christ Lutheran School of Menominee, saying, "Let the parochial schools fall in line and do the same thing."<sup>69</sup> Countless citizens filed complaints about parochial schools. In Ottertail, Minnesota, one citizen complained to the CPS about a newly created Lutheran parochial school, which "almost ruined the *American* public school."<sup>70</sup> With the public school in dire straits, he hoped the Commission would intervene: "it would be a blessing to us few Americans in and around Ottertail if this German school could be knocked in the head." A mayor of Stillwater, Minnesota reported to the CPS numerous students fleeing the public school and enrolling in the parochial schools, and hoped that in some way the Commission could remedy the situation.<sup>71</sup> A postmaster wrote to the Justice Department, "We have had considerable trouble with these German schools here and they are antagonizing our American schools in this section of the country. Steps should be taken to abolish them."<sup>72</sup>

Others took the situation into their hands. Citizens of New Auburn, Minnesota instituted a "Loyal Service League" with its purpose the elimination of parochial schools. They advocated dissolution for several reasons:

The German parochial school bars patriotism; that such schools are under the domination of the German ministers in the community and they are progerman [*sic*] to the core and espouse the cause of Kaiserism...in a secret and cowardly manner which makes it all the harder to neutralize; pupils in the German parochial school fostered Little Germanies.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Otto Engel, "The Anti-German Spirit Experienced by German Americans during World War I," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 14 (1996), 38.

<sup>69</sup> La Vern J. Rippley, "Conflict in the Classroom: Anti-Germanism in Minnesota Schools, 1917-1918," *Minnesota History* 54 (1981), 180.

<sup>70</sup> Arthur Madsen to CPS, 4 August 1918, File 184, CPS Records.

<sup>71</sup> J.R. Kolliner to CPS, 2 October 1918, File 184, CPS Records.

<sup>72</sup> Postmaster W. Cipell to Department of Justice, 12 August 1918, OG 284018.

<sup>73</sup> L.W. Grace to CPS, 23 January 1918, File 68, CPS Records; C.W. Ames Correspondence, File 184, CPS Records.

The "Minute Men" in Snohomish, Washington were proactive against a newly formed Lutheran parochial school. They threatened members of the congregation, telling them that if their pastor "opened his Lutheran school this fall there would be trouble, something would happen, etc."<sup>74</sup> Rev. Heck reported these activities to the Justice Department and stated that he intended to open up his school during the coming term and asked for advice. "This the Agent could not give." After finding out that Rev. Heck filed a complaint, one of the vigilantes told Heck to "tell this to your Board, the gang has sworn to tear the building down." When authorities interviewed the Minute Men to determine their grievance against the school, one member replied that the school "had but two little dirty [American] flags" on the premises.

Public officials typically shared these anti-parochial school sentiments. During a Senate Hearing on the National German-American Alliance, a couple of Senators were floored by testimony that hundreds of schools in the United States used German as the medium of instruction. Minnesota State Superintendent Shulz tabulated 307 parochial schools in the state with an enrollment of 38,853 pupils. Of these schools, nearly two-thirds used the German language primarily. Shulz refrained from legislating to these schools, but proposed "that school boards, principals and teachers be urged, as a patriotic duty, to require the use of the English language as the exclusive medium of instruction."<sup>75</sup> Unlike other states, he made an exception in the case of religious instruction. However, in April 1918, the CPS stripped non-citizens of their teaching positions in all schools, public and private.

Investigators kept themselves busy to ensure that no pro-German teachers poisoned any young minds. In Winona, Minnesota, operatives looked into Wisconsin Synod teacher Max Hackbarth, whom they considered "very pro-German before the declaration of war, as were all

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<sup>74</sup> Petrovitzky Report, 4 September 1918, OG 155869.

<sup>75</sup> *German American Alliance Investigation*, 588-591; Rippley, 175.

the members of his church."<sup>76</sup> During a Thrift Stamp campaign, the report listed "that it was with great reluctance that he would inform any of his students relative to the value of Thrift Stamps or the details of said campaign."<sup>77</sup> Agents visited Rev. Sauer of St. Matthew Lutheran Church and asked for Hackbarth's address. Sauer objected to this request, and "claimed the full right to know what business the party in question had with Hackbarth." When it came to a "show-down," Sauer was unable to find Hackbarth's address in his study. The investigation into



5.4: Confirmation class from Zion, Olivia, MN, 1921.

Hackbarth hardly materialized, however, as most of the evidence against him was based on rumor. In Hustisford, Wisconsin, another Wisconsin Synod teacher, William Riem, was studied and reported "very strong in his pro-German remarks."<sup>78</sup>

Agents inquired about Reim's citizenship, believing this to be the best course to get at the teacher. A lack of a follow-up report likely meant disappointment in the results. In New Germany, Minnesota, an APL member hit the jackpot when he stumbled upon a school play at a Lutheran parochial school. This play depicted a captured German soldier who conspired to be recaptured to return to his countrymen. The agent remarked after the play, "If a government officer were there and saw that, he would arrest all of them."<sup>79</sup>

A government report late in the war struck at the heart of the parochial school issue. A school's main purpose, it claimed, was "the development of the spirit of national unity...It is considered as essential for the children of a nation to receive ideas and knowledge of such a

<sup>76</sup> Donald B. Pritchard to A. Bruce Bielaski, 30 March 1917, OG 173248.

<sup>77</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, 27 May 1918, OG 173248.

<sup>78</sup> Olaf Olson Report, 23 April 1917, OG 16703.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph J. Joyce Report, 12 January 1918, OG 130064.

nature as to be in conformance with the aims of the whole country and nation."<sup>80</sup> The parochial school, instead, had its chief aim in the preservation of "an ideal, a tradition, and a history different from that of the rest of the community." As proof, the report discussed annual church services in the "German synods" which featured the "exhortation for the upkeeping of the *Gemeindeschule*." In the sermons, "the secular public school is depicted as a danger to the religion and the very souls of the children; contamination with American ideas, harmful contact of good Lutherans with members of other Protestant Denominations...are held up before the guileless members of the congregations as the baleful consequences of entrusting their youngsters to the public schools." This report predicted a swift end to the parochial school system during or after the war. After referring to popular action and various state laws restricting parochial schools, it concluded with the remark, "This action will not cease after the war; America is going to finish its house-cleaning."



5.5: St. Peter's Gemeindeschule, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. One of the synod's largest.

At first glance, this opposition to the parochial school appears to have a specifically anti-German sentiment. But when the periodization of this issue is broadened, it reveals an historically-based animosity toward Lutheran parochial schools, as shown by the Bennett Law controversy in Wisconsin Synod history. These schools were a thorn in the side to the attempts of evangelical religious organizations to "Christianize" students in a pietist mold through the common school system. Even before the declaration of war, the parochial school was a red-hot issue. During the early months of 1914, the *Northwestern Lutheran* published some sort of

<sup>80</sup> Report: Alleged German Activities, 33-42, OG 37083.

defense of the church schools in nine consecutive issues. Knowing the motivation behind the anti-parochial school rhetoric, the Wisconsin Synod remained obstinate on this issue.<sup>81</sup>

### **Un-American Voting**

In the 1916 presidential election, the German Lutheran counties of Washington and Jefferson, Wisconsin, submitted a paltry amount of votes for the Socialist Party candidate—59 and 71, respectively.<sup>82</sup> In February 1915, the *Northwestern Lutheran* even mentioned Belgium's "atheistic socialism" in one of its articles, revealing an attitude that socialism had an essence of irreligion.<sup>83</sup> Despite a lack of cooperation in the past, the two groups were not too far apart before the war on anti-business rhetoric. The *Northwestern Lutheran* even boasted that "the church school [as opposed to the public]...is free to tell the truth about corporation greed and preach against theft in high places."<sup>84</sup> Wisconsin Synod Lutherans usually shared the small independent farmer's disdain for big business, and the *Northwestern Lutheran* in early 1917 even quoted Martin Luther's thoughts on the subject: "Yea, we might well let the lesser individual thieves alone if we could arrest the great powerful thieves, with whom princes and rulers associate...They daily pillage not only a city or two, but all of Germany." Furthermore, during an unpopular war believed to be provoked by business interests, and with synod customs and religious practices under attack from members of both major political parties, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans became more receptive to Socialist Party rhetoric. Wisconsin Socialist figure Victor Berger was the strongest proponent for expanding the party's base beyond the urban worker to include rural farmers.<sup>85</sup> Rather than it being planned, however, the German Lutheran and Socialist Party connection came about quite naturally. Both groups used harmonious

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<sup>81</sup> *Northwestern Lutheran* 1:4 through 1:13, "A Defense of the Church School" to "Our Nation's Hope."

<sup>82</sup> Falk, 391.

<sup>83</sup> "Belgium's Boast," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:4 (21 February 1915), 32.

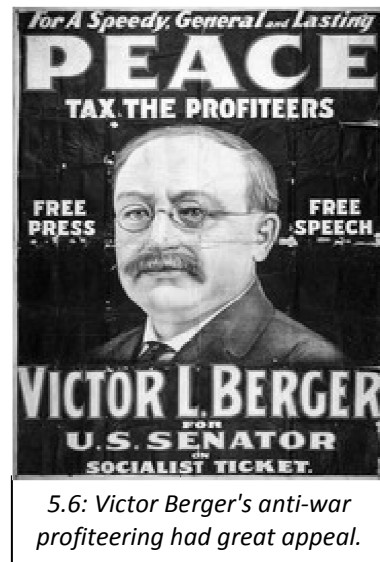
<sup>84</sup> "Big Business and Education," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:7 (7 February 1917), 54.

<sup>85</sup> Report: "Socialistic Literature," OG 329166.

rhetoric about the war. Both ridiculed the cry that the war would "make the world safe for democracy," and claimed that the United States entered to benefit munitions manufacturers and speculators. As previously shown, officials often encountered German Lutheran members in the Nonpartisan League and the People's Council, which both heavily leaned socialist.

Specific targeting was used nonetheless. The 1918 Socialist Party platform included such pledges as "freedom of conscience and for religious liberty—and for the unrestricted right to use any language in church services."<sup>86</sup> The platform also supported the right for churches to run parochial schools and stood against "race hatred and against mob rule." Clearly, the Socialist Party had German Lutherans specifically in mind when it created the platform. The pro-war *Milwaukee Sentinel* even suggested that Milwaukee Socialist mayor Dan Hoan "might change into a Lutheran."<sup>87</sup>

The Socialist Party took its message on the road in preparation for the midterm and gubernatorial elections in 1918. Socialist candidate for Wisconsin governor Emil Seidel found rural German American districts "eager to hear a Socialist talk."<sup>88</sup> He found there was "always time to make an evening meeting within 60 or 70 miles of Milwaukee." Seidel believed that the German farmers were so receptive "because they realize that Democratic and Republican parties will not serve...their purpose." The socialist current was so strong among German Lutherans that

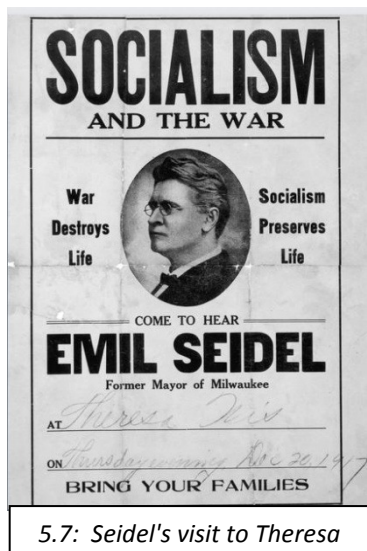


<sup>86</sup> Report: "Socialistic Literature," OG 329166.

<sup>87</sup> Sentinel claim found in *Victor L. Berger: Hearings before the Special Committee appointed under the authority of House resolution no. 6 concerning the right of Victor L. Berger to be sworn in as a member of the Sixty-sixth Congress* (Washington: Government Print Off, 1919), Volume 1, 854.

<sup>88</sup> Seidel, "Autobiography," 180, 182, Found in Lorence, "Dynamite for the Brain: The Growth and Decline of Socialism in Central and Lakeshore Wisconsin, 1910-1920, *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66 (Summer 1983), 255.

a Wisconsin Synod conference in Minnesota discussed the topic, "How should we behave in relation to the socialist current in our land?"<sup>89</sup> Socialist units and organizations sprang up in new areas across the Midwest, such as Kiel, Horicon, and West Bend, Wisconsin.<sup>90</sup> In Hot Springs, South Dakota, F.M. Greene complained to the Justice Department about the German Lutherans of that town gathering together for Socialist Party purposes.<sup>91</sup> The Justice Department kept a keen eye on German Lutheran socialist activity elsewhere across the Midwest as well. For example, as Seidel travelled to deliver a speech at Theresa, Wisconsin—a Wisconsin Synod town—the Department helped organize a group of 600 patriotic citizens to prevent the meeting. These citizens flocked to the village and physically thwarted Seidel from speaking.<sup>92</sup> They threatened to do the same in nearby Mayville if Seidel tried speaking there. He eventually opted for a farm in neighboring Horicon, Wisconsin. Afterwards, the Theresa citizens hid Seidel in a stack of hay until he could safely return to Milwaukee.<sup>93</sup>



5.7: Seidel's visit to Theresa

Some Wisconsin Synod Lutherans even began assisting the Socialist Party in its work. Rev. Otto Engel wrote to fellow WELS pastor Herman Zimmermann: "Victor Berger is my man. A few days ago, I was in Milwaukee and had a long talk with this Socialist leader."<sup>94</sup> He suggested that Zimmermann "read the platform on which Berger is contesting for the Senatorial Toga." Zimmermann took Engel's advice and corresponded with Otto R.

<sup>89</sup> "Die Gemischte Konferenz von Sudwest-Minnesota," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:20, 29 September 1918, 316.

<sup>90</sup> Falk, 404.

<sup>91</sup> J.F. McAuley Report, 14 September 1918, OG 100602.

<sup>92</sup> A.A. Viall Report, 16 February 1918, OG 16703.

<sup>93</sup> "Socialist Hid under Hay in Theresa Fifty Years Ago," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, 29 December 1967.

<sup>94</sup> Otto Engel to H.R. Zimmermann, 7 March 1918, OG 5025.

Hauser of the Wisconsin Socialist Party.<sup>95</sup> Engel then got in touch with Louis Arnold, Secretary of the Socialist Party. Arnold sent Engel 1,000 circular letters and 1,000 party platforms to distribute. Engel replied, "I am in a position to send 1,000 letters to Lutheran pastors and teachers, who believe in strict divorce of church and state advocated in the State platform."<sup>96</sup> Engel also wrote a letter of encouragement to *The Issue*, a new socialist magazine. "This is a heyday for the Socialist press," Engel wrote, "No truth-seeker can afford being without *The Issue*, a paper that dares to tell the ill-advised government where to draw the line...Personally, I am convinced the Democratic and Republican parties having become thread-worn, the Socialist Party is bound to come into its own."<sup>97</sup> Rev. Engel's nephew, Walter Engel, was investigated by the Justice Department for distributing Berger platforms in Western Wisconsin during the Senatorial campaign. The Department also looked into a Wisconsin Synod minister in Washington state, Frederick Soll, who was "reported as being very radical at the present time."<sup>98</sup> The agent declared Soll's thinking to be line with "Bolsheviki [*sic*] doctrines."

Eventually, investigators began to anticipate this working relationship between Lutherans and Socialists. As Agent #83 of the CPS received instructions for his investigation of Wisconsin Synod Professor Adolph Ackermann, he was specifically told to keep watch for any interaction between Ackermann and Socialist leaders.<sup>99</sup> Another telling example was the Justice Department's undercover investigation of the German Lutherans in Norwalk, Wisconsin. They

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<sup>95</sup> Otto Robt. Hauser to Herman Zimmermann, March 1918, found in Wm. H. Steiner Report, 8 October 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>96</sup> Louis Arnold to Otto Engel, 23 March 1918, OG 5025; Otto Engel to Louis Arnold, 22 August 1918, 5025; Louis Arnold to Otto Engel, 26 August 1918, OG 5025. When Engel's home was searched in September 1918, the following literature was confiscated, among others: A circular from the *Milwaukee Leader*; "A copy of the Constitution of the Social Democratic Party of Wisconsin"; A receipt of subscription to the *Christian Socialist*; A copy of the magazine *Appeal to Reason*; A copy of *The American Socialist*; A circular letter of the Organizing Committee of the Second National Conference of Labor, Socialist, and Radical Movements, New York; A campaign platform of Morris Hillquit, Socialist Mayor candidate; A circular letter entitled "Persecution of American Socialists"; Numerous circulars by Presidential Candidate Eugene Debs.

<sup>97</sup> Otto Engel to *The Issue*, 29 June 1917, OG 5025.

<sup>98</sup> B.F. McCurdy Report, 11 July 1919, OG 368492.

<sup>99</sup> #83 Report to CPS, 20 August 1917, Brown County HSS Records.

decided the best way to earn the trust of the Lutherans was for the agent to pose as a "red hot socialist."<sup>100</sup>

The first election shock came in January 1918, as Marathon County, Wisconsin held an election for state legislature. Socialist Party candidate Herman Marth uncompromisingly advocated immediate peace and freedom of speech, press, and assembly, among other issues. German Lutherans in Marathon flocked to the Socialist banner. In Berlin and Hamburg, Wisconsin, the German Lutherans voted over ninety percent Socialist.<sup>101</sup> Marth was swept into office. Democrats and Republicans feared that "what happened in [Marathon] would set entire Wisconsin ablaze."<sup>102</sup> Socialists especially eyed two key elections: one special election to replace the vacant U.S. Senate seat left by the late Paul Husting, the other for governor of Wisconsin. Like the election in Marathon, Socialist candidates Victor Berger and Emil Seidel fared best wherever Lutherans predominated, specifically Sheboygan, Calumet, Manitowoc, Marathon, Dodge, Washington, and Jefferson Counties. To exemplify this voter turnaround, the Wisconsin Synod town of Jackson, Wisconsin gave 0.02% of its votes to the Socialist senatorial candidate in 1914, but gave Berger 86% of the vote in the 1918 election.<sup>103</sup> Overall, Berger ran a strong senatorial race, receiving 110,487 of the 423,343 votes cast, but he placed third. The result still irked Justice Department officials, who claimed "The State of Wisconsin recently cast 105,000 un-American votes."<sup>104</sup> Emil Seidel's bid for governor also fell short; he placed third as well. A lenient Governor Philipp somewhat mitigated Lutheran Socialist voting, as Seidel received approximately seventy-five percent of their votes in this election. Somewhat disappointed, the Socialist Party settled for a congressional seat, sending Victor Berger to the House. Berger won

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<sup>100</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 5 April 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>101</sup> General results, including tables, found in Lorence, 258, 259, and 262.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 259.

<sup>103</sup> Jackson voting results for the special Senatorial election found in the *Milwaukee Journal*, 7 April 1918.

<sup>104</sup> Henry W. McLarty Report, 7 January 1919, OG 341691.

this seat despite being under indictment for violating the Espionage Act. After his release from prison, the House refused to seat him. His seat remained vacant until 1921.

The Lutheran flirtation with the Socialist Party severely antagonized public officials. An agent travelled to Door County, Wisconsin to seek out the "disloyalty existing in the German Lutheran communities throughout Door County."<sup>105</sup> For proof that his mission was needed, "a number of votes [were] given to Victor L. Berger, Socialist candidate in the senatorial election recently." In this process, the Department failed to realize that their actions helped ignite this political phenomenon. Many German Lutherans cast their lots with the Socialist Party as a means to protect their religious and cultural way of life. These votes represented the frustration this community felt with the mobs, investigations, coerced patriotism and integration, and religious persecution that came hand in hand with the war they so desperately tried to avoid. By 1920, with the war crisis two years past, the Socialist sentiment lost some of its vigor. The presidential vote among German Lutheran voters was evenly split between Socialist Eugene Debs and Republican Warren Harding, with hardly any choosing to stick with the Democratic status quo.<sup>106</sup> A "return to normalcy" sounded equally as appealing as the rhetoric against the war profiteers.

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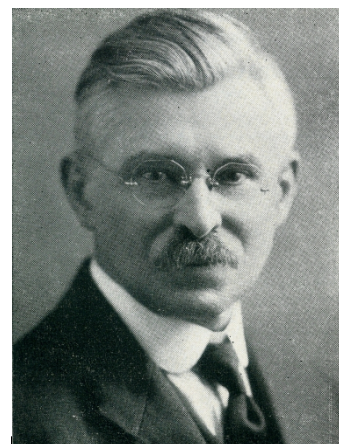
<sup>105</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 23 April 1918, OG 183007.

<sup>106</sup> Lorence, 268.

## Chapter 6: Patriotism, Apologetics, and Perseverance

Born in 1912, Reginald Siegler of Bangor, Wisconsin was only six years old at the height of the war, but he was well aware of the antagonism faced by his German church community. "I was old enough to think that people [who] were suspicious were creeping around the house and looking into [our] windows."<sup>1</sup> Reginald's father, Carl W. Siegler, the minister at St Paul's church in Bangor, also understood the issues at stake for his congregation. According to Reginald, "my father and mother often discussed the suspicions that were encountered, and...how careful they were to give nobody justification for being suspicious." For many Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, the burden weighed on their shoulders to disprove the notion that their church was an epicenter of disloyalty. This pressure caused a wide array of defensive actions from Lutherans to prove their loyalty and patriotism.

Some like Carl Siegler chose a direct method. R.M. Jones, an APL informant for the Justice Department, paid Siegler a visit in July 1918. He stated that Siegler's "pro-German attitude is strong enough to convince one that he is heart and soul with Germany."<sup>2</sup> Siegler had not made any public remarks to arouse suspicion, but this conclusion was drawn because he had "never been active in any move to aid the United States in the war." While confronting Siegler, Jones stated his belief that Lutheran ministers were "a menace to the country." Siegler stopped the lecture then and there. He retorted that he "hated to be classed...as a menace to the country." In his defense, Siegler stated that he was never one to make public speeches and was not qualified for that type of work. Instead, he called Jones's



6.1: Rev. Carl W. Siegler

<sup>1</sup> Reginald Siegler, interview by author, La Crosse, WI, 5 July 2012, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Chas. I. Rukes Report, 18 July 1918, OG 241152.

attention to his participation in patriotic programs and his encouragement to his congregation to buy Liberty Bonds and Thrift Stamps. Siegler also offered his rebuttal to Jones's statements on the language issue. He protested that the government was mistaken in attempting to bring about a change too fast. A middle ground was offered by Siegler, who suggested that the change be attempted over a course of three years to allow for transition within the congregation. Spirited retorts like this one did not always have their desired effect. However, in this case Jones closed his testimony with "the subject has not been far out of the way at any time."

While direct confrontation was not an option for most, Reginald Siegler and other German Lutherans used their actions to quell detractors. "I was aware there were people thinking I was the enemy," recalled Siegler, "I felt that they were foolish, and I participated in any activity that showed my support for the army and country."<sup>3</sup> Even in a small town like Bangor, opportunities abounded for showcases of patriotism and loyalty. National holidays and Liberty Loan drives included demonstrations and parades in which many Lutherans of Bangor participated. The Ladies' Aid Society of the church assisted the Red Cross by sewing and collecting donations. In addition to this, they sewed together a service flag with around 25 stars representing members of the congregation serving in the war. Of those who served, one returned home with only one arm, and four paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Reverberations such as what happened in Bangor echoed across the Wisconsin Synod throughout the war. Whether their patriotic efforts to defeat Germany were genuine or for cover varied by the individual. The choice became much simpler once family and congregation members began serving in the war. Efforts to support their soldiers became the favorite method of contribution. Most congregations proudly erected service flags and posted honor rolls to pay tribute to the sacrifice of soldiers in the congregation. The Red Cross, by virtue of its sole

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<sup>3</sup> Reginald Siegler, interview by author, La Crosse, WI, 5 July 2012, 2-3.

purpose to provide welfare for soldiers, became the preferred program of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans to fund and participate. On the other hand, programs which conflicted with Lutheran goals, like the YMCA, received little support.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, whenever a community attempted to bring churches together for patriotic displays, the Lutheran church obeyed conscience and stayed on the sideline. The Wisconsin Synod's search for a war service that was doctrinally acceptable is perfectly illustrated by its camp pastor program.

### **Soldiers and Camp Pastors**

While the exact number of Wisconsin Synod "doughboys" was never tabulated, if the statistics compare similarly to Missouri Synod numbers, the total should be around 3,000.<sup>5</sup> Many individual congregations hoisted service flags with over thirty stars. The stories of their courage and sacrifice provided congregations with much pride on the home front. It also caused difficulty for many families. Letters poured in to the writers of the *Gemeindeblatt* from family members wondering if they were allowed to write their soldiers in the German language. A few incidents of rejection spurred these questions. A train depot agent in Elkton, South Dakota, for example, refused to mail a letter from Julius Engel to his son, Walter, because it was written in German.<sup>6</sup> Thankfully, when the Synod put the question to General Isaac Sherwood, he responded, "I don't believe any officer who is broad-minded and patriotic enough to appreciate the value of free speech and real patriotism, could possibly object to either fathers or mothers writing to their sons in the language in which they can best express their feelings and convictions."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the *Gemeindeblatt* felt the need to give further advice to parents corresponding with soldiers. For example, "If you write to soldiers in the army or the navy, one

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<sup>4</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "War Memorials," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:24 (1 December 1918), 188.

<sup>5</sup> Missouri Synod figures located in Julius Rosin Report, 3 December 1918, OG 284018.

<sup>6</sup> Otto Engel, "The Anti-German Spirit Experienced by German Americans during World War I," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 14 (1996), 38.

<sup>7</sup> "Ist es erlaubt, an unsere Jungen in Heer und Flotte deutsche Briefe zu schreiben?" *Gemeindeblatt* 53:11 (26 May 1918), 167.

should write the address as legibly as possible."<sup>8</sup> The article also advised parents to put stamps on envelopes and to provide a full return address. While these steps may seem elementary, for many of these boys it was their first time away from home, and this may have been the first time parents needed to write their sons.

Their sons' extended absence from their religious community also worried parents and the church. The *Northwestern Lutheran* summarized these fears:

There is a real danger to the boys and therefore real needs. The separation from Christian homes and from the holy influences of the church is itself a most serious thing for any young man. The danger is doubly great when, separated from safe surroundings, he is encased among influences such as generally exist in army life...the strange and questionable atmosphere of the camp and army.<sup>9</sup>

The synod was then taxed with the problem of sustaining the church's religious culture for the soldiers scattered across the country. For starters, the synod was able to secure a pocket-sized English New Testament for every soldier, and even extras to share with others.<sup>10</sup> Yet the issue remained of providing pastors for the soldiers. The simplified and cheaper route would have been to participate in the Lutheran Commission, a government subsidized chaplaincy program for Lutherans. Other synods pressured the WELS to join in this venture; the Norwegian Synod's J.A. Stubb urged Lutherans to be "one and dissoluble behind our boys," and that "we can return to our doctrinal, racial, or synodical differences after the war if we must."<sup>11</sup> Despite the financial and logistical benefits of this program, the WELS never seriously considered joining. A major fear within the synod also surfaced about the nature of the subsidized ministry programs. Said WELS minister Hans Moussa, "nearly all of the work was under management of sectarian (evangelical) organizations."<sup>12</sup> The Committee on Public Information even boasted that religious services at

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<sup>8</sup> "Winke für solche, die an Soldaten schreiben," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:18 (1 Sep 1918), 279.

<sup>9</sup> "A Real Danger," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:5 (10 March 1918), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Has Your Soldier His Testament?" *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:17 (7 Sep 1917), 129.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Braun, "Being good Americans and better Lutherans: Synodical Conference Lutherans and the Military Chaplaincy," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 19 (2001), 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> "Now is the Time to Say it," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:15 (27 July 1919), 115.

the YMCA camps "are so nondenominational, that a Mohammedan will find himself as much at home as a Protestant or Greek Catholic."<sup>13</sup> Involvement in the government program therefore would invariably lead to participation in religious assimilation with denominations who were often antagonistic to Lutheran beliefs.

In its place, the Wisconsin Synod worked with the Missouri Synod and other members of the Synodical Conference to create the Lutheran Church Board for the Army and Navy. This organization would send these synods' own Lutheran ministers to serve the soldiers at their camps. With hundreds of training camps across the country, the task was daunting. Not only would numerous pastors need to leave their congregations for an unspecified period of time, but this program included a heavy price tag. As Wisconsin Synod president G.E. Bergemann explained to the Michigan District Convention,

A chaplain costs us monthly about \$200, not because their salaries are so exceptionally high, but because of the costly extras. Because of the great distances involved we had to buy Fords for several chaplains. We also have to supply our boys gratis such things as books, writing materials, and church periodicals.<sup>14</sup>

Another pricey aspect which Bergemann failed to mention was the construction of numerous "Lutheran centers" around the army camps. In many cases, the YMCA buildings, the place for official army chaplains, did not offer the Synodical Conference pastors any use of the building, or if they did, the time slot received was too inconvenient to conduct regular services. To remedy this, the Lutheran Church Board quickly assembled places for worship around the camps.<sup>15</sup> In all, this camp pastor program cost roughly \$400,000. Considering the relative worth of the 1917 dollar, this figure translates to \$6 million in the early twenty-first century. This price tag would have been much higher and the task nearly impossible had it not been for the

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<sup>13</sup> John Brenner, "Why we do not Cooperate," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:4 (24 February 1918), 31; Committee on Public Information: Division of Four Minute Men, "Maintaining Morals and Morale," *Official Bulletin* 19, (12 November 1917), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Bergemann letter found in Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 137.

<sup>15</sup> "Unsere 'Lutheran Centers'" *Gemeindeblatt* 29:20 (29 September 1918), 310-311.

Missouri Synod, which had a footprint in the southern states where most of the army camps were located. This allowed many pastors from those areas to serve both their home congregation and the soldiers in the camps. Much credit is also due to the tremendous efforts of many camp pastors who served multiple army camps at great distances. WELS minister Arthur Sydow, for example, served seven different camps in the San Antonio area, and then found time to minister to soldiers in Laredo and Eagle Pass, Texas. William Beitz of Tucson, Arizona travelled to camps in Douglas and Nogales near the Mexican border, and somehow found time to minister to the camp up north in Prescott, Arizona, a roundtrip of over 700 miles. This lengthy traveling to serve the spiritual needs of Wisconsin Synod soldiers likely did not please members of the Fuel Administration.<sup>16</sup>

The need for a separate Lutheran mission to the soldiers was not self-evident to government officials. While discussing the Lutheran Church Board to another agent, G. Jones of the Justice Department commented, "It would appear...with regimental chaplains and YMCA workers, the troops would not suffer spiritually without [Lutheran] missionaries."<sup>17</sup> Because of this judgment, nearly every aspect of the Lutheran Church Board came under suspicion and scrutiny. The Justice Department first focused on the money "presumably being raised for the support of Lutheran preachers enlisted in the service of the U.S. Army." Amazed that "every member of the church contributed from \$1.00 to \$5.00,"<sup>18</sup> and that such collections were general throughout the German Lutheran churches, it was decided that "the use to which this fund is being applied may probably be the subject of investigation." Even though contact with Germany was strictly controlled through the Trading with the Enemy Act, officials still feared the prospect of Lutherans gathering large donations.

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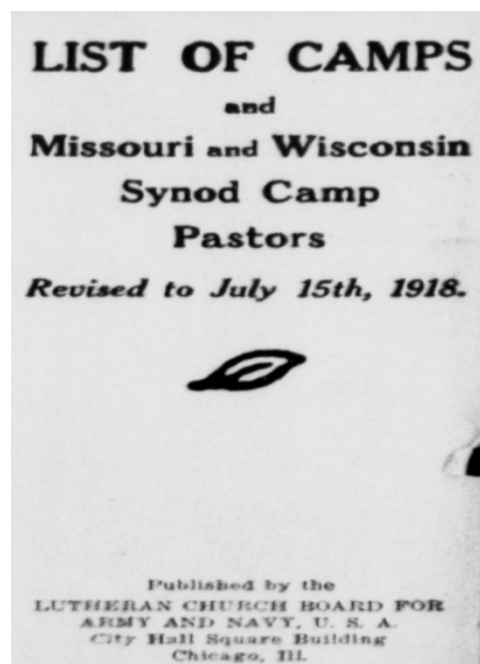
<sup>16</sup> Camp Pastor List Located in DOJ Files, OG 281118.

<sup>17</sup> Special Agent in Charge Chas. Jones to John K. Wrenn, 11 December 1917, OG 112360.

<sup>18</sup> E.B. Sisk Report, 8 August 1918, OG127609.

While the Lutheran Church Board fund raised eyebrows, the thought of German Lutheran ministers serving future soldiers sounded alarms for public officials. It was bad enough that Lutheran ministers "poisoned" efforts on the home front, but now it appeared to government officials that they were taking their seditious message on the road to the soldiers.

One investigator noted that Synodical Conference "camp pastors with few exceptions refuse to preach patriotic sermons."<sup>19</sup> Captain Lester testified before a Senatorial investigation that "great difficulty was experienced...on account of the activity of certain pro-German Lutheran clergymen in and about the camps among the soldiers."<sup>20</sup> Suspicions also arose that these camp pastors were reporting troop movements to Germany, with one official labeling the camp work of the Lutheran Church a "vast smooth running potential spy organization."<sup>21</sup> The Department made investigations and gathered information for every



*6.2. The Justice Department made heavy use of this Lutheran Church Board Pamphlet, as indicated by numerous markings on the inside.*

single Lutheran Church Board camp pastor, and often used synod publications of camp pastor locations as the starting point.<sup>22</sup> Investigators were to follow a four step process. First, locate the pastors who are or will be serving in or near a specified camp. Second, investigate the "nature of the activities of these men." Next, a subject should be determined loyal, disloyal or

<sup>19</sup> Report: Alleged German Activities, OG 37083, p. 33, 62.

<sup>20</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, *Hearings on Brewing and Liquor Interests and German and Bolshevik Propaganda*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919, p. 1788.

<sup>21</sup> Henry W. McLarty Report, 7 January 1919, OG 341691.

<sup>22</sup> Confiscated Camp Pastor List located in DOJ files, OG 281118.

suspicious. And lastly, "if disloyal or suspected, state the facts upon which conclusion is based."<sup>23</sup>

The criteria to make a camp pastor "pro-German," however, were especially vague. Even before the investigation of Pastor Arthur Sydow began, the case title read, "Rev. Arthur Sydow: Probable Pro-German."<sup>24</sup> Subtleties like this often show the disposition of agents making the investigation, and hence conclusions of "disloyal or suspected" should not surprise. Investigators heard rumors that Sydow spread stories of troop revolts on transport ships and that he told soldiers that the army should stay on American soil, but both turned out to be groundless. Despite the APL investigation which gave



6.3: Arthur Sydow with his wife, around 1920.

Sydow a "clean bill," the commanding officer at Camp Travis, San Antonio informed Sydow on 3 October 1918 that his services were no longer desired after October 27.<sup>25</sup>

The creation of separate Lutheran Centers also raised suspicion, and after William Beitz established one at the University of Arizona in Tucson, an agent determined "this camp pastor will bear watching."<sup>26</sup> On another occasion, the Bureau of Investigation director A. Bruce Bielaski suggested that George Schmidt, an official of the Lutheran Army and Navy board, be kept under surveillance, noting that "in common with nearly all members of the Lutheran clergy he is an

<sup>23</sup> Wm. Neunhoffer Report, "Activities of Lutheran Ministers and Camp Pastors in the Southern Department," 21 November 1918, OG 37083.

<sup>24</sup> Wm. Neunhoffer Report, "Rev. Arthur Sydow," 12 July 1918, OG 237146.

<sup>25</sup> Louis De Nette Report, 1 October 1918, OG 237146.

<sup>26</sup> Report: Alleged Violation of Conscription Act, 24 August 1917, OG 37082.

object of suspicion."<sup>27</sup> This guilty until proven innocent mentality also revealed itself in the investigation of the Missouri Synod pastor A.J. Soldan at the camp in Rockford, Illinois. The agent claimed "no one could be found who would testify to his loyalty," and based on this, felt "that an investigation as to loyalty of subject could best be made at the Leavenworth [Kansas] Penitentiary."<sup>28</sup> Many times, camp chaplains made the best informants. Rev. Carden, serving the Episcopal Church in Taylor, Texas, followed Missouri Synod pastor Arthur Hartmann and reported his activities to authorities.<sup>29</sup> While WELS camp pastors escaped arrests, a few Missouri Synod pastors were interned.<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, if the Justice Department's main concern was the morale of the soldier, the internment of his spiritual counselor before he crossed the Atlantic to "save democracy" likely inflicted more doubt than any propaganda could have.

The war's end on 11 November 1918 was a welcomed blessing to the Lutheran Church Board. The war's short duration of 18 months allowed the program to avoid problems which may have surfaced over a prolonged war. A price tag of \$400,000 a year would have been financially unsustainable in a long war. The heavy work load of the camp pastors may have become too burdensome as well. Additionally, since war becomes more frustrating for belligerents as time passes, Lutheran camp pastors may have become scapegoats for setbacks in the war, and confrontations with the Justice Department may have multiplied. In a report after the war, the Justice Department declared that "the institution of camp-pastors is to be abolished, and the army chaplains attached to the military units are to take their place."<sup>31</sup>

Looking back, the synod did not have much good to say about the system in place, either:

Lutheran activities were sorely hampered in some cases by this unfortunate sectarian division of responsibility. We made the best of it and our work suffered a little, but it was humiliating at

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<sup>27</sup> G. C. Van Dusen to Bielaski, 26 July 1918, OG 243145.

<sup>28</sup> Report: Alleged German Activities, OG 37083, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> Ward E. Thompson Report, 8 July 1918, OG 236110.

<sup>30</sup> Report: Alleged Violation of Conscription Act, 24 August 1917, OG 37082, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

times to be dependent upon the good will of some YMCA secretary for opportunities to do our most essential work.<sup>32</sup>

The camp pastor program met its end with enthusiasm from both the Synod and government officials, one of the few times both parties could agree about something.

### **Patriotism: Genuine, Awkward, and Ugly**

Hans Moussa, one of the prominent writers for the *Northwestern Lutheran*, noticed a transition among his fellow Lutherans taking place only six months into the war. "It seems that this year we are trying to make up at one stroke the indifferences of former years," he observed.<sup>33</sup> He also noticed that the wartime program receiving the most enthusiasm was the Red Cross, and he approved: "It is well that there is general interest in the Red Cross. It is the only authorized national agency with an opportunity to soften the hardships of war." He even pointed out that the first local branch of the American Red Cross was organized at a Lutheran Church in 1881. WELS Lutherans' choice to support the Red Cross was plainly understandable and well-summarized by Moussa. Certainly, WELS Lutherans supported an array of government wartime programs, and many buried their animosity to the war and gave every effort for its successful conclusion. The line was drawn, however, whenever patriotic displays became excessive or required religious collaboration with those who rejected what the Synod confessed.

Red Cross work proliferated across the synod. In New Ulm, Minnesota, fifty three students at DMLC, over half of the student body, formed a Junior Red Cross chapter, and resourceful methods were used to fund the relief organization.<sup>34</sup> Fritz Reuter and Lydia Wagner composed "a national anthem," titled "America," to encourage donations to the Red Cross. The

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<sup>32</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Now is the Time to Say it," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:15 (27 July 1919), 115.

<sup>33</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "The American National Red Cross," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:17 (7 September 1917), 134-135.

<sup>34</sup> Morton Schroeder, "Adolph Ackermann, Chauvinism, and Free Speech," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 2 (1984), 16.

song was presented at a program which included the mixed choir, organ and piano. The song was considered such a success that the *Gemeindeblatt* advertised its sheet music for members to buy across the synod. Its lyrics exhibit a devoted love for their country:

America, most blessed land  
 Where freemen ever shall gather  
 Where high and low and rich and poor  
 United as man with man...  
 My country, my glorious, glorious land...<sup>35</sup>

Lutherans in New Ulm perhaps felt extra incentive to display their loyalty for the United States ever since the draft meeting in July 1917. Unfortunately, events like the patriotic program at DMLC went seemingly unnoticed by the Minnesota Public Safety Commission, who were too busy looking for proof of disloyalty.

Ladies' Aid Societies, or *Frauvereins*, became essential to WELS congregations' work with the Red Cross. In Peshtigo, Wisconsin, an APL member visited St. Johannes to discover that



6.4: Rev. Otto Engel poses with St. Jacob's Frauverein in Norwalk, Wisconsin.

every member of the congregation's *Frauverein* held membership in the Red Cross.<sup>36</sup> In Plymouth, Michigan, the *Frauverein* of St. Peter's Congregation became "determined to counteract the ignorant fanaticism of the hundred percenter Americans, who called

everyone of German extraction a Hun."<sup>37</sup> They organized meetings every week to sew for the Red Cross and arranged clothing drives for war relief in Europe. A Red Cross flag was hung in the church parlor next to a service flag, the latter created by the society. These societies also took

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 16; "Buchertisch," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:9 (28 April 1918), 140.

<sup>36</sup> A.A. Viall Report, 6 April 1918, OG 172536.

<sup>37</sup> WLS Archives, Plymouth Folder, *Church History of St. Peter, Plymouth*, 27.

responsibility to provide care and holiday packages to their soldiers in camps across the country.<sup>38</sup>



6.5: St. Peter's Frauverein, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. These societies became the face of loyalty across the synod.

As previously demonstrated, Liberty Bond drives provoked some animosity among German Lutheran circles, especially early in the war. As the war progressed, however, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans displayed much more organized and enthusiastic support for Liberty Bonds. Government officials took notice, as a CPS official remarked, "This Liberty Loan is the best thing I know to change seditious people into patriots. A number of fellows that have sulked in their tents in the past, some of them decidedly pro-German, have even worked on the committee and are among our best hustlers."<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Lutheran in Wellington, Minnesota held a church meeting where 52 of 57 eligible voting members attended.<sup>40</sup> Members of this meeting were asked to pay \$2.50 as soon as possible to buy bonds and war stamps. At Grace Lutheran in Milwaukee, the church accepted the US Secretary of Treasury McAdoo's request for churches to

<sup>38</sup> J.W. Behnken, "The Home congregation and Her Boy Under the Flag," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:10 (19 May 1918), 79.

<sup>39</sup> Thos. E. Cashman to CPS Sec. H.W. Libby, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.

<sup>40</sup> Engel, 41.

get involved in the Third Liberty Loan. At a congregational meeting, a synod member "explained this type of propaganda in convincing and clear ways how we as Lutherans, as patriots, should deal with this bond issue, and how the whole congregation should partake."<sup>41</sup> The congregation decided to hang posters in the school and vestibule of the church "in order to bring the point across that one's money was needed." The pastor at Grace was even asked "to say appropriate words from the pulpit regarding this matter." While not all congregations would approve of Grace's promotion of bonds from the pulpit, their acquiescence in the matter shows how much outside pressure had taken a toll on a strong position taken by the Wisconsin Synod earlier in the war of non-pulpit participation in government propaganda.

The synod as a whole eventually felt obligated to organize and systematize work with Liberty Bond drives. The Committee on Public Information called for the enlistment "of all organized bodies in the coming campaign for the Third Liberty Loan." The WELS responded by designating a committee in Milwaukee to calculate the contribution of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans and to send a report to the CPI. Its director, George Creel, sent back this reply:

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter...and assure you that the so valued co-operation of the Lutheran Church along thoroughly organized lines in behalf of the Third Liberty Loan is most highly appreciated...To receive tabulation of final results as soon as possible will be greatly welcome, and is of great value, since it will enable us to embody same in our official report to the Secretary of Treasury.<sup>42</sup>

Members of Wisconsin Synod congregations were told to report to their pastor or church committee to what measure they had taken part in the Loan, and that church was to gather this information and report it to the synod committee. The WELS committee ran into difficulty in receiving reports from all congregations, and pleaded in the *Northwestern Lutheran* that "a large number [of congregations] are still to be heard from." The final results are uncertain, but the committee claimed to be highly gratified by the reports made by many WELS congregations.

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<sup>41</sup> Quarterly Meeting Minutes of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI, 11 April 1918.

<sup>42</sup> F. Graeber, "Report on the Third Liberty Loan!" *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:11 (2 June 1918), 82.

Officials of the synod were certainly anxious to see satisfactory results to refute those who doubted the loyalty of German Lutherans.

In total war, nearly every aspect of life can be made into a contribution to the war effort. WELS Lutherans found many other ways to support the United States. The *Gemeindeblatt* urged its readers to "save wheat, bread, sugar, oil, coal, and whatever else may be added." The publication decided to set an example for its readers by saving paper and ink through condensing its "Receipts" section from three columns to one and a half.<sup>43</sup> It later publicized a "thank you" to the government for refraining from "digging theology students for military service," for this would have caused many more vacancies than there already were.<sup>44</sup> Other WELS members publically put their loyalty on display. Professor M.J. Wagner, who spoke at the earlier New Ulm draft meeting, took part in a patriotic program on Lincoln's birthday and gave a speech entitled "Lincoln and Patriotic Address."<sup>45</sup> Upon a surprise visit from an APL agent, Pastor John Helmes of Menasha, Wisconsin showed membership cards of the Red Cross and Food Administration. When asked, he also furnished English copies of his sermons from the past two months. Fully convinced, the agent reported that "Rev. Helmes has been a capable supporter of the interests of this government in the successful prosecution of this war."<sup>46</sup> With the prospect of a visit from a government official always looming, it was prudent to blanket oneself with patriotic deeds.

Patriotic sentiments were not always expressed smoothly. A WELS pastor speaking in German to a crowd at Olivia, Minnesota spoke on the Matthew 22:21 text, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." Unfortunately, the member from the Commission of Public Safety heard, "So gebt dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers

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<sup>43</sup> "Sparen!" *Gemeindeblatt* 53:3 (1 February 1918), 42-43.

<sup>44</sup> "Das Theologische Seminar," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:13 (23 June 1918), 199-200.

<sup>45</sup> Schroeder, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Wm. H. Steiner Report, "Rev. John Helmes," 29 April 1918, OG 186773.

ist, und Gott was Gottes ist." Shortly afterward he was apprehended by the CPS, which tried to impose a fine for what they believed to be a pro-German speech. The pastor served as his own defense and exonerated himself by showing the CPS that the German word "Kaiser" did not refer to the German Kaiser, but rather a generic term denoting a ruler or king.<sup>47</sup> Another well-intentioned patriotic act gone wrong took place in Milwaukee, where a man named C.D. Reichle thought he could honor both church and state by displaying an American flag with the words "Ev. Salem's Gemeinde" sewed on. After an APL agent informed him of the statute forbidding the desecration of the American flag, the flag was quickly removed.<sup>48</sup>

Because WELS Lutherans differed in their patriotic enthusiasm, some difficulties within congregations surfaced. The most unfortunate occurred at Rev. August Stock's congregation in Neosho, WI. Pastor Stock's participation in the war effort could make any APL member jealous. He organized the Home Guard Reserves in the town and encouraged congregation members to participate. He also put himself in charge of selling Liberty Bonds in the town of Neosho and marketed War Savings Stamps to his congregation. In church, he organized a special collection to purchase numerous flags to decorate the church and preached on patriotic themes. At a time when synod churches were under investigation, these maneuvers provided sorely needed protection to the congregation. Yet for a church body which reluctantly entered the war and strictly guarded the church and state barrier, some conflict was inevitable.<sup>49</sup>



6.6: Rev. August Stock,  
1908

<sup>47</sup> Engel 42.

<sup>48</sup> A.A. Viall Report, 23 February 1918, OG 155126.

<sup>49</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 1-3.

Difficulties already arose by August of 1917. Many members of the congregation felt Stock was overbearing as he pushed the congregation to participate in patriotic activities. Rumors even spread that Stock reported to authorities every member who refused to participate in the Home Guard and Liberty Loan drives. Herman Schuett, the president of the congregation, filed a protest in October 1917 to Rev. Carl Buenger, the president of the Southeastern Wisconsin District of the Synod. Buenger and another minister visited the congregation to investigate the situation, but were unable to create peace. Two days after the visit, a Mr. Petsch and fourteen other members of the congregation sent a letter to Wisconsin Synod President, G.E. Bergemann, claiming they were unsatisfied with the investigation, and argued for more concrete action against Stock.<sup>50</sup>

During the following months, the strife escalated. After Stock dismissed a woman, Mrs. Griep, from the congregation for penning a public letter against him, she and some other members transferred to the synod congregation in nearby Woodland, Wisconsin. This caused tension between Stock and Rev. Lescow of Woodland, who admitted Mrs. Griep to his congregation against the protest of Stock. Buenger looked to transfer Stock to another congregation, but as he wrote to synod president Bergemann in February, "None of the other [district] presidents will nominate him, and I do not have any vacancies. I am afraid he digs his grave there." In a last attempt to remedy the situation, Buenger wrote a letter "in bruederlicher Liebe" (in brotherly love) to Stock in March. He pleaded with Stock to solely preach the gospel and to try to let the situation burn out. Stock was apparently unmoved, as Buenger wrote to Stock two months later, "It seems to me that you slandered me as well as Pastor Lescow to your church members by giving a one-sided report why the [synod] has not acted in the affair of Mrs.

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<sup>50</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 1-3; C. Buenger to A. Toepel, 24 August 1917, WLS Archives, Neosho Folder. G.E. Bergemann to C. Buenger, 29 October 1917, *ibid*; C. Buenger to A.C. Stock, 6 December 1917, *ibid*.

Griep." Buenger made another visit to Neosho in May, but the situation was clearly worsening beyond his control.<sup>51</sup>

The issue finally reached its culmination at a congregational meeting on 7 July 1918. As the meeting was about to close, a member, Frank Redlin, rose and said that certain members asked of him as deacon to request that Stock desist in his activities with the Home Guard. Upon this request, Rev. Stock immediately demanded the congregation to close the official meeting, "as I would not allow any war talk in an official meeting." But the congregation's president, Herman Schuett, responded that the congregation had a right to demand this promise. Frank Redlin and August Otto reprimanded Stock and said that the congregation called him as their pastor and not the state, and that he should not serve both congregation and state. Another member, Robert Schmidt, arose and said if Stock did not stop all his war activities, "the congregation will be sent to pieces." In his defense, Stock claimed some of his positions were appointed to him from government officials, and he had to willingly obey the government. Mr. Otto replied that he "ought to shirk those things as other ministers do," and if he kept these activities up "our whole congregation would be laughed at and mocked at by the neighboring members of other neighboring congregations."<sup>52</sup>

The quarrel progressively became more intense. After Stock continually refused to desist from his activities, Frank Redlin rose and spoke, "if you do not give us that promise today, I will not consider you as my minister and will resign as a deacon." Two other members also confirmed his statement. Before Stock could respond, Otto, Schmidt, and August Nell then

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<sup>51</sup> C. Buenger to August Petsch, 9 February 1918, WLS Archives, Neosho Folder; C. Buenger to G.E. Bergemann, 25 February 1918, *ibid*; C. Buenger to Rev. C. Lescow, 6 March 1918, *ibid*; C. Buenger to A.C. Stock, 11 March 1918, *ibid*; C. Buenger to E. Griep, 10 May 1918, *ibid*; G.E. Bergemann to St. Paul Congregation, Neosho, WI, 10 May 1918, *ibid*; C. Buenger to A.C. Stock, 29 May 1918, *ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 1-3. This account comes from the testimony of Stock to the APL agent in charge of this case. This account was shown to the members in attendance and they all agreed that it gave an accurate account.

asked Stock what he expected the congregation to do when Stock had to spend three weeks with the Home Guard Reserves at Camp Douglas. Stock denied that he was obligated to make such a trip, since the Reserves were only an auxiliary to the State Guards. Mr. Redlin seconded the charge, however, and claimed he was certain that the Reserves also must go three weeks to Camp Douglas. Thereupon the meeting moved to the parsonage, where Stock showed official letters from the Adjutant General supporting his argument. Since it was getting late, a member made the motion to close the official meeting. Stock seconded the motion and insisted upon it. It was decided to postpone the matter until Tuesday. Later that evening, however, after an English language service, Rev. Stock handed in a written resignation to the deacons of the church. Stock described his decision to resign with the following remarks:

I loved my congregation but I love my country more...yes that Mr. Herman Schuett and Mr. Frank Redlin were my most intimate friends, but when my most intimate friends in the spur of the moment try to barr [*sic*] me from doing my duties to my country, friendship ceases and my country first. I cannot even now forget the many personal favors of my most intimate friends...but it is my painful duty to say even to them: My country first. Only the omniscient God knows what battles in my heart I am fighting to take this view and action.<sup>53</sup>

The events at St. Paul in Neosho brought about an investigation by the APL the following day. Stock and the prominent participants in the meeting were interviewed separately. Fortunately, the unnamed agent was genuinely sympathetic to all sides. He even provided a translator for two of the four members who had difficulty communicating in English. He understood the viewpoint of the congregation as he remarked, "While Rev. Stock is a patriotic man and a hundred percent American I am afraid he is somewhat hysterical and has antagonized certain members of his congregation." He was also impressed with Frank Redlin and Herman Schuett's holdings in Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps, about \$400 each. He concluded that the members of the congregation did not object to Stock's activities from want of patriotism, but instead that such activities were provoking difficulties in church doctrinal

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<sup>53</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 3.

matters, and this was the source of the objections. It is possible this APL agent understood Lutheran doctrine better than most agents; others, as previously shown, could never grasp that Lutherans withheld participation in some activities for religious convictions. The sad account of August Stock's resignation demonstrates the difficult situation Wisconsin Synod Lutherans encountered because of the all-encompassing war.<sup>54</sup>

### **Apologetics**

Across the Midwest, the numerous State Councils of Defense tried to outdo their counterparts in Americanization legislation. South Dakota and Iowa forbade the use of German in all public gatherings and over the telephone.<sup>55</sup> The Nebraska State Council of Defense outlawed the use of any non-English language for all subjects, including religion, in all public and private schools.<sup>56</sup> The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety forbade all non-citizens from teaching in both public and private schools. Wisconsin banned German from all wireless stations, and shortly afterward APL agents dismantled WELS stations at the Lutheran *Altenheim* and *Kinderheim* in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.<sup>57</sup> Nearly every Midwestern state had bills pending in the legislature to duplicate these laws. States like Michigan, Nebraska, and Wisconsin circulated bills requiring attendance in public schools until the eighth grade. Amid the seemingly unending wave of state laws concerning the German language and parochial schools, German Lutherans sensed that their habits and institutions were in serious danger.<sup>58</sup> Across the synod, leaders and lay members took up the pen and defended their way of life from the "Americanizers" who attempted to use the war as a harbinger for change. The two types of works which appeared

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<sup>54</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 5-6.

<sup>55</sup> Engel, 41.

<sup>56</sup> "Enemies of Lutheran Schools in Nebraska," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:3 (9 February 1919), 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, "Wireless Stations," 28 April 1917, OG 14300.

<sup>58</sup> "Wie haben wir unsere schulen einzurichten," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:17 (18 August 1918), 265; F. Graeber, "Danger Threatens," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:14 (14 July 1918), 107.

most often in the *Gemeindeblatt*, *Northwestern Lutheran*, and the *Theologische Quartalschrift* focused on the German language and the parochial school system.

A favorite method for these writers was to highlight a prejudiced article and dismantle it. A writer in the *Northwestern Lutheran* targeted an article in the *Minneapolis Journal* that advocated for the abolishment of foreign languages in newspapers, church services, and to insist "socially and legally" on the use of the English language in America. The *Northwestern Lutheran* writer retorted, "We cannot understand by what process of reasoning a person at this time in our history should become nervous about the predominance of the English language in the United States," and later mocked, "We cannot believe that the editorial writer in the *Journal* has carefully considered what he wrote, but it must have been written in a weak moment of war fanaticism without careful consideration."<sup>59</sup>

Writers often used American war propaganda to justify their position on the language question. One of the writers in the *Gemeindeblatt* put it aptly:

One of the freedoms we are fighting for is freedom of speech. It has been America's proud reputation, that every alien immigrant can use any language to write, speak and read, and indeed, America has its reward, for never has a nation of so many different types of people revealed such loyalty and unity to America now in its current crisis.<sup>60</sup>

The article then pointed out how autocratic regimes in Europe outlawed the language of the enemy, subtly hinting that the United States was Prussianizing itself by implementing these laws. When writers were not busily defending the German language against outsiders, they were encouraging German Lutherans to stay strong despite outside pressure. "Just now we need to emphasize and exercise our Constitutional rights of free speech and free press. Let us not be intimidated to give up this unalienable right," wrote the *Northwestern Lutheran*.<sup>61</sup> The

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<sup>59</sup> "Use the American Language," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:10 (21 May 1917), 78.

<sup>60</sup> "Über die Frage der Sprachen," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:13 (23 June 1918), 202-203.

<sup>61</sup> "Use the American Language," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:10 (21 May 1917), 78.

*Gemeindeblatt* was much more blunt: "He is even a coward who lets anyone dictate anything to him."<sup>62</sup>

Despite the apologetics for the use of the German language, most synod leaders understood that a transition to English was inevitable in the long run. A generational gap existed in language usage, with the younger more adept and comfortable using the English language for religious purposes. Despite this inevitability, the hope remained that the church would steer clear of the influences which often came hand-in-hand with the English language in the church. Seminary Professor August Pieper summarized these fears well:

In the German language lie all the roots of genuine, solid, strong Lutheranism and Christianity, in the English, not one. Tear this plant forcibly from the soil of the German language, and it will become a dry tumbleweed driven by the wind against the fence. We must *hold fast to the German language in church and school* as long as there still are those who can be edified better in German than in English. In our training-schools for pastors and teachers we must cling to the German language *until Judgment Day*...O that the Lutheran Church, especially as it becomes an English speaking church would guard against this moralistic gospel and common sense Christianity of the Reformed as against the devil himself! O that we might say to them until Judgment Day as Luther said to Zwingli, "*You have a different spirit than we!*" This gospel of the sectarian churches is nothing else than the authority of the blind but proud human reason over the Gospel of Christ. If we as a Synod were already dominated by the Reformed spirit of reason, then no study of Scripture, be it ever so intense, could produce a spiritual renewal in us, but would become mere modern criticism of the Bible and rob us of our faith.<sup>63</sup>

Even before the United States entered the war, WELS Lutherans sensed an animosity toward their school system. "There is an element in our American society which nurses a sullen resentment against every form of private and parochial schools," wrote Moussa in 1915.<sup>64</sup> The same forces which tried to undermine their parochial school system with the Bennett Law in 1890 reemerged during the First World War, and the rhetoric remained mostly unchanged. They claimed Lutheran parochial schools did not Americanize their students, that German language instruction left them ill-equipped for life, and that only one common school system could truly unite the country ideologically. Rev. Fred Graeber could see past the rhetoric: "The enemy is

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<sup>62</sup> "Obrigkeit und Sprache," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:16 (4 August 1918), 253.

<sup>63</sup> August Pieper, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 62 (1965), 194.

<sup>64</sup> "Sullen Resentment," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:15 (21 August 1915), 127.

employing whatever our troublous times afford in the way of camouflage and is making another assault on our constitutional liberty."<sup>65</sup> When it came to their parochial schools, WELS Lutherans did not reject outright an "American viewpoint" for their pupils, but they flatly repudiated Americanization in morals and religion, and used their parochial school system as a bulwark against it.<sup>66</sup>

WELS Lutherans understood who was behind these parochial school laws, which they claimed were "backed by the Reformed sectarian element and by the foes of our church generally." As a case in point, the *Northwestern Lutheran* referred to the proposed Blair Educational Amendment in the Senate. The amendment would empower Congress to enforce upon the public school the teaching of Christian religion, "and its object is to open the way for the national power to eliminate all parochial schools, and to take control of religious as well as secular education of the children of our nation." Senator Blair did not hide his intentions, and the author quoted one of his arguments: "If this idea of church authority should come to permeate the public school system, the parochial school would disappear."<sup>67</sup>

As further proof of "sectarian" church involvement, the *Northwestern Lutheran* printed verbatim the sermon of A.A. De Larme, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Omaha, Nebraska:

I most heartily approve of some of the bills regarding the public schools of the state that have been recently introduced in the legislature. One of the most important, in my estimation, is that introduced by Senator Perry Reed of Hamilton County, requiring boys from seven to sixteen years and girls from seven to seventeen years of age to attend the public schools during the full school year.<sup>68</sup>

While citing his reasons for the abolishment of church schools, the preacher said, "Parochial schools devote considerable time to the teaching of antiquated creeds and dogmas that are anachronisms to this age. If taught at all, these things should be taught at home." Another

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<sup>65</sup> F. Graeber, "Danger Threatens," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:14 (14 July 1918), 107.

<sup>66</sup> F. Graeber, "Un-American Legislation," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:5 (9 March 1919), 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> John Jenny, "Would Eliminate Parochial Schools," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:8 (21 April 1919), 61-62.

<sup>68</sup> F. Graeber, "Intolerance," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:7 (6 April 1919), 50.

*Northwestern Lutheran* article featured a Detroit lodge, which it believed was behind "this notorious anti-church school amendment that it hopes to spring on the voters this fall." The article shared a petition created by the society with the following argument:

We do not believe that there is anything in the Lutheran creed that would suffer, should their children be obliged to attend the public school; but if there is anything in their doctrine that would suffer, the sooner they abandon that part of their doctrine, the better for the Lutheran children and the people that adhere to it.<sup>69</sup>

When defending their schools, writers most often appealed to the Constitutional right of parents to decide which education is best for their child. This argument became essential as states considered laws to make attendance at public schools compulsory. "The Constitution does not take from parents the right to train their children in their own Christian faith; nor does it take from them the right to repudiate compulsory acceptance of public teachers, high and low, whose chief business is to undermine the Christian faith of the children and the youth of the land," quoted the *Northwestern Lutheran*. No one, argued Rev. John Brenner, should enjoy a government-instituted monopoly over the young minds of the nation. "The inhibition of Church schools, whether parochial or academic, by the state is distinctly unconstitutional and un-American."<sup>70</sup>

The verbal and legislative onslaught, however, continued to pour on parochial schools as the war dragged on, and many WELS members got involved in the struggle. On 13 January 1918, the *Milwaukee Journal* quoted a German Baptist pastor from Milwaukee, who said, "I absolutely disapprove of the parochial school, where the point of view and the language of the old country is kept up, and the children do not learn to think *in American terms*."<sup>71</sup> Later in the article, a German Methodist pastor gave this tribute: "Our church has never believed in the parochial school, because we wanted the children to become thoroughly Americanized in the

<sup>69</sup> F. Graeber, "Un-American Legislation," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:5 (9 March 1919), 38-39.

<sup>70</sup> John Brenner, "Our Schools," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:15 (7 Aug 1915), 119-120.

<sup>71</sup> Anna Hoppe, "A Defense of the Lutheran Parochial School," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:2 (27 January 1918), 12-13.

Public School." Anna Hoppe, a former WELS parochial student, came to the defense of the Lutheran parochial school and used herself, "a patriotic American," as evidence of its effectiveness. "Lutheran schools were not founded for the purpose of maintaining the German language, but for rooting and grounding the children entrusted to their care in the infallible Word of the Lord," said Hoppe. The virtues inculcated were not specifically German, but "Christian virtues." She closed her article with a prayer:

God bless our Lutheran parochial schools, these bulwarks of Christian life, Christian citizenship, Christian patriotism, these staunch advocates of the greatest American principles: the separation of church and state...these defenders against the countless false doctrines and Isms of the day, which lay traps to ensnare and beguile the Church's treasures: its children.<sup>72</sup>

When it came to the persecution of German Lutherans, Hans Moussa concluded the "Lutheran" half of the term played a more important role: "It has nothing, or very little, to do with the German character of the Lutheran church."<sup>73</sup> Instead, Moussa pointed out the offensive nature of Lutheranism to the "self-appointed guardians and exponents of American liberty and tolerance." First, Lutheranism's outspoken criticism of lodge and fraternalism often created animosity. Secondly, claimed Moussa, "Our policy of tenaciously clinging to our own schools" caused conflict as well. But most of all, "our refusal to be party to the unionism which the so called American churches are forever substituting for Christianity caused critics to grow peevish because we sometimes refuse to give encouragement to efforts which they heartily approve." Moussa may have somewhat downplayed the role of the anti-German sentiment during the war, but his conclusions about Lutheranism have much support. Another *Northwestern Lutheran* article was cynical about attempts to argue the Lutheran position in the war "Blank stares and frowns greeted every attempt to make plain that the Lutheran church, second to no other in its devotion to the state, did not propose to compromise its own faith by adopting every view any

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<sup>72</sup> Anna Hoppe, "A Defense of the Lutheran Parochial School," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:2 (27 January 1918), 12-13.

<sup>73</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Are We to be Persecuted?" *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:15 (7 August 1917), 115.

government official chose to promulgate."<sup>74</sup> The remedy to this, they claimed, was to stay strong to Lutheran principles, as Moussa argued, "Those unfortunates who try to escape from persecution by outwardly conforming to the wishes of the persecutors, are not winning the good will they seek. They are not respected but suspected." Contrarily, "Conscious of your own worth and public righteousness, you will win the respect of our enemy if you convince him, by remaining true to your principles, that you were never wrong."

While apologetics in the *Gemeindeblatt* and the *Northwestern Lutheran* encouraged German Lutherans, these publications had very little possibility of being read by the persecutors and detractors. The *Northwestern Lutheran* understood this: "We know little or nothing about those things which we instinctively dislike. They do not like us, therefore they do not want to know anything about us." The best apologetics, therefore, occurred on the individual scale:

There is but one way to combat the foulmouthed slanderer: begin at home. Do not attempt to effect sweeping change by publishing your sentiments broadcast, but go to the man next door and find out where he heard that last bit of slander...You have your Council of Defense. These men are human. Most of them decent. Hardly any know much about Lutheran affairs. Don't sit at home and mope about the injustice of it all; seek out the best men on the Council and talk it over with them. They will be grateful for every correction you make of their mistaken notions.<sup>75</sup>

The best remedy for the injustice, however, was acceptance of the persecution, even rejoicing.

The Michigan District Convention happily decreed, "If our Christianity arouses no opposition, we should question ourselves: Are we indeed followers of that Christ who shall be a sign that it is spoken against?" Lutherans, therefore, need only rejoice in their sufferings and to persevere through them.<sup>76</sup>

### **Perseverance**

Despite protests, many bills became law which severely restricted worship and school practices of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. Even when laws were not in place, many APL members

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<sup>74</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Again, Church and State," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:26 (29 December 1918), 202.

<sup>75</sup> "Fellow Citizens," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:10 (19 May 1918), 73.

<sup>76</sup> "Proceedings of the Michigan Dist. Synod Assembled at Scio, Mich, 1918," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:15 (28 July 1918), 114.

or other vigilantes tried to enforce change as they saw fit. WELS Lutherans used several different methods to cope with these changes. Sometimes even civil disobedience was advocated. "It is Christian duty to obey the law of the land; it is the duty of government to rule according to the law of the land. The government that nullifies the constitution under which it holds power has forfeited the right to the obedience of its citizens."<sup>77</sup> Moussa later reminded his readers that Martin Luther practiced civil disobedience when authorities tried to compromise his faith. This steadfastness was not without controversy, and one incident even found its way to the Supreme Court in Washington D.C.

With the extremity of anti-German laws varying between the states, borders between these states created opportunities for perseverance and conflict. Julius Engel's congregation in Elkton, South Dakota was forbidden use of the German language by the South Dakota

legislature. After Engel made this announcement to his congregation, many members could be seen kneeling in the benches, crying and praying. Elkhorn's location and small size had allowed Engel and the congregation to previously converse almost exclusively in the German language. Engel was neither proficient nor conversant in the English language, and he expressed his difficulty in a letter to his parents in Milwaukee: "Right now I conduct all my services in the



6.7: Rev. Julius Engel, brother of Otto Engel.

English language. What that means to me you have no idea. I must have the dictionary in hand the whole week and if I should deliver the sermon freely I must read it."<sup>78</sup> Since Elkhorn was just a few miles away from the Minnesota border, however, the congregation bypassed the South Dakota law by holding German services in Minnesota. One of the member's farms on that side

<sup>77</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "The Birth of Freedom," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:21 (7 Nov 1917), 171-173.

<sup>78</sup> Engel 38; Julius Engel was the brother of aforementioned Otto Engel.

became the favorite meeting place for the Lutherans at Elkhorn until the conclusion of the war.<sup>79</sup>

The actions of the congregation in Elkhorn and other German Lutherans near the border angered Minnesota residents. Charles Chrisman wrote a letter of protest to the Minnesota

Commission on Public Safety:

Dear Sirs: Enclosed find copy of the South Dakota order forbidding the use of German in that state. The result of this is that they come over to our side of the line and hold meetings in that jargon. If you are unable to make such an order for our entire state could you not cover the counties adjoining the state line? We have enough traitors living on our side without furnishing asylum for criminals from Dakota...Leniency does no good with those public enemies. Why not try some of the only medicine that reaches them: Force?<sup>80</sup>

Chrisman then listed location where Lutherans had been gathering, most likely in the hope that agents of the CPS or APL would pay them a visit. Unaware to Chrisman, the APL had already visited Engel's congregation, where they dejectedly reported that he "preached the Bible from his pulpit and nothing else."<sup>81</sup> To Chrisman's disappointment, no law passed in Minnesota to restrict the use of German for worship in Minnesota.

The German Lutherans in Pipestone, Minnesota, persevered through their crisis via compromise. E.N. Prentice, the minister at First Presbyterian Church in Pipestone, had it in for the Lutheran church ever since they declined to hold a joint patriotic religious procession, and instead determined to "pull off a so called patriotic rally at one of the country homes."<sup>82</sup> The Lutherans at St. Paul in Pipestone had recently remodeled their church, and were planning a dedication service on 25 August 1918. Prentice and others tried to see to it that not one word of German would be spoken at that service, and threatened to use force if necessary. The congregation had used German exclusively in their worship up to that point, but Pastor Bonhoff agreed to split the service evenly between English and German. This somewhat abated the

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 38-39.

<sup>80</sup> Charles E. Chrisman to Public Safety Commission, 24 Aug 1918, 103.L.9.2F, CPS Records.

<sup>81</sup> Willis Toland Report, 28 May 1917, OG 21396.

<sup>82</sup> E.N. Prentice to J.A.A. Burnquist, 16 August 1918, 103.L.9.2F, Box 15, CPS Records.

pressure, but Prentice was not pleased. He and another member of his church wrote Minnesota governor Burnquist pleading for intervention:

I assure you, my dear Governor, that I speak the sentiment of the men of Pipestone County who willingly pledge their lives, their property, and their sacred honor for the defense of America in imploring you to immediately issue a proclamation permitting the use of the American language only in any public assembly in the State of Minnesota. Of course it is the hun [*sic*] and his language that hurts us the most and does the most damage and we plead with you to stop it at once.<sup>83</sup>

Prentice and his church member subtly hinted that unless the Commission intervened, mob rule may intercede on behalf of the American position. "If they undertake to hold the services in German," said Prentice "they will in all probability be dealt with by a righteously indignant community." His member, J.H. Robson, considered force a foregone conclusion, and promised if the Commission flexed its muscle, "we will see that it is in force...with the use of less force than would be necessary without a proclamation."<sup>84</sup> Hans K. Moussa's earlier prediction that those who conform will nonetheless endure persecution came to fruition in Pipestone, Minnesota.

A very effective method that German Lutherans employed to persevere was to work together as a religious community to ward off attacks. The Missouri Synod set up a Bureau of Defense to assist congregations in the Synodical Conference "during the present crisis." The Bureau's duty was to investigate where persecution existed and to support congregations in need. The Bureau's objectives included the following:

1. To assume the official representation of our congregation and our synodical interests before our State authorities wherever a situation of distress arises;
2. To prepare and disseminate suitable literature to exhibit the attitude of our church on every moot question, and to rebut any erroneous or slanderous reports about our Synod;
3. To aid our people in making proper reply to such reports wherever they appear in the public press;
4. To advise our people as to their conduct whenever their cooperation is required at public meetings and demonstrations, and religious scruples arise whether they may conscientiously do so;<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> E.N. Prentice to J.A.A. Burnquist, 16 August 1918, 103.L.9.2F, Box 15, CPS Records.

<sup>84</sup> J.H. Robson to Gov. Burnquist, 16 August 1918, 103.L.9.2F, Box 15, CPS Records.

<sup>85</sup> Julius Rosin Report, "Synodical Wartime Bureau," 3 December 1918, OG 284018; The intentions and workings of the Bureau were investigated and discussed in the Department of Justice.

The Bureau also sent out a questionnaire to schools in the Synodical conference and tried to gauge the level of hostility each school was facing from the community. The common defense of German Lutheran institutions followed less organized channels as well. When the Axel-Johnson bill was being discussed in Madison, Wisconsin to eliminate foreign languages in all state schools, a large crowd of objectors arrived at the state capitol, including a significant bloc of Synodical Conference Lutherans. Ernest von Briesen of the Wisconsin Synod made the principal address before the legislative committee, emphasizing the injustice of interfering with the rights of parents in the education of their children. Wisconsin chose to maintain freedom of language in religious instruction.<sup>86</sup>

While the stories of German Lutheran patriotism and perseverance are numerous, nothing could signify these virtues quite like the soldiers fighting across the Atlantic. Hans Moussa understood this, and after the war he urged congregations to use the soldiers to personify the patriotism of German Lutherans:

Nearly every church has a service flag and an honor roll. Now...would be the time to make them a permanent and easily available record...Tell when they went, where they trained, to which part of the army they were assigned, and if they went to France, in what actions they were engaged. Tell of their wounds and hospital experiences...<sup>87</sup>

Lest the historical record get it wrong, Moussa was convinced these accounts could serve as a rebuttal. "[They] would be a constant reminder that the Lutheran church did not fail its civic duties in the trying times of 1917-1918." This display could also help the church persevere in the uncertain years after the war, as Moussa claimed, "If we do something of this kind we will not be molested by officious 'patriotic' organizations." Moussa and his fellow German Lutherans hoped this would not be necessary, and prayed that peace and tranquility would return to the church in the following years.

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<sup>86</sup> "Language Legislation," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:6 (23 March 1919), 46-47.

<sup>87</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "War Memorials," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:24 (1 December 1918), 188.

If these war memorials served as the only testament to the Wisconsin Synod's reaction to the First World War, they would severely gloss over the ambiguities. In the early days of the war, many members in anger and dismay openly clashed with an equally hostile "war party." This culminated in the anti-draft movement at New Ulm and the anti-Espionage Act expressions of Otto Engel's American Liberty League. As German Lutheran ministers and members moved into the Justice Department's short list, this combativeness could not last. It is clear that many of the positive war contributions were brought about by the "stick" instead of the "carrot." This should not take anything away from the expressions of patriotism from the synod, however. This was simply a different brand of patriotism than that espoused by mainstream America. It advocated American ideologies such as freedom of conscience and religion, and took up the role of guardians of these principles. A strict focus on the dissent would also do a complete disservice to the thousands of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans who complied with the draft or volunteered their lives for their adopted country. As Rev. Palechek told an agent, "our young men will cross the sea and fight, but they will never approve of the war."<sup>88</sup> Otto Engel's nephew, Walter Engel, fits Palechek's description. During March 1918, Walter helped Otto distribute pamphlets for the Socialist Party—which advocated a quick or immediate peace. Walter was then drafted one month later, whereby he reported and traveled to France for combat.<sup>89</sup> This sense of duty for these Lutherans usually trumped personal indignation.

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<sup>88</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 16 June 1917, OG 26572.

<sup>89</sup> Frank F. Wolfgram Report, 18 February 1919, OG 5025. Also the son of Julius Engel from this chapter. Despite his compliance with the draft, Frank Wolfgram still investigated Walter's activities with the Socialist party after he returned from the war.

## Conclusion: No Armistice Here

Armistice Day on 11 November 1918 triggered a collective exhale and sense of merriment across the country, especially among the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. The students at Grace Lutheran School in Milwaukee, for example, "heard the excitement" from their classroom, and "ran out of school to join in."<sup>1</sup> The *Gemeindeblatt* posted poems which celebrated the newly arrived peace.<sup>2</sup> Anxious individuals with relatives in Germany, after not hearing from them for at least eighteen months, and often fearing the worst, looked into regaining contact. The *Northwestern Lutheran* informed its readers that "it will be some months before the usual exchange of mails may become effective."<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, the publication listed instructions for synod members to send mail to their relatives through the American Red Cross. With the passing of the Hohenzollern dynasty in Germany, many detractors believed that German Lutherans met this development with despair. While the *Northwestern Lutheran* admitted Hohenzollern's demise was "not without interest," this development could hardly moderate the joy of the armistice. Besides, "the greatest injustice done the Lutheran church" in Germany was done by a Hohenzollern in 1817, when he "decreed the 'union' of the Lutheran and Calvinistic churches in his domain of Prussia in 1817."<sup>4</sup> A new democratic regime in Germany could mean conditions "more favorable to the free and untrammled development of the [Lutheran] church."

German Lutherans felt antagonism and disillusionment over developments after the war. In September 1919, President Wilson addressed a crowd with the following remarks: "Is there [anyone] here, who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial

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<sup>1</sup> Historical Archives of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI, 11 November 1918.

<sup>2</sup> "Silvester 1918," *Gemeindeblatt* 54:3 (2 February 1919), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Letters to Enemy Countries," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:25 (15 December 1918), 194.

<sup>4</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "The Passing of Hapsburg and Hohenzollern," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:25 (15 December 1918), 195.

and commercial rivalry?...This war was a commercial and industrial war. It was not a political war...The commercial advantage will be ours [because of victory]."<sup>5</sup> Wisconsin Synod Lutherans fumed over the inconsistency of rhetoric over the past two years. Wisconsin Synod minister John Jenny wondered what happened to "that humanity, the freedom of the world, the root of civilization, which, as was reiterated time and time again, were at stake?" In Wilson's rhetoric, a disconnect emerged between a war with moral and religious undertones and a war for commercial supremacy."Personally, we never took such [religious] statements regarding the issues of this war seriously, much less did we believe in them," Jenny further iterated.

Wisconsin Synod Lutherans generally understood that peace did not completely remedy the situation. "The outlook for a triumph of sane Americanism is not very bright," wrote the *Northwestern Lutheran*, nearly a year after the war. "The stories of mob violence...[are] too fresh in our minds to find consolation in the vaunted 'American sense of fairness and justice.' The idea that might makes right does not seem to be peculiarly and exclusively a European error."<sup>6</sup> In an article titled "Will Religious Persecution Return?," Rev. Hans K. Moussa warned Wisconsin Synod Lutherans to "be awake to the fact that unless they guard their [religious] treasure bravely, they will lose it."<sup>7</sup> Many men in the country, according to Moussa, "are eagerly seeking the opportunity to wipe out our parochial schools...they stoke the whole church by cutting off its children." Even though the synod already faced charges of disloyalty, Moussa claimed that "we have no right to make even the slightest concession to the forces that are cloaking their conduct and their persecution with many fine patriotic phrases." Seminary professor John Schaller, giving in to the fact that persecution would prevail, avowed that "we

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<sup>5</sup> John Jenny, "The Inconsistency of it All!" *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:21 (19 October 1919), 164-165.

<sup>6</sup> John Schaller, "Untitled," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:14 (13 July 1919), 107-109.

<sup>7</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Will Persecution Return?" *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:2 (26 January 1919), 10-11.

may as well make ready to meet all kinds of religious oppression with stout hearts, steeled to bear sufferings for Christ's sake."

War reconstruction efforts included the same cozy relationship between evangelical churches and the state. The Treasury Department announced a Victory Liberty Loan for 21 April 1919, "a purely financial enterprise of the government," according to Seminary professor John Schaller.<sup>8</sup> Even without the war emergency, the Treasury dictated biblical texts for ministers to use in their sermons, and, with a calm assumption of authority, told them to "remember that a Minister's duty in this day of 'human service' stretches far out from the theological path." Those ministers who refused were threatened with the stigma of disloyalty. Most churches around the country complied, nonetheless, leading Schaller to remark, "the hysterical scheming of most churches to take a hand in the political reconstruction of all the world, including our own country, foreshadows nothing but disaster." Schaller hardly blamed the government for assuming the church to be its handmaiden. Instead, he blamed the "sectarian" churches, "who have for so many years engaged in political and social agitation, [who] have worked hard to produce this impression."

Despite the end of the war and the ensuing sense of respite, many Lutherans of the Wisconsin Synod were not out of the woods yet. As previously shown, numerous Department of Justice cases, from Otto Engel to Carl Fenska, spilled over into peacetime. Some investigations were just beginning. A month after the armistice, the Department of Justice received a complaint concerning a Wisconsin Synod church in White Bluffs, Washington. The sender reported that "the Rev. L.C. Krug...took up a subscription among Germans here about a year ago."<sup>9</sup> He was naturally suspicious because "members of this man's church are well known by their sayings and action to have been strong pro-German." The subscription check was traced to

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<sup>8</sup> John Schaller, "Religious Freedom Endangered II," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:12 (15 June 1919), 92-93.

<sup>9</sup> R.R. Woods to Department of Justice, 20 November 1918, OG 332660.

Wahluke, Washington, and it was suggested that an agent go over Rev. Krug's records and make a personal call on the minister. The Department thanked this informant and promised to send an agent to do just that at the first opportunity. A drop in urgency is noticeable here, however. Either the Department of Justice neglected to follow up or the agent failed to report his findings. Either way, the case file abruptly ends. In 1919, Wisconsin Synod president Rev. G.E. Bergemann was likely contacted by government authorities. Captain George B. Lester testified in 1919 in a hearing before the Senate: "I personally conducted a number of conferences with representatives of these large [Lutheran] synods, and pointed out to them the facts in reference to individual cases."<sup>10</sup> Lester claimed he encouraged the better element, "the American element of the Lutheran Church," to curb these men. The "Americanization" of the Wisconsin Synod remained, nonetheless, a complicated and delicate matter.



C.1: Rev. G.E. Bergemann,  
Wisconsin Synod President

### Selective Assimilation

Before the war, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans already practiced selective assimilation to some extent. While their cultural and religious habits remained "foreign" to popular opinion, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans consistently professed their love for the American Constitution and its decrees of religious liberty. This became especially clear during neutrality, as many leaders consistently quoted the Constitution to defend non-aggression principles.<sup>11</sup> During the war

<sup>10</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to R.R. Woods, 29 November 1918, OG 332660; A. Bruce Bielaski to F.A. Watt, 29 November 1918, OG 332660; F.A. Watt Report, "Rev. L.C. Krug," 9 December 1918, OG 332660; U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, *Hearings on Brewing and Liquor Interests and German and Bolshevik Propaganda*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919, p. 1788.

<sup>11</sup> For examples of Constitution rhetoric during neutrality and the war, see Prof. Ackermann's remarks in the *New Ulm Review*, 4 April and 29 September 1917; Prof. M.J. Wagner in *New Ulm Review*, 1 August 1917; Rev. Atrops in Eberstein Report, 23 January 1918, OG 133065; R.H. Retzlaff in Robert Davis Report,

crisis, officials consistently made their sentiment clear that this was not good enough. The Wisconsin Synod sought to compromise with these demands without giving up their religious nature. A practice of selective assimilation was needed and eventually applied.

While habit and a pride in German culture played a role in the particularly slow transition of the church to English, this issue had religious undertones as well. Lutheran histories were careful to point out that the loss of the German language typically went hand-in-hand with a compromise of Lutheran doctrine. A Lutheran history in 1916 used the term "American Lutheranism" to describe the synods which used English, by which he meant, "A Lutheranism modified by the Puritan element."<sup>12</sup> The author blamed this development on the lack of English Lutheran literature and the intermingling effects of learning the American language. The "American Lutherans" gave up on their parochial schools, joined lodges and other secret societies that promoted doctrinal indifferentism, and allowed "Methodists" and other evangelicals to "rant" from their pulpits on Sunday.<sup>13</sup> Wisconsin Synod seminary professor August Pieper warned that "the gospel of the English [churches] is the product of common sense, the spirit of reason...*It is a terrible danger that threatens our Church from that source.*"<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, the wartime strife prompted reflection and even concessions concerning the language issue. At the convention of the Wisconsin Synod in 1919, its first resolution on the language question bluntly states, "The transition into the English language is unavoidable." It then pledged to continue using German as long as there were those who were better served

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3 August 1917, OG 47665; Rev. Walter Hoenecke in "Etliche Fragen über Prohibition," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:3 (1 February 1918), 37-38; Rev. John Jenny in "The Language Question," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:23 (17 November 1918), 178-179; Rev. F. Graeber in "Danger Threatens," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:14 (14 July 1918), 107; Rev. Hans K. Moussa, "The Birth of Freedom," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 4:21 (7 November 1917), 171-173; among numerous others.

<sup>12</sup> Juergen Ludwig Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Burlington, IA: The German Literary Board, 1916), 100, 104, 110-111, 113-114, 116, 145, 436-437.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Kleppner, *Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900*, (New York: Free Press, 1970), 81.

<sup>14</sup> August Pieper, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 62 (1965), 193. Emphasis is his.

through that language. Seminary students were to learn to preach in English, but also remain competent enough to read German Lutheran sources.<sup>15</sup> Professor August Pieper confirmed this sentiment: "For the next fifty years we must become bilingual."<sup>16</sup> The transition slowly took effect. The *Northwestern Lutheran* surpassed the *Gemeindeblatt* in readership in 1939.<sup>17</sup> Churches across the synod rewrote their constitutions at varying speeds. St. Lucas Lutheran in Kewaskum, Wisconsin, for example, revised its church constitution to include both English and German services in 1939.<sup>18</sup> A second World War with Germany certainly helped speed the process. It would be another thirty years before the *Gemeindeblatt* ceased publishing and the German language could not be consistently heard at Wisconsin Synod services.<sup>19</sup>

The synod also made small concessions concerning its parochial schools. The Convention of 1919 reaffirmed that "no government has the right to prescribe to us in which language the Gospel is to be preached in the church and school."<sup>20</sup> However, Synod leaders redoubled their efforts to put the secular education in the parochial schools on par with the public schools. August Pieper even conceded that states had a right to pass certain laws requiring that children be educated, and he encouraged synod teachers and principals to report statistics to the state promptly and correctly.<sup>21</sup> Before the war, this opinion would have been met with scorn.

The major concessions eventually came from the church's opposition. After the failed experiment with national prohibition in the 1920s, such efforts dwindled in the ensuing decades. Sabbatarian laws met the same fate. These behaviors were eventually viewed as less of a danger to American society. In one of the many ironies of this narrative, the parochial school

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<sup>15</sup> "Convention of Joint Synod," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:21 (19 October 1919), 165.

<sup>16</sup> Pieper, 201.

<sup>17</sup> Schroeder, 18; John Brenner, "Forward in Christ: Doctrinal Challenges and Language Change," *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Files*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Constitution at St. Lucas Lutheran Church, Kewaskum, Wisconsin, 1939.

<sup>19</sup> James P. Schaefer, "Untitled," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 69:3 (February 1982).

<sup>20</sup> "Convention of Joint Synod," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:21 (19 October 1919), 165.

<sup>21</sup> August Pieper, "Zum Kampf um die freie Christliche Schule," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 17:3 (1920), 177.

eventually became highly regarded among many evangelical religious groups. The development which spurred this change of opinion was the secularization of the public school. Now without an institution to instill pietistic norms to the young, the parochial school suddenly became an attractive alternative. Since the Lutheran and Catholic religions have the longest tradition of parochial schools, many Christians not of those faiths attempt to enroll their children at these schools.

Nearly one hundred years after the war, countless ministers across the country are still asked to preach for ecumenical religious ventures. Ministers from the Wisconsin Synod will either decline or, more likely, be avoided because the supplicant already knows the answer. The ministers decline because they know they must make concessions to Lutheran beliefs to participate. In this way, the Wisconsin Synod never assimilated. Like in 1918, detractors attack this policy as either intolerant or quixotic. Few understand the historical and religious basis for their actions. To this day, the Wisconsin Synod has not fully embraced "American Lutheranism."

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Unless otherwise noted, German language sources from the Wisconsin Synod (*Gemeindeblatt*, *Theologische Quartalschrift*, or church records) were translated by myself. The Justice Department also unwittingly made my task easier by spending entire weeks translating Otto Engel's and other synod members' letters and publications. While they may have spun the translation somewhat to fit their purposes, they expected their translations to be upheld in the court of law. Furthermore, the original German letters are no longer extant, so personally translating them is not an option.

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