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Cover picture

Adolph Ackermann (1871-1950), Dr. Martin Luther College President

The War to End All Germans

Wisconsin Synod Lutherans and the First World War

by Stephen Gurgel

Part 1

I: 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."¹ 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: its 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.²



Which of the Men You know is a German Agent?

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

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,"³ 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 natural-

ly 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; incendiaryism, sabotage, explosions, murder, domestic riot.⁴

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.⁵ It also punished all attempts to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of 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.⁶

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."⁷ 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.⁸

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 mainstream America. 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 by the difficulty of securing convictions of 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."⁹ 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."¹⁰ Armed with these statutes, the colossal home front war machine could successfully root out all disloyalty.

II. 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.¹¹

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.¹² 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 coun-

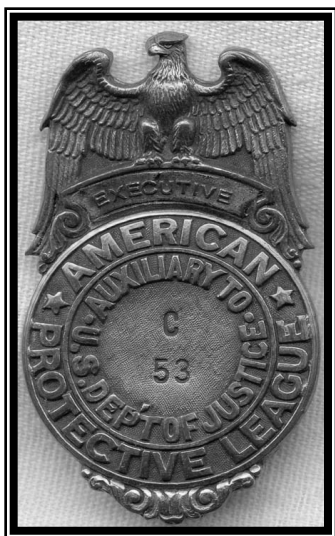
try was ever so thoroughly and intelligently policed in the history of the world.¹³

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!"¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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 per capita average.¹⁶ 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."¹⁷ 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."¹⁸ 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."¹⁹ 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 serve had it been possible for us—it never gave back an inch of ground."²⁰ 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 loud tone of voice about his work, his loyalty and said he was looking for slackers."²¹

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 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."²² 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!"²³ 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."²⁴ 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.²⁵ After all that work, a report asserting the subject's innocence would

have been surprising.

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."²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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."²⁸ 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.²⁹ Eventually, the criteria for acceptance 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."³⁰

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."³¹ 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.³²

A Lutheran coming under investigation became a common occurrence for the APL. In fact, Lutherans were the favorite target of the organization.³³ 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.³⁴

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."³⁵ 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."³⁶ 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.

III. 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 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."³⁷ 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."³⁸ The minority against the war caused endangerment to the war effort, especially when "civilization [was] hanging in the balance."³⁹ 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."⁴⁰ 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 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.⁴¹ 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."⁴²

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."⁴³ 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 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.⁴⁴

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."⁴⁵ 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."⁴⁶ 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 Wisconsin Synod and other liturgical bodies like the Catholic Church adamantly rejected this development throughout the course of the war.⁴⁷

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 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."⁴⁸ 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."⁴⁹ 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."⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

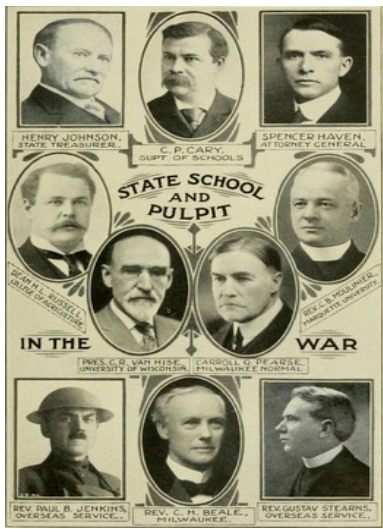
Creel, nonetheless, stood by his record during the war. "Our European comrades," claimed Creel, "viewed the [CPI] experiment with amazement...for in every other belligerent country censorship laws established iron rules, rigid suppressions, and drastic prohibitions carrying severe penalties."⁵² While "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."⁵³ The CPI may have accomplished this while bearing a benign face, but the implication of force lurking behind it could be tacitly assumed.

IV. 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 those of the Committee on Public Information, and in many ways they served as its handmaidens. 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 overtime in order to make up for lost time," asserted McGee.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ The CPS remained exceptionally busy throughout the war; it processed an average of 18 sacks of mail weekly and investigated 682 cases concerning sedition.⁵⁶ 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



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

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."⁵⁷ 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."⁵⁸ 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 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.⁵⁹

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 official orders dealing with saloons, the CPS declared bartending to be unpatriotic "in lieu of the serious shortage of farm workers."⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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."⁶² 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."⁶³ 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."⁶⁴ 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."⁶⁵ During a cold Wisconsin winter, an army colonel posted a 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."⁶⁶ Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, 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."⁶⁷ 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."⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ 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.

V. 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 the United States army, but being blind in one eye his service was declined.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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.⁷² In Milwaukee, a mob mounted a machine gun outside Pabst Theater to prevent the staging of the German-language production, *Wilhelm Tell*.⁷³

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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

Like government organizations, mobs specifically targeted Lutherans. In Illinois, a mob beat a Lutheran pastor and his wife because the minister preached in German.⁷⁶ In Peshtigo, 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.⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸ Another Lutheran school in Schumm, Ohio, was dynamited. 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.⁸⁰ For some, going to school constituted an act of bravery. As Wisconsin Synod teacher George Pullman was instructing students, a bullet was fired through the window of the classroom. Fortunately, no one was injured.⁸¹

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.⁸² 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 Loyalty meetings...associates with pro-Germans, and takes no interest in war work."⁸³ 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.

Endnotes

1. James R. Mock, *Words that Won the War: the Committee of Public Information* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1939), 32.
2. George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 168.
3. Emerson Hough, *The Web: The Authorized History of the American Protective League* (Chicago: The Reilly & Lee Co., 1919), 58.
4. Creel, 166.
5. Despite unwavering arguments by Wisconsin Synod 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.
6. Mock, 23-25.
7. *Ibid*, 32.
8. "Press Censorship and Religious Liberty," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:13 (7 July 1917), 101; See part two for more detailed WELS criticism of wartime policies.
9. Hough, 57.
10. *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 9 August 1918.
11. 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.
12. Thomas, 32.
13. Gregory in a speech seven months after the war, found in Thomas, p.3.
14. Creel, 167.
15. Harold M. Hyman, *To Try Men's Souls: Loyalty Tests in American History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 271-272.
16. 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.
17. French Strother, *Fighting Germany's Spies* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1918), 195-198.
18. *Ibid*, 197.
19. Hough, 89.
20. Hough, 13.

21. R.M. Markham to J.F. McAuley, 1 Oct 1918, OG 22490, p. 103.
22. Joan Jensen, *The Price of Vigilance* (Chicago: RandMcNally,1968), 16, 44, 48, 49, 52.
23. 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."
24. Eberstein Report, 13 June 1918, OG 173400.
25. Jensen, 152.
26. *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.
27. Mock, 14; Jensen, 49.
28. *APL Bulletin*, 15 October 1917.
29. Charles Schmid Report, 16 June 1918, OG 236002.
30. W.E. Cox to R.B. Spencer, "Rudolph Tagatz," 30 October 1918, OG 315182.
31. A. Bruce Bielaski to M. Ebertstein, 8 June 1918, OG 209986.
32. Rev. Harvey Kerstetter to E.W. Fiske, 9 Sept 1918, OG 22490.
33. Hough, 69.
34. *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.
35. Mock, 14.
36. Jensen, 292.
37. David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 46.
38. Creel, 3.
39. Mock, 2-4.
40. Creel, 178.
41. *Ibid*, 90-93.
42. Quarterly Meeting Minutes of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI, October 1914 and April 1918.
43. Creel, 88.
44. Committee on Public Information, "The Second Liberty Loan of 1917: Bulletin and Sample Speeches," 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.
45. Creel, 89.
46. *Ibid*, 270.
47. A. Bruce Bielaski Report, "General Matters," OG 209513; U.S., Committee on Public Information, *The Four Minute Men of Chicago* (Pamphlet), 15.
48. John E. Ferris Report, "Paul F. Mayott: Investigation for the Committee on Public Information," 27 Feb 1918, OG 126654.
49. 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.

50. A. Bruce Bielaski to N.I. Antrim, 2 November 1917, OG 43413.
51. E. W. Finch Report, "Committee on Public Information—Division of Films, 24 Jan 1919," OG 344061; Mock ,42, 148.
52. Creel, 23.
53. Kennedy, 62.
54. Jensen, 120.
55. La Vern J. Rippley , "Conflict in the Classroom: Anti-Germanism in Minnesota Schools, 1917-1918," *Minnesota History* 54 (1981), 171-173.
56. Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, *Report of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety* (St. Paul: L.F. Dow Co., 1919), 29.
57. Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (Dekalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 296.
58. Samuel Hopkins Adams, "Invaded America: Winning the Battle in the Middle West," *Everybody's Magazine* (February 1918), 32.
59. 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.
60. Commission Report, 84-85.
61. 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.
62. Freeborn County General Liberty Loan Program, April 1918, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.
63. 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.
64. Robert F. Davis Report, 16 June 1918, OG 188937.
65. *Rochester [MN] Post Record*, 6 August 1918.
66. H.R. Zimmerman to Otto Engel, 1 March 1918, OG 5025.
67. Creel, 180.
68. Otto Engel to Ernst Goerner, 3 Dec 1917, OG 5025.
69. Lorin Lee Cary, "Wisconsin Patriots Combat Disloyalty: the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion and Politics, 1917-1918," (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1965), 49.
70. For a detailed account of the Prager lynching, see Luebke, 3-24.
71. Luebke 249, 274.
72. *Ashland Daily Press*, 1 April 1918.
73. Ludwig Kreiss to Robert Lansing, 6 April 1917; State Department Records, 763.72111.4763.
74. Falk, 403.
75. *Spy Glass*, 10 Aug 1918.
76. Bielaski Report, "Lawlessness," 20 October 1918, OG 290513.

77. Luebke 282. The Peshtigo incident *likely* involved WELS Lutherans from Zion or St. John, these being the most prominent Lutheran churches in Peshtigo.
78. *Ibid*, 281.
79. *Ibid*, 281. The dynamited school belonged to Rev. George Meyer's congregation, mentioned earlier for penning a letter to the CPI.
80. E.L. Wells Report, 5 April 1918, OG 178895.
81. Esther Pullman Weidner, "Remembering George & Hilda Pullman," Balge Family Records.
82. C.I. Rukes Report, 11 Sep 1918, OG 188937.
83. *Ibid*, 1.

The War to End All Germans

Wisconsin Synod Lutherans and the First World War

by Stephen Gurgel

Part 2

I. 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.¹

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.

II. 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."² 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 hor-

rors 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.³

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 Wisconsin Synod 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."⁴ 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, 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."

Wisconsin Synod 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.⁵ 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."⁶ Koehler certainly made good points about the fragile and divisive nature of a democracy, and the Wisconsin Synod 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 Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, he



Senator Paul Hustung

symbolized the new intolerance of the Democratic Party. During the neutrality period, Hustung spiritedly defended Wilson's 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 about 100 feet from the Senator's house, and there they "rendered a concert the like of which was never heard in Mayville before."⁷ According to a Justice Department informant, "it was done to show Mr. Hustung 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.⁸ 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.⁹

III. 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 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.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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

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."¹³ 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 reconsider the constitutionality of 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."¹⁴ 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."¹⁵ 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 Wisconsin Synod 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 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.¹⁶

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."¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

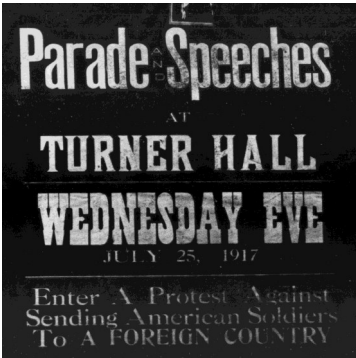
The main purpose of the upcoming meeting, Retzlaff later testified, "was to persuade the boys to submit and obey the law until it could be repealed."²⁰ Retzlaff argued that if the meeting had not been held, many boys would have refused to go to the training camps. Aside from this, however, participants 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."²¹ 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-draft meeting in New Ulm."²² 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.²³

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 10,000.²⁴ 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 ex-

plained 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.²⁵

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.²⁶ "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.²⁷ Ackermann supported sending petitions to Congress and the president because their congressman, Franklin Ellsworth, did not work for the interests of his vot-

ers. "More than 80 per cent of the voters are of a different opinion about his duty than he is."²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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."³⁰ 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.³¹ 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 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.³²

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."³³ 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.³⁴ 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."³⁵ 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 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."³⁶ 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.³⁷

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."³⁸ 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.

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?"³⁹ The neighboring town of Sleepy Eye placed a banner over its main street which read, "Berlin, Ten Miles East."⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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 Wisconsin Synod 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.⁴² 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."⁴³ 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 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

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 co-sponsor of the New Ulm meeting. Upon returning, Retzlaff endeavored to open chapters of the People's Council throughout the area.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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."⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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 that he was persuaded by Retzlaff to participate in New Ulm. After he desisted in his activities, his case was dropped.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹



*Adolph Ackermann,
DMLC President*

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 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.⁵²

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*.⁵³ 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."⁵⁴ 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."⁵⁵

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."⁵⁶ 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 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."⁵⁷

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."⁵⁸ 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."⁵⁹

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."⁶⁰ When tendering his resignation, Ackermann declared, "*Recht muss Recht bleiben!*" or, "What is right remains right!"⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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.⁶³ He presented at a Joint Conference of Southwest Minnesota in October 1918, where he was listed as "Prof. Ackermann (die alte)" in the *Gemeindeblatt*.⁶⁴ 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."⁶⁵ Sixteen years later, he was elected president of that same district.

The German Lutherans at New Ulm fit the profile of those who openly combat government war policies and programs. It is no accident that the largest confrontations 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.⁶⁶ 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.

IV. 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.⁶⁷ Hence they enlisted the 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."⁶⁸ Contrarily, Wisconsin Synod 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.⁶⁹

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 France," among others.⁷⁰ 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."⁷¹ The state has a sword, not the church." 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*:

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.⁷²

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.⁷³

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."⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

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."⁷⁶ 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."⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸

A Wisconsin Synod 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?"⁷⁹ 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.

One of the foremost 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."⁸⁰ 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.

To be continued.

Endnotes

1. 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.

2. "Gebet zur kriegszeit," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:9 (1 May 1917), 129.
3. "Krieg," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:9 (1 May 1917), 135.
4. "Die Pflichten der Regierung," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:11 (1 June 1917), 165-166.
5. Mark Braun, "Being good Americans and better Lutherans: Synodical Conference Lutherans and the Military Chaplaincy," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 19 (2001), 25.
6. 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.
7. G. Clabaugh to Ralph Izard, 24 December 1917, OG 16703.
8. A.A. Viall Report, "General Disloyalty Conditions," 16 February 1918, OG 16703.
9. G. Clabaugh to J.H. Means, 18 May 1918, OG 16703;
10. 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.
11. This section will mostly focus on the activities and suppression of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans in the New Ulm incident. An 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).
12. David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 18.
13. *Ibid*, 22.
14. 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.
15. A.F. Kearney Report, "Conditions At New Ulm, Minn," 15 September 1917, OG 17438.
16. John F. McGovern Report, 23 July 1917, OG 17438.
17. *New Ulm Review* 1 Aug 1917.
18. A. Bruce Bielaski to R.H. Van Deman, 1 September 1917, OG 1917.
19. La Vern J. Rippley, "Conflict in the Classroom: Anti-Germanism in Minnesota Schools, 1917-1918," *Minnesota History* 54 (1981), 173.
20. A.F. Kearney Report, 30 August 1918, OG 17438.
21. A.F. Kearney Report, 15 September 1917, OG 17438.
22. Agent to T.G. Winter, 24 Sep 1917, Brown County Historical Society Records.
23. *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.
24. John F. McGovern Report, "Protest Meeting at New Ulm, Minn," 25 July 1917, OG 17438.
25. *New Ulm Review*, 1 Aug 1917.
26. *New Ulm Review*, 1 Aug 1917.

27. 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.
28. *New Ulm Review*, 1 Aug 1917.
29. John F. McGovern Report, "Protest Meeting at New Ulm, Minn," 25 July 1917, OG 17438.
30. *New Ulm Review*, 1 Aug 1917.
31. *New Ulm Review* 29 Sep 1917.
32. A.F. Kearney Report, 6 September 1917, OG 17438.
33. Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.
34. *New Ulm Review*, 29 Sep 1917.
35. Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.
36. Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.
37. *New Ulm Review*, 8 Aug 1917.
38. Robert F. Davis Report, 3 Aug. 1917, OG 47665.
39. *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.
40. Daniel Hoisington, *A German Town: A History of New Ulm, Minnesota* (St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2004), 78.
41. Robert F. Davis Report, 21 August 1918, OG 17438.
42. WGS to Commission on Public Safety, 24 Aug 1917, Brown County HSS Records.
43. Robert F. Davis Report, 21 August 1918, OG 17438.
44. H.C. Hess to C.W. Ames, 9 Oct 1918, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 103, CPS Records.
45. Robert F. Davis Report, 23 August 1918, OG 17438.
46. Robert F. Davis Report, 21 August 1918, OG 17438.
47. A.F. Kearney Report, 30 August 1917, OG 17438.
48. J.P. Arnoldy Report, 18 September 1918, OG 17438.
49. J.P. Arnoldy Report, 4 September 1917, OG 17438; A.F. Kearney Report, 7 September 1917, OG 17438.
50. Special Agent in Charge J.E. Campbell to A. Bruce Bielaski, 17 January 1918, OG 17438.
51. A.F. Kearney Report, "Conditions at New Ulm, Minn.," 6 September 1917, OG 17438.
52. 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]."
53. "Biennial Meeting of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod, August 15-21," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:17 (7 September 1917), 134.

54. WGS to Public Safety Commission, 21 August 1917, Brown County HSS Records.
55. "Staatskonferenz der Lehrer," *Gemeindeblatt* 52:24 (15 December 1917), 374
56. Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, *Report of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety* (St. Paul: L.F. Dow Co., 1919), 219.
57. *Ibid*, 220.
58. Chrislock, 155.
59. *Ibid*, 156.
60. *Ibid*, 156.
61. Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 138.
62. *New Ulm Review*, 6 February 1918.
63. Morton Schroeder, "Adolph Ackermann, Chauvinism, and Free Speech," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 2 (1984), 17.
64. "Die Gemischte Konferenz von Sudwest-Minnesota," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:20 (29 September 1918), 316.
65. *New Ulm Review*, 20 June 1920.
66. Enoch Crowder, *The Spirit of Selective Service* (New York: The Century Company, 1920), 24.
67. 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.
68. John Schaller, "Religious Freedom Endangered," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:11 (1 June 1919), 86-88.
69. 25 March 1918; "Was alles den Pastoren zugemutet wird!" *Gemeindeblatt* 52:13 (1 July 1917), 200.
70. *Syracuse Herald*, 27 April 1918; *Alton Evening Telegraph*, 29 March 1918; *Chicago Tribune*, 25 March 1918.
71. "Was alles den Pastoren zugemutet wird!" *Gemeindeblatt* 52:13 (1 July 1917), 200.
72. "The Pulpit and the Food Problem," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:14 (July 21, 1917), 109.
73. *Ibid*, 109.
74. Hans K. Moussa, "Food Conservation," *Northwestern* 4:17 (7 September 1917), 130-131.
75. F. Graeber, "Gardens Displace Sermons," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:10 (21 May 1917), 74.
76. "What Confusion!" *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:14 (21 July 1917), 112.
77. *Ibid*, 112.
78. F. Graeber, "Press Censorship and Religious Liberty," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:13 (7 July 1917), 101.

79. *Ibid*, 101.
80. 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.

Picture Acknowledgments

- Page 1 *Face to Face with Kaiserism* Advertisement (*Milwaukee Journal*)
- Page 5 American Protective League Badge (National Archives)
- Page 11 Wisconsin State Council of Defense Poster (Report of WSCOD)
- Page 20 Wisconsin Senator Paul Husting (Public Domain)
- Page 23 New Ulm Meeting Advertisement (National Archives)
- Page 27 Adolph Ackerman, DMLC President (WLS Archives, Ackermann Biography)

This article is excerpted from Teacher Stephen Gurgel's Master's Thesis written for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Looking Back

by John M. Brenner

25 years ago – 1990

- Deacon Ryuich Igarashi is called home to heaven. He had served as a seminary instructor, translator, and literary editor for the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church, the WELS mission in Japan.
- The WELS Board for Home Missions affirms the mission counselor program and adopts a philosophy of ministry for developing multi-cultural missions.
- The WELS Board for Home Missions and Board for Worker Training cooperate in a pilot project to allow professors to serve for a year in a home mission field.
- The WELS Board for World Missions reports 81 responses to the radio broadcast, *Dies ist der Tag*, from January 29-March 12, 1990. The board hopes to be able to expand radio broadcasts to other areas of Eastern Europe.
- The WELS Board for Parish Services reports the appointment of a synodical Care for Called Workers Committee.
- The Report on Synodical School Structure lays out the possibilities for combining synodical worker training schools in the light of enrolment decreases and cost increases.

50 years ago – 1965

- Martin Luther Memorial Home in South Lyon, Michigan is dedicated.
- Dedication of Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service in Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Lutheran services are held for the first time in Kumba, Cameroon, by former members of the Nigerian Lutheran Church who had come there as refugees from the Biafra crisis in Nigeria.
- Pastor Marlyn Schroeder replaces Prof. Conrad Frey as interim counselor in Hong Kong.
- Articles of Organization are adopted by the Lutheran Church of Central Africa in a meeting at the Lutheran Bible Institute, Chelston, Lusaka, Zambia.
- The Wisconsin Synod in convention sets the tuition at synodical prep schools at \$100 annually for grades 9-10, \$200 annually for grades 11-12, and \$300 annually for the synod's colleges.
- Dr. Francis Uplegger, veteran WELS missionary to the Apaches, dies at the

age of 96. Dr. Uplegger was a student of the Apache language and succeeded in putting that language into written form. He also produced the first complete Apache dictionary.

- The WELS Board of Education reports that the eight area Lutheran high schools supported by groups in the synod have a total enrolment of 2,519 students taught by 122 teachers.

75 years ago – 1940

- Three new professors accept calls to the Theological Seminary in Thiensville. Professor Paul Peters, who had been teaching at the seminary of the Saxon Free Church in Berlin/Zehlendorf, succeeds August Zich, who died the year before. Professor Adalbert Schaller of Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, replaces Professor Frederic Brenner after his death in January. Pastor Edmund Reim of Neenah, Wisconsin, takes over some classes of Professor August Pieper, whose teaching load is reduced because of his advanced age. In January of the following year, a broken hip causes Professor Pieper's teaching career to end, but he continues to write for the seminary's *Quartlaschrift* (Quarterly).
- The United Lutheran Church (ULC) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) continue to negotiate what becomes known as the Pittsburgh Agreement in an attempt to resolve differences between these two Lutheran church bodies, especially on such issues as the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and secret societies.
- Max H. Zschiegner, Missouri Synod missionary to China, dies at Wanhsien, China.
- The Missouri Synod Lutheran Hour is broadcast in a foreign land for the first time.

100 years ago – 1915

- The Wisconsin Synod changes its official name from *Allgemeine Ev. Luth. Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, und anderen Staaten* to the *Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*. The new name is a result of some of the anti-German sentiment in the country during the First World War but also is a streamlining of the old name.
- Matthias Loy, president of Capital University (Columbus, Ohio) and leader in the Ohio Synod dies. Loy led the Ohio Synod into fellowship with the Missouri Synod and charter membership in the Synodical Conference. He and the Ohio Synod later break with the Synodical Conference during the Election Controversy.
- Albert Kuhn, president of the Minnesota Synod (1876-1883), dies.

- Wilhelm Streissguth, president of the Wisconsin Synod (1865-1867), dies.
- Lutheran pastors in Sibley County, Minnesota, meet to discuss the doctrinal differences between the Synodical Conference and the Ohio Synod which have existed since the election controversy of the 19th century. These meetings result in a movement which gives birth to the Intersynodical Committee. This committee has representatives from the Missouri, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Iowa synods and eventually produces the “Chicago Theses” (also known as the “Intersynodical Theses”). In 1929 the Missouri Synod in convention rejects those theses as inadequate for settling the doctrinal differences.

125 years ago – 1890

- Franz Delitzsch, German Lutheran Old Testament scholar and theologian, dies on March 4. Delitzsch had been a university companion of C.F.W. Walther. Unfortunately, later in life Delitzsch accepted some conclusions of the documentary hypothesis leaving the door open to contemporary critical approaches to Scripture.
- On March 25 the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Suomi Synod) is organized at Calumet, Michigan.
- The Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod, the Norwegian Danish Conference, and the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood unite to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.
- Prof. Ott of Northwestern College is granted a two-year leave of absence to obtain his PhD in Germany. He will complete his studies at the University of Halle.
- The Wisconsin Synod in convention celebrates the 25th anniversary of Northwestern College and begins its campaign against the Bennett Law. This law includes provisions which are seen as potentially destructive to Lutheran schools.

150 years ago – 1865

- Justus Heinrich Naumann, president of the Minnesota Synod and father of future Wisconsin Synod President O.J. Naumann, is born in Dresden, Germany, on March 14.
- H. Hoffmann becomes the first graduate of the Wisconsin Synod’s seminary on April 25. He had already received some training in Germany.
- The Wisconsin Synod reports the following statistics for 1865: 47 pastors, 97 congregations, 35 preaching stations, 51 day schools and 47 Sunday schools (14 Sunday schools in congregations with day schools).

- At the suggestion of Professor Moldehnke, the Wisconsin Synod convention in Watertown resolves to begin publication of a synodical paper, the *Ge-meinde-Blatt*. The first issue is published on September 1.
- President Reim resigns because of personal difficulties in his Helenville congregation. Vice-president Streisguth is elected fourth president of the Wisconsin Synod.
- Northwestern University is opened in Watertown, Wisconsin. Begun as an all-purpose university, it later changes to a pastor training college and prep school. Adam Martin, the school's first president, has dreams for a "Harvard of the West" rather than a worker training school. His successor, Professor Ernst, will transform the school into an institution preparing young men for seminary training. The first two students are A.F. Siegler and another young man named Engelhardt. The college's first building is dubbed *Kaffemuehle* (*Coffee-Mill*) because the structure resembles a coffee grinder.
- Benjamin Kurtz (born 1795) dies. Kurtz was a leader in the General Synod, editor of the *Lutheran Observer*, and a strong advocate of "American" Lutheranism. The "American" Lutherans advocated the use of revival methods and rejected liturgical worship. Kurtz championed the *Definite Synodical Platform* with its "American Recension of the Augsburg Confession." This recension eliminated from the Augsburg Confession those doctrines which separated Lutheranism from the generic Protestantism that had developed in America. The *Platform* is sent anonymously to Lutherans throughout America in 1855 and is rejected by almost every Lutheran synod in America, including the young Wisconsin Synod. The Wisconsin Synod in convention called the *Definite Synodical Platform* the definite suicide of the Lutheran Church.

175 years ago – 1840

- In 1840 Christian Fredrick Spittler founds the *Pilger Mission* (Pilgrim Mission) of St. Chrischona (the Tradesmen's Mission in the German Church), in whose early efforts John Muehlhaeuser, a baker by trade, first president of the Wisconsin Synod, is enrolled. About 250 St. Chrischona graduates come to the U.S., most of them to Texas, but about sixteen, including C.J. Albrecht, the father of Dr. Martin Luther College, come to Minnesota.
- John Grabau sends a circulatory letter to his congregations and others, warning them against ministers who have not been properly ordained. Walther in Missouri detects some of the same false views in Grabau which had been evident in Martin Stephan.

200 years ago – 1815

- The Basel Mission Society (officially the Protestant [Evangelical] Mission Society) is founded by Christian Fredrick Spittler, secretary of the German Society

for Christendom. The society's Basel Mission House, at first intended for heathen mission work, later works among the Swabian Germans in Michigan, sending Friedrich Schmidt to Scio Township near Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1833. Schmidt is the first Lutheran pastor in Michigan, founds the first Lutheran congregation, and is instrumental in founding two synods. The first soon goes out of existence, but the second Michigan Synod (founded in 1860) survives and eventually merges with the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Nebraska synods.

The WELS Historical Institute was given formal approval by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in convention in 1981 to organize for the purpose of collecting and preserving historical data and artifacts that are related to the various periods of Lutheranism in America, especially of the WELS. In recent years the synod took over the responsibility of maintaining the archives. The Institute maintains a museum and publishes a *JOURNAL* and *NEWSLETTER*. Membership is open. Fees, which include the cost of subscription, are as follows: Individual: \$20.00; Husband/Wife: \$25.00 (2 votes but only one publication issue); Congregation, School, Library, Corporation: \$40.00; and Student: \$15.00. Fees may be sent to the WELS Historical Institute, N15W23377 Stone Ridge Drive, Waukesha, Wisconsin 53188.

The board members are: Prof. Robert Bock, president; Daniel Nommensen, vice-president; Naomi Plocher, secretary; Ryan Haines, treasurer; Mr. Duane Kuehl, Prof. Joel Pless, Steven Miller, Prof. James Korthals, Rev. Joel Leyrer, Prof. Aaron Palmer, Rev. David Dolan, Mr. Kenneth Artlip, and Mr. Carl Nolte. Advisory members are: Prof. John Hartwig, Prof. John M. Brenner, and Charlotte Sampe, designer and museum curator.

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