

“Spy Mad”?

Investigating Subversion in Pennsylvania, 1917-1918

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American entry into the first world war in April 1917 was marked by an upsurge of xenophobic reaction against everything that could be associated, however loosely, with the national enemy.¹ All German symbols were an obvious target—the renaming of sauerkraut as “liberty cabbage” is a notorious example of the public mood—but hostility also extended to Socialist and pacifist opinions. The systematic assault on all that was “un-American” foreshadowed the other great outbreaks of political intolerance over succeeding decades like the Red Scare of 1919-20 and the anti-Communist purges of the Truman era. Not surprisingly, historians have often criticized the political repression of these years as a manifestation of the darkest traditions in American society.²

War hysteria had an obvious impact on Pennsylvania, both because of its rich ethnic diversity and specifically its German roots, as well as the flourishing tradition of radical labor politics. Those who feared un-American activities found abundant sources for concern throughout the Commonwealth, and they shared these fears freely with law enforcement agencies. In 1917 and 1918, there was a lively culture of denunciation, in which it was evidently regarded as patriotic to report to the authorities any remarks or behavior which might indicate disloyalty. However dubious ethically, this popular campaign against espionage or sedition has been invaluable for the historian, in that it has left rich documentary materials in the form of thousands of pages of intelligence reports, investigations, and letters of accusation in the archives of the Pennsylvania State Police.³ Taken together, these papers offer extensive information about popular sentiment towards the war and to the wider society, and specifically about those views which were rarely regarded as fit to express in print.

Apart from its value for examining public opinion, this archive is also rewarding for the study of official reactions to the perceived threat from German subversion, which was viewed with extreme seriousness. In retrospect, it is tempting to dismiss this concern as simply spy “hysteria,” and to agree with the German-American woman who complained in 1918 “that the country was Spy Mad.”⁴ This would be anachronistic and often inaccurate. German intelligence was a potent force that did have active networks throughout the western hemisphere, and between 1915 and 1917 German agents genuinely did undertake sabotage attacks against the munitions plants and infrastructure of a then neutral America.⁵ Once war broke out, one could surely expect a far more serious wave of attacks, and what targets would be more natural than the

crucial heavy industries of Pennsylvania? Against this real threat, state and federal agencies were profoundly short of personnel and finance. They naturally had to rely on the voluntary impulses of an enthusiastic citizenry: attitudes which all too easily turned to simple vigilantism.

This paper differs significantly from the main historical works on this era, many of which were written during or shortly after the McCarthy era, and which tended to read the perceptions of that time back into the earlier era.⁶ This meant that anti-German suspicion was seen as a rhetorical disguise for the central anti-radical thrust of the movement, and that the wartime purges were indistinguishable from the red Scare into which they joined so seamlessly. The standard account of the “Opponents of War” explicitly “deals with nonconformists, with extremists—radicals, IWW’s, Socialists,” so that partisan pro-German sympathy is dealt with only in passing.⁷ This sort of account had a natural resonance for scholars of the Vietnam era and the 1970s.⁸ Equally, the threat of actual sabotage or espionage undertaken on behalf of the Central Powers is scarcely even mentioned before it is dismissed as a chimera conjured up in the minds of anti-red fanatics. While not for a moment seeking to excuse the savage and mindless abuses undertaken in the name of national security, all the beatings, lynchings, and ostracism, there was an authentic domestic menace which the United States could reasonably have expected to confront following the outbreak of war.

The picture that emerges from these records is therefore quite complex. While a general hysteria certainly did exist, and permitted countless acts of injustice, the law enforcement agencies themselves emerge in a somewhat more sympathetic light. Investigators were sometimes critical of allegations, they demonstrated a sense of perspective admirable for the circumstances, and where appropriate they often cleared suspected individuals. Most interesting perhaps is the attitudes which they were called upon to examine. While the police often did investigate radical or liberal dissidents of the familiar stereotype, they were also examining genuine expressions of seditious and even treasonous sentiment, and occasionally from individuals in a position to carry out serious obstruction to the war effort if they chose to do so. Vigilantism and repression thus coexisted inextricably with a serious and necessary effort to combat genuine subversion.

Defining the Enemy

The vigor of official repression throughout World War I was a direct consequence of the widespread hostility that was believed to exist to the war and its conduct. In contrast to World War II, the United States entered the earlier fray without an overwhelming consensus, and the Congressional vote on declaring war produced minorities of six Senators and a significant fifty Representatives, figures which probably understates public qualms.⁹ In 1917

and 1918, continued hostility to war is suggested by the steady or even increased votes for Socialist candidates in elections in various cities, including heavily left-wing Reading, Pennsylvania.¹⁰ Regions thought to be anti-war included the Progressive and radical sections of the West and Midwest, and those large areas of the country heavily populated by communities whose home nations were now at war with the United States. The ferocity of "Americanism" campaigns from 1917 onwards reflected this perception that even the slightest hint of doubt about the war effort might open the gates to general resistance or sedition. As historian David Kennedy writes, "the war for the American mind" was the first and most decisive engagement in the American participation in this global struggle.¹¹

Pennsylvania was richly endowed with the groups and populations thought to be most at risk of betraying the national crusade. Obviously, "Germans" in general were perceived as a likely enemy, but the definition of the term was quite difficult in Pennsylvania, where there were so many people descended from colonial Germans, in addition to first or second generation immigrants. In the cities alone, over a hundred thousand foreign-born people reported German as their mother tongue by 1920, and that takes no account of the sizable German-speaking communities long native to the state. Philadelphia was home to the largest concentration of German-stock residents, but there were substantial groups in Pittsburgh, Allentown, Erie, Scranton, Altoona, and Reading. They were served by a network of well-established newspapers and magazines, like Pittsburgh's *Sonntagsbote* and *Volksblatt und Freiheits-Freund*, and Philadelphia's *Tageblatt/Sonntagsblatt*. There were also religious and cultural periodicals, like Harrisburg's *Christian Botschafter*. The scale of the German population in many rural counties was suggested by the abundance of Lutheran and Reformed churches, and the newspaper advertisements which well into the present century continued to offer services or consultations for German-speakers.

Pennsylvania had a rich tradition of German social and cultural organizations, as well as political movements and newspapers of all ideological shades.¹² In 1899, an assortment of local German societies had joined to form the *Zentralverein*, the Central Union of German-American societies in Pennsylvania. In 1901, a meeting at Philadelphia created a National German-American Alliance, which at its height claimed two million members, a hundred thousand in Pennsylvania alone.¹³ From 1914 onwards, these German associations had campaigned strenuously against the Anglo-French cause, opposing loans and denouncing the sinister agitation of Allied agents trying to lead the United States into war. Some local units went much further, passing motions expressing full support for German victory and the submarine campaign, and justifying or applauding events like the 1915 sinking of the *Lusitania*.¹⁴

German-Americans dominated the "American Neutrality League." This group held mass gatherings in Philadelphia in the presence of several Congressmen who passionately denounced the Allied cause. Also present, though less fervent, was the man who as Pennsylvania's war governor epitomized the dilemmas of so many of the state's citizens. Martin G. Brumbaugh was himself a German-American, and moreover a lay minister of the pacifist Church of the Brethren.¹⁵ The anti-war movement reached its height in 1916, when German-American groups held a national conference in Chicago to decide how best to influence the forthcoming presidential election.¹⁶ The Pennsylvania *Zentralverein* was one of several statewide groups seeking to maximize German-American electoral strength, and to ensure the success of anti-war candidates.¹⁷ At this critical moment, the President of the National Alliance was Sigmund von Bosse, a Philadelphia Lutheran minister.

After the United States entry into war, the great majority of the German-American societies either rallied to the American cause or at least kept silent about their qualms. In Pennsylvania, these groups demonstrated visible support for the war effort by purchasing Liberty bonds in large quantities.¹⁸ However, such ostentatious loyalty was not sufficient to prevent a general anti-German panic, which produced countless myths about pro-German sedition and political activism. In 1918, the National Alliance voted its own dissolution, shortly before it could be officially abolished through legislation. At the local level, manifestations of prejudice were countless. The Philadelphia School Board voted to end the teaching of German in the public schools, and the city's mayor suspended official advertising in the German language newspapers.¹⁹ The Philadelphia Orchestra even abandoned the playing of German music.²⁰ There were also physical attacks on Germans, both individuals and institutions, reaching a climax in the spring of 1918.²¹

But even if public rage focused its attention only on actual enemy aliens, this category extended far beyond subjects of the German Empire. The United States was also at war with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose subjects included many of the southern- and eastern- European ethnic groups that had flocked to Pennsylvania in the previous three decades, especially to Pittsburgh and the neighboring steel and coal communities. Imperial subjects included some or all of the Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Ruthenians, and Poles, many of whom were at least sentimentally devoted to the overthrow of the Austro-Hungarian regime. Technically though, any who retained their previous citizenship were now subjects of a power at war with the United States, and even those who had been naturalized could be viewed with suspicion.

As if this did not already cover a sufficiently large proportion of the state's foreign stock residents, there were other dubious categories. Apart from customary fears of their cosmopolitanism, Jews were suspect because of their Yiddish tongue, which bore such a close resemblance to German. By the time

the United States entered the war, Russia was in revolution and its government increasingly under both Socialist and German influence: November, 1917, brought the Bolshevik coup. This cast a pall over not merely Russians, but over other subject peoples like Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Finns, and Poles, and those Jews who had not derived from Austro-Hungarian territory. Not surprisingly, a member of the vigilante American-Protective League could write that "Pittsburgh . . . was expected to be an alien storm center when the United States declared war upon Germany." The presence of so large a foreign "element in its industries was feared as a source of dynamite, labor and sabotage troubles." At Monessen, "a town with a foreign population of about 70 percent," virtually all foreign stock residents were excluded from the new Home Defense Police, which meant that loyalty investigations had to proceed in ignorance of the native languages of a majority of the population.²²

Even the Irish were not immune from scrutiny. Though they were originally citizens of Great Britain and thus American allies, by 1917 Ireland was deeply disaffected from British rule and nationalist militants were closely allied to Germany. In 1915, German intelligence had listed Philadelphia Irish-American Joseph McGarrity as one of three "absolutely reliable and discreet" agents in North America. With German assistance, McGarrity had made Philadelphia the leading American center of support for armed Irish nationalism, and his *Clann na Gael* had raised money and arms for use in Ireland.²³ Strong Irish nationalist opinions might therefore make a person subject to official investigation.

In summary, Pennsylvania's population at this time was perhaps one-fifth foreign-born. Of this figure, the only substantial groups who could be presumed to be loyal were those from Britain (minus Ireland), Italy, and Serbia. In effect, the international situation in 1917 raised automatic doubts about the loyalty of a large majority of the foreign-stock population, a strikingly convenient situation for those nativists who had long suspected the political intentions of the new wave of immigrants. Similarly, traditional Protestant prejudices now seemed confirmed by the predominance of Catholic and Jewish religious loyalties among those groups which could now handily be categorized with the damning term "enemy alien."

But even the large numbers of foreign-stock residents did not exhaust the list of possible enemies. For decades, Pennsylvania had supported vigorous radical and Socialist groups, especially in the coal districts, but also in the major cities. Branches of the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) thrived. Both revolutionary and reformist wings of the left were strongly anti-war, viewing the struggle as a conspiracy directed against the working people of all nations. These opinions would have been distasteful enough for conservatives and war supporters, but they also tended to be expressed by foreign-born militants, often Germans or Jews, giving rise to

suspicious that Socialist rhetoric was merely a subterfuge for pro-German sedition. In the Socialist stronghold of Reading, for example, anti-Socialist election propaganda described the largely German leftists as men “whose hearts are black with treason and whose lips are white with the hypocritical and lying pretense of loyalty. They should be stood up against a wall tomorrow at sunrise and shot.”²⁴

In the first few months of the war, mob violence and vigilantism was directed as much as Socialists and radicals as at the more obvious German symbols. A Philadelphia mob attacked a Socialist anti-war gathering, with the tacit acquiescence of the city’s police, and law enforcement agencies assisted in the disruption of meetings intended to promote conscientious objection.²⁵ Anti-war protesters, “slackers,” Socialists, and IWW members were painted with the broad brush of “pro-German sympathies.” Radical dissidence increased sharply after the passage of the Selective Service Act, especially in Philadelphia and among “the foreign element in the mining regions of Luzerne and Lackawanna counties.”²⁶ Anti-war protests or draft resistance were viewed as essentially indistinguishable from espionage or treason, and in June, 1917, federal authorities launched a purge of Wobbly activists in the coal country, chiefly among Italian radicals. State Police officers supported a federal raid on IWW headquarters in Scranton. Suspects were accused of plotting “to protect against the action of the US government, to spread discontent among the miners, and in general to hinder the government in the prosecution of the war.”²⁷ The IWW was by this stage dismissed as “this German-inspired, anarchistic organization”, so that constant surveillance was maintained.²⁸

In August, 1917, Socialist party headquarters in Philadelphia were raided, its secretary arrested, and arrests made. A Socialist leader in the city was Charles T. Schenck, who was tried in what became the landmark freedom of speech case which bears his name. The *Schenck* case gave rise to Oliver Wendell Holmes’s famous remark that free speech did not give one the right to shout “Fire!” in a crowded theater, and that was felt to provide a suitable analogy for the Socialist advocacy of draft resistance during wartime. In both cases, there was a “clear and present danger,” to use what would become a celebrated phrase.²⁹ Coverage strongly critical of President Woodrow Wilson and the war led to the conviction of several staff members of the Philadelphia *Tageblatt* under the Espionage Acts, largely on the grounds that they had reinterpreted news stories “so as to bear a changed meaning which was depressing or detrimental to patriotic ardor.”³⁰

The ultimate nightmare was that the Socialists and radicals would gain strength by focusing what was felt to be endemic opposition to military conscription, perhaps in alliance with German agents. That this was by no means a ludicrous scenario is suggested by the recent experience of Ireland, in which long-standing grievances were mobilized into active insurrection with

the assistance of German arms and money, or of Russia, where German covert action helped incite a red revolution. For Americans, the outbreaks in Dublin in 1916 and Petrograd in 1917 were both troubling precedents for what could occur on their own soil. In December, 1917, the Pennsylvania state government was deeply concerned about draft riots erupting "in the cities of Pittsburgh, Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Chester, and Philadelphia, where large members of foreign born populations are living and where quite large numbers of them are being drafted." Moreover, "paid agents of the Austro-German governments have been trying to foment trouble" in these regions, probably a reference to the IWW.³¹ At just this time, the State Adjutant-General was exploring the possibility of equipping units of the Pennsylvania Reserve Militia with machine gun units specifically in preparation for what was perceived as likely mob violence or insurrection by disloyal elements. In such encounters, "machine guns are of inestimable value. The machine gun has acquired such a reputation for deadline that its very presence frequently overawes a mob and bloodshed is avoided, and if in the last extremity riot must be suppressed by rifle fire, machine guns are of as much value as two companies of infantry."³² Few documents so well convey the sense of Pennsylvania officialdom that they were living almost as beleaguered colonial administrators in an alien territory on the verge of an explosive native insurrection.

Apart from foreigners and the left, pacifist religious groups also came under suspicion. Sects like the Amish and Mennonites experienced appalling trials as the draft law made little real allowance for conscientious objection, especially by those of German descent. Believers who strictly opposed war in all circumstances were condemned for suggesting that United States soldiers might be murderers, and they recounted stories of the martyrdoms inflicted on fellow-pacifists. One Seventh Day Adventist minister at Ephrata told how he had heard how one draftee "refused to take a gun and the Commanding Officer of the camp stood him against the wall and had twenty men charge upon him with fixed bayonets but the boy did not flinch."³³ Whether or not the specific story is true, events of this kind did occur, and they were widely believed.

A much more serious menace was felt to be the Russellites or Watch Tower Society, the later Jehovah's Witnesses, who were accused of having crossing the line from anti-war sentiment to actual treason. The movement would long be controversial for its refusal to acknowledge the jurisdiction of earthly governments, and members usually claimed conscientious objector status. In 1918, the FBI and the State Police launched a major investigation of a book entitled *The Finished Mystery*, a continuation of the writings of Charles Taze Russell, the movement's founder. This work included a fierce denunciation of war and nationalism. Two Scranton men had written "the most objectionable and vicious portions of the book", which apart from IWW tracts was the anti-

war item most often singled out for condemnation.³⁴ The State Police infiltrated meetings in numerous small towns, and avidly tracked the distribution of Russellite literature.³⁵ Arrests were made across the Commonwealth, mere possession of the book for sale being sufficient to merit prosecution under the Espionage Act. In addition, the German government was said to have financed publication, enabling the book to be distributed free in large quantities. Several Russellite leaders received long prison terms in the affair.

Spies and Saboteurs

The worst mob violence occurred in the summer of 1917, but throughout nineteen months of the war, there was continuing concern about the activities of spies and seditionists, broadly defined. In Pennsylvania, these fears usually found their way either directly or indirectly to the State Police, which served as the Commonwealth's leading weapon in the struggle against subversion or insurgency. The force had been founded in 1905 as a direct imitation of the Philippine Constabulary which had suppressed native revolt in that nation at the turn of the century, and its first leader was Captain John C. Groome, an outspoken advocate of authoritarian paramilitary policing. In its first decade, the force drew both on Army veterans and former members of the state National Guard, many of whom, like Groome himself, had served in the Spanish War. Not surprisingly, Theodore Roosevelt was a staunch friend and advocate of the new Pennsylvania constabulary, which he saw as a model for policing throughout the United States. These paramilitary origins stood the State Police in good stead in 1917. Leading officers were familiar with the techniques of counter-intelligence, and cooperated easily with federal agencies like Military and Naval Intelligence, and the Bureau of Investigation. The State Police undertook investigations both on its own behalf, and at the behest of these other agencies.

The force's wartime activity was diverse, including as it did the pursuit of draft resisters and "slackers", the infiltration of radical and Wobbly meetings, and the suppression of vice establishments frequented by the military.³⁶ In total, the State Police made a total of 632 arrests related directly to war matters, divided as follows:³⁷

Table One

<i>Offense</i>	<i>Number of arrests</i>
Enemy alien	4
Desecration of American flag	17
Deserters of US service	67
Violations of Selective Service law	522
Violations of US Espionage Acts	22
Total	632

Draft matters clearly predominated in terms of arrests, but investigations of espionage and sabotage also consumed a huge amount of time and labor throughout the war. In most cases, these affairs did not lead to arrests, but contributed to the maintenance of surveillance and intelligence-gathering, a point confirmed by the number of contacts recorded with federal agencies throughout the war. Of 2,653 requests which the State Police received from such agencies, draft boards were the source of 802, but the Department of Justice originated 826, Military Intelligence 491 and the Fourth Naval District 221. At least sixty percent of such contacts concerned alleged sabotage or espionage.

Contrary to later impressions, concern over sabotage had some foundation. Since 1914, a series of explosions and other disasters had been linked with varying degrees of plausibility to the network of German spies and saboteurs which assuredly did exist in North America, and which was seeking to prevent American armaments from reaching the Allied Powers.³⁸ Two attacks in particular were definitely connected to hostile action. The most spectacular was the Black Tom catastrophe near Jersey City in July 1916, when an explosion destroyed two million pounds of munitions stored in New York Harbor, causing a blast heard many miles away.³⁹ In January 1917, a similar incident destroyed vast quantities of munitions near Kingsland in New Jersey.⁴⁰ However, Pennsylvania was the scene for several lesser-known events which might have involved foul play. 1915 alone produced an explosion at the Philadelphia Benzol Plant, and incendiary fires at Bethlehem Steel in Bethlehem, at the Aetna plants in Pittsburgh and Sinnemahoning and the Westinghouse works at Turtle Creek.⁴¹ German involvement has also been suggested in the munitions explosion at Eddystone near Chester in April 1917, in which over a hundred workers were killed.⁴²

Official fears about sabotage reflected Pennsylvania's critical role in the war effort. The Philadelphia area alone built a fifth of the shipping tonnage constructed by the United States during the war, while Hog Island near Philadelphia became the world's largest shipyard. The Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia was a major supplier of armaments in addition to railroad supplies.⁴³ The mines and mills of the Pittsburgh area supplied most of the coal and steel employed in war production.⁴⁴ From the outbreak of war, there were widespread and understandable fears of sabotage, and State Police officers were posted to protect crucial installations such as the dams along the Pennsylvania Railroad near Johnstown and Altoona.⁴⁵ In December 1917, the State Adjutant-General listed the obvious targets: railroads and manufacturing plants, especially the steelworks in Bethlehem, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia, "situated in sections of the state where there is a considerable foreign element, *not necessarily alien.*"⁴⁶ The Chief of United States Military Intelligence informed the State Police of his serious concerns about real and potential sabotage: "the

central bituminous coalfields of Pennsylvania which produce coal for the navy and other departments of the government is a fertile field for alien enemies. . . . A great many of the workmen are foreigners and the fact that a great many Austrians are there gives rise to the belief that acts of violence may be expected. . . . On one branch line of the railroad known as the Portage branch which is only three and a half lines in length there are nineteen mines which we are advised could be destroyed almost simultaneously."⁴⁷

However, it is a long step from acknowledging foul play to establishing that an action was specifically intended to hinder the war program. There were also many motives for charging enemy action, and the State Police laudably resisted the temptation to leap to conclusions about German malfeasance. In the heart of the bituminous district, for example, the federal Fuel Administration reported two damaging incendiary fires in 1917, respectively at Portage (Cambria County) and Osceola (Clearfield County), and Military Intelligence cited both apparent acts of sabotage in calling for tighter protection of mines. However, the detailed investigation by the State Police showed that managers at Osceola actually believed that the fire there was of accidental origin, and had cited sabotage as they felt that this would be a better way of satisfying the federal bureaucrats when they demanded to know why coal contracts had not been fulfilled. Sabotage was a more likely prospect at Portage, but the company concerned was deeply unpopular with both its workforce and neighboring businesses, and personal rivalries probably accounted for non-political arson.⁴⁸

The relative skepticism of the State Police makes us more willing to take seriously the reality of several confirmed incidents of sabotage which led to formal prosecution. Officers of the Philipsburg substation scored a major coup when they arrested six German aliens accused of plotting bomb attacks against power plants, mines, and railroads. There were also thefts of explosives which could be used for sabotage, and in some instances police linked perpetrators to German organizations or agents.⁴⁹ In this setting, the authorities would have been grossly irresponsible to ignore even the most unlikely hints of espionage activity. Some of the reports led to quite plausible suspects, as when the Butler detachment arrested Max Hendtke, a German national who had wandered between various jobs in the New York City area, in Buffalo, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, usually seeking employment in freight houses, shipping depots and railroad yards. In peacetime, this would have appeared a routine example of an itinerant laborer, but in the dangerous year of 1918, it is not surprising that he was arrested as a possible spy. A Bulgarian priest at Steelton was said to be gathering information from the local steel mills and passing it to the Bulgarian Legation, from whence it was presumably delivered to Berlin.⁵⁰ As the United States was not technically at war with Bulgaria, this was viewed as an exceptionally delicate situation.

On another occasion, a Butler woman reported a conversation with a sinister stranger possessed of large sums of money, who was seeking information about any powder mills in the region. The State Police subsequently arrested both the suspicious individual and a colleague, who appeared to be relatively recent arrivals from Germany.⁵¹ Large quantities of papers were seized, "but [the investigators] were unable to read them owing to the fact that they were written in German": a damning comment on the limitations of using such local officers in counter-intelligence work.⁵²

It is difficult to imagine most authentic spies being sufficiently blatant to ask such astonishingly incriminating questions, even to fellow-Germans, and most spy reports originated with behavior that was felt to be suspicious or deviant. This could include almost any out-of-the-way activity that suggested inexplicable wealth, cosmopolitanism, and wide travel, or even the possession of unusually voluminous baggage. In practice, most of these "clues" were all but worthless as indications of illicit doings. Madame Scheven, a music instructor at Bucknell College, was denounced in December, 1917, basically because she was of German birth, and had traveled widely in Europe and America in pursuit of an operatic career. She was also believed to receive unusual quantities of mail.⁵³ Even puzzling financial transactions might be reported by local banks. In 1917, a certain W. S. Maher of Lancaster had "purchased a very considerable number of Wells Fargo traveling express checks, which he immediately deposits in his bank." This cryptic transaction attracted the curiosity of Military Intelligence, who also suspected some of Maher's associates as German sympathizers. They accordingly asked the State Police to investigate.⁵⁴

Other behavior defined as suspicious included running a business involved in building a chain of hotels on strategic mountains across the state.⁵⁵ Gypsy groups were reported because of their itinerancy and knowledge of several languages, and when they camped close to railroads, the evidence of hostile intent seemed clear-cut.⁵⁶ One of the oddest charges in an odd collection concerned "a Jap by the name of Isgurigo" who began a photographic gallery in the Milton area, suspiciously close to a new shell plant in Berwick, with the implication that he was spying on military facilities.⁵⁷ Japan and the United States were of course on the same side at this point, though rumors of a German-Japanese axis had reached even to so tranquil a region of northern Pennsylvania.

Sedition

While actual spies were rare, the miscellaneous reports of popular suspicions show how far perceptions of "Americanism" could be affected by chance remarks or behavior, or what one said or read. The bulk of official investigation concerned this type of alleged sedition. Official attitudes are suggested by a remarkable document from June, 1918, which shows the State

Police vetting prospective jurors for the United States district court, presumably because it was likely to be hearing security-related cases. For each individual, questions were asked about name, address, occupation and nationality, but also concerning religion, party affiliation, reputation, "tendencies," the reading of German *or Irish* papers, and "attitude toward war measures, such as proclamations and restrictions placed on German alien enemies." The section on "tendencies" shows how thoroughly the term "American" had come to serve as a label for one's degree of acceptance of official attitudes towards the war and internal repression. Typical phrases included "Strongly American" and "Thoroughly American," but these were only applied for loyal souls who had never questioned official policies.⁵⁸ To criticize was to be un-American, and therefore at least potentially disloyal.

Jury vetting was a special circumstance. Normally, investigations were initiated in response to a public complaint about a remark or speech that an individual had overheard, and which was then communicated to state or federal authorities. A typical case from the anthracite country involved a young immigrant miner named Rudolf Wagner, who lived at Summit Hill (Carbon County). In a discussion about war news, Wagner was reported as saying "that they (meaning the United States soldiers) would never get the Kaiser, and that this country was rotten." One of those present reported his words, which the authorities took seriously because of the location of the incident in a key industrial district, "where Wagner, if he so desired, could produce untold damage to the coal-mining industry." As the authorities were well aware from past labor disputes, miners could all too easily gain access to explosives, and mines were highly vulnerable to sabotage in which foul play might never be detected. A State Police officer insinuated his way into Wagner's confidence, and found him only too willing to speculate on the course of the war and the means by which Germany could achieve victory: by signing a peace with Russia, crushing the Italians, "and then go after the others." That Wagner was more than a sentimental patriot was suggested by his statement that he knew how to convey information to Philadelphia, where radio transmissions could carry it to the Mexican border, and thence to German agents. The investigating officer concluded with the far from "hysterical" judgment that Wagner "is a dangerous man, for while he might not do anything if he was left alone, I am positive that if a German agent should get hold of him he would go in with them and do anything, for he is very loyal to Germany; would like to work for the Fatherland and his people who are in the war."⁵⁹

Though most reports came from individuals, denunciation was institutionalized through semi-official or vigilante groups, above all the American Protective League (APL), which in Pennsylvania as elsewhere originated in an alliance of local businessmen and professional detective or security firms.⁶⁰ These groups were incredibly active and intrusive. In

Philadelphia, for example, the A.P.L. chapter “examined” 18,275 individuals between December, 1917, and November, 1918, chiefly in the context of draft status, but also emphasizing counter-sabotage activities. The city specialized in mass “slacker” raids, in which thousands were rounded up from bars or sporting events in order to search out draft evaders, but also to disrupt vice and bootlegging. In Pittsburgh, the A.P.L. had active agents assigned to every voting precinct, “and where there were concentrations of the foreign element, these agents were to be found in practically every city block.”⁶¹ In the broader industrial region of the southwest, agents were found “in every county, township, city, town and village,” but the A.P.L. drew amazing numbers of volunteers throughout the state: Wilkes-Barre had 66 enrolled members, Meadville fourteen.⁶² Obviously, such coverage could only have been achieved if the A.P.L. was working in intimate alliance with the local employers and their existing structure of anti-labor surveillance and espionage.⁶³ These efforts were now directed to detecting and reporting seditious talk. The Reading branch alone “reports 170 cases of alien enemy activities, 226 cases of disloyal and seditious talk, 38 cases of investigation of radical organizations.”⁶⁴

“Committees of Public Safety” also flourished across the Commonwealth, generally composed of local business figures and community leaders anxious to root out the merest signs of disloyalty or sabotage. Their efforts were coordinated through an officially sanctioned statewide Committee chaired by later United States Senator George Wharton Pepper. A typical report from the York County Committee reported the following: “George E. Smith . . . under suspicion for circulating private Socialistic paper debarred from mails, published in Milwaukee; Andrew Miller, color mixer . . . disloyal utterances constantly; Edward Gentzler who cooperates with Miller in his Socialistic work; one by the name of Bressler living near Weiglestown, York County; The Rev. Dr. Enders, alien enemy, suspected of being connected with a German propaganda [sic].”⁶⁵ Sometimes, such bodies would complain about a whole ethnic group or community in their area. In McKean County, the Committee reported the Swedish settlement in Mount Jewett as subject to “a strong Socialistic and quite pro-German sentiment”, which was troubling in view of the strategic industries in the area.⁶⁶ Palmerton in Carbon County was similarly tainted because of its population of “Pennsylvania Germans, Ruthenians, Slovaks and Hungarians.”⁶⁷

When a charge was to be investigated, State Police officers would often enter communities in which they had few prior contacts, and would therefore be forced to rely upon the opinions of the “solid citizenry,” local individuals of unquestioned worth and respectability. Usually they would go undercover as insurance agents, salesmen, or some other type of innocuous traveller.⁶⁸ On other occasions, they would rely entirely on the judgment of their local contacts, who might or might not be affiliated with a formal body like the A.P.L. One

characteristic investigation involved allegations that seditious peace posters had been seen in the town of Warren. A private undertook several interviews in the town: with the postmaster, the Deputy Sheriff, the Police Chief, and a local businessman.⁶⁹ This was exactly the roster pursued in other cases, supplemented regularly by the secretaries of Public Safety Committees and other notables. Postmasters were a common starting point, as they could indicate reliable local individuals, as well as commenting upon any suspicious mail that had passed through their hands.⁷⁰ In a Butler County mining town, the main source was a weighmaster.⁷¹

The sources most commonly used to investigate subversives were employers, managers, or foremen. In practice, this meant accepting the judgment of the employers and foremen about their workforce, and also asking largely Protestant elites for their opinion of their Catholic neighbors, asking old-stock Americans about immigrants. The potential for abuse and prejudice was obvious, and this was a golden opportunity to remove militants or “troublemakers.” On the other hand, it is surprising how often local notables vouched for their neighbors. In December 1917, for example, a State Police officer visited Annandale in Butler County where he was told that “There are a great many Hungarians in this community but both of the Miller brothers reported that they were all loyal towards our government.”⁷² In the Mount Jewett case discussed above, a police officer sent to the area noted that the local citizens gathered to chat in Swedish, which he could not understand, but on being reliably informed that there was no harm in their discussions, he abandoned the investigation forthwith.⁷³

Informants might attribute remarks to a specific individual, or sometimes used these quotations to show the unpatriotic atmosphere in a particular locale or factory, and anti-government statements are thus cited at length. In 1917, for example, a Philadelphia mechanic wrote to complain of the breadth of disaffection he witnessed around him. The remarks quoted reflected a spectrum of opinion, from Socialist radicalism to simple pro-German loyalty. In the first category was the recurrent theme that “The President of the U.S. is paid by England to fight for him. The US is only the tool of J. P. Morgan . . .” Germans were quoted as saying that “I will fight for German [sic] against anyone” and “We will show him, that President, that he is not going to rule us Germans.”⁷⁴ The vast majority of all the remarks examined fell into one of these two categories, either opposing the war because it was contrary to the interests of the American people, or actively asserting support for Germany.

The authenticity of such remarks is obviously controversial. In an atmosphere in which Germans or the foreign-born were constantly suspected of treason, it is easy to imagine hostile neighbors distorting or inventing words in order to encourage official intervention. Much also depends on chronology. It is not always clear whether a remark reported to police in (say) late 1917

was actually made at the time, or some years previously. In legal terms, crowing over German achievements against the British or French in 1915 was quite harmless, if ill-advised; but retroactively quoted in 1917, such comments might be damning. On the other hand, it is surprisingly how many of the pro-German incidents were strictly contemporary, however much it strains credulity that even the most naive German sympathizer might be so rash as to utter such words after all the riots and purges of mid-1917. Still, though, we find public statements in defense of the Kaiser, assertions that the American army would meet defeat at the hands of the German forces, or that the passengers of the torpedoed *Lusitania* had got what they deserved.⁷⁵ One would think that being a German citizen on American soil in wartime invited enough trouble without speculating publicly about “what Germany would do to us when they get over here.”⁷⁶

One explanation for these astonishing indiscretions lies in the means by which they came to official attention. With a handful of exceptions, few pro-Germans made their views known in public, where they knew that they were likely to be mobbed. They spoke rather in settings which they believed to be safe, usually addressing fellow-Germans or Austrians, and often berating them for agreeing to support the war effort. A Lancaster man reported for treasonous remarks did so in the context of an argument with another German-American, in which he “shook his fist in Kready’s face, telling him he should be ashamed to agitate for the Allies on account of his being of German descent.” Kready duly denounced him. In York, a man with a brother serving in the German army was dismissed after asking a fellow German-American “why he bought Bonds and did not support his Fatherland.”⁷⁷ These are typical illustrations of a common schism in the German community, between the majority of immigrants who had largely or fully identified with their new homeland, and those who retained primary loyalties to the Central Powers.

Addressing Charges

Ultimately, we can perhaps never know the absolute truth of the various allegations, but that at least some of the remarks were genuine might be confirmed by the attitude of the investigators reflected in the internal reports which they submitted to State Police authorities. Investigations often failed to confirm either specific or general charges, showing that the officers in question were not working under any form of quota, and thereby inspiring confidence in the charges which they did authenticate. This comment is somewhat impressionistic, in that the nature of the records does not readily permit an accurate sampling of official responses to charges. We cannot say that a given percentage of charges resulted in prosecution or clearance. However, abundant examples survive to show investigators exercising appropriate skepticism, and often a refreshing note of sanity that helped to moderate the effects of public hysteria.

This deserves emphasis, as the State Police in its early years had a frankly dreadful reputation as a bigoted nativist group, whose first chief, John C. Groome, notoriously asserted that "One State Policeman should be able to handle one hundred foreigners." Officers acted accordingly, especially in the strikes and labor confrontations that earned them the titles of the "Cossacks" and the "Black Hussars." It is therefore striking to find the so-called Black Hussars as exponents of relative tolerance. Several explanations are possible. Restraint might have reflected the knowledge that no jails were large enough to hold every Pennsylvanian who had ever expressed sympathy for the German cause, while an obsessive pursuit of trivial allegations would have diverted very scarce resources needed to track serious enemy agents. Already sparse police numbers had been reduced still further by the number of officers joining the regular armed forces. Possibly, the abundance of eminently respectable German-Americans in the community and in the State Police itself encouraged a certain sanity. Ideological factors might also have been at work. From its earliest days the force had been closely aligned with a strand of Progressivism that demanded independence from political control, and that exalted an objective professionalism. At its worst, this belief system was potentially anti-democratic, but in wartime, a certain contempt for popular passions and demagoguery gave investigators a healthy distance from the worst excesses of public sentiment.

For whatever reason, the State Police were content to debunk accusations when appropriate, as when pro-German peace posters were said to be in circulation in Warren in November, 1917. All the individuals approached denied any knowledge of the charge, and were extremely sceptical of the man who had reported the affair. In reality, the only basis was that Socialist candidates had used some posters at election time, "but this was nothing but what pertained to the election." While there were some reputed pro-Germans and pacifists in town, the posters were brusquely dismissed as mythical.⁷⁸ Officers were also quite sensitive to the context in which words were spoken. In early 1918, for example, a State Police sergeant investigated a civil servant who the Dauphin County Committee for Public Safety had denounced as a "German propagandist" for stating that Germany would win the war, and that the invasion of Belgium was justified. The officer noted that "I don't believe Mr. Daecke to be at all dangerous, although it is a fact that his sentiments are strongly German. I will state that within the past few months Mr. Daecke has been very quiet, most of his remarks having been made prior to the United States declaring war on Germany."⁷⁹

Allowing for the prejudices of the age, the police often appear to have been healthily sceptical of accusations, splendidly so in comparison with comparable documents from the McCarthy era. Officers interviewed complainants, but sought confirmation from local notables and neighbors,

comparable documents from the McCarthy era. Officers interviewed complainants, but sought confirmation from local notables and neighbors, and when corroboration was lacking, they were swift to conclude that the report might have arisen from personal malice, or a professional busybody.⁸⁰ Police accounts of specific communities sought to unravel the personal and factional rivalries which might have led to false charges being laid. At Palmerton, for example, a sensational account of systematic pro-German activism was dismissed following consultation with local employers, who described the accusations as “grossly misleading.”⁸¹ The affair resulted from a schism in the local Catholic church, from which Slav parishioners had defected following the arrival of a certain priest, a Slovak who identified too strongly with the Hungarian *Herrenvolk*. The Slavs had then founded a congregation of the Slovak National Catholic Church. This had exacerbated the already deep tensions between Slavic and Hungarian residents, and the Slovak minister was the source of the dark picture of pro-German plotting in the town, the constant persecution of loyal Slovaks by sinister Hungarians. Once this was appreciated, most of the specific incidents were readily placed in the context of the ongoing “church fight.” At Jersey Shore, sinister accounts of secret meetings of a German club were similarly traced to antipathies between local Catholics and a defector from that church.⁸²

In a Clarion County case, the original charge was that one Matthew Castner was given to reading and interpreting the news in a vociferously pro-German way, and these views were shared by two other friends. The corporal sent to investigate explained the issue in terms of complicated petty rivalries, in which a dispute over increased postage rates had led to a family transferring its business to a different post office. The ensuing ill-feeling led to accusations that pro-German sentiment had caused the appointment of a postmistress. The three individuals had been accused because “some other people were sore at these men,” specifically a man named Fitzgerald who was a notorious troublemaker. The worst that Castner could be accused of was suggesting that the Germans were not licked yet, hardly a daring sentiment in the spring of 1918. In summary, the original accuser “got matters somewhat twisted,” and the case was based only on rumor. False accusers often received short shrift. In a Titusville case, the report concluded “Mrs. Kane either has the story very much exaggerated or is framing up a charge against Swartzler with the view of getting him into trouble.”⁸³ At Petrolia in Butler County, one F. S. Stern might indeed have made indelicate remarks about the *Lusitania*, and he had relatives in the German Army. On the other hand, the officer examining the case stressed that “he is not so well liked in Petrolia due to the fact that he is a Jew or German Jew and that he treats his employees bad.” That went far towards explaining complaints.⁸⁴

In one rather impressive case, the investigator acknowledged that a

Lancaster man had stated that the German government was the best in the world for efficiency, but the remark had been made in highly provoking circumstances. The officer presented a sympathetic picture of a naturalized citizen frequently taunted by neighbors as “the Kaiser,” and whose enemies often insisted on making him join in provocative toasts. The report appears intended both to clear the man and to condemn the foolish prejudice which had placed him in difficulties in “a barroom argument.” Once again, the probe was commendable for examining the total circumstances of a given statement, rather than condemning merely on the strength of ill-tempered words.⁸⁵ Another officer recorded a case where “practically all the trouble was the trouble of what Miss Ehrer had said before the United States had declared war on Germany,” which had included statements that Germany was justified both in invading Belgium and sinking the *Lusitania*. However, even after such words, her later good behavior was felt to be grounds for full clearance.⁸⁶

When carpenter A. B. Nestor of Erie was attacked as a “pro-German,” officers gathered information both in his hometown and in Butler County where he worked. They quoted some rather mild pro-German remarks that had been reported, mainly questioning American pretensions to be a true democracy, but otherwise informants failed to confirm charges. Nestor’s neighbors presented him as diligent, hard-working, and financially responsible, and reported that he said little about international affairs. The investigator concluded that “I would say . . . that this man’s character is good in the community, except the Socialism which he possesses [sic].”⁸⁷ This almost amounted to a solid testimonial, and no further interest was expressed in the case. At least for the State Police, there really was little sign of a “witch-hunt” atmosphere, suggesting that we should take them seriously when they did confirm that a remark had been made. They seem to have known the difference between loose words and sedition, arguably far better than the federal authorities responsible for drafting and enforcing the draconian laws of this era.

Pro-German Sympathies

If the State Police indeed investigated complaints fairly for the most part, then the various documents leave no doubt of the large scale of opposition to the war in Pennsylvania. This was natural enough in view of the number of residents who had only shortly before left a country with which the United States was now at war, and who had probably served in its armed forces. Sometimes, German sympathizers were sufficiently indiscreet to have left a lengthy record of numerous conversations in which they had repeatedly criticized President Wilson, the war, and the Allies, leaving rich pickings for a sedition investigation. One of the most flagrant pro-Germans was one Dick Allday of Chambersburg, whose actions included flying a German flag on his house shortly before the American declaration of war, and who was noted for

meetings with friends with whom he would sing German songs. Comments attributed to him included a dismissal of the British Army ("The English is a damned yellow bunch. They will turn tail and run as soon as they can") and of the Italians: "God damn them, they ought to be licked"). He also asserted that "How absolutely impossible it was for any nation to do any particular harm to Germany, further that our country was very foolish, that we would be unable to get our men across to be of any help to the Allies. . . . The American Army is only equal to one division of the German Army."⁸⁸

The testimony of Allday's friends shows how frequently they tried to dissuade him from such rash pronouncements, and lynching or mob action was often foretold. Most sympathizers were more discreet, but that does not mean that Allday's views were not shared privately. Prior to the American entry into war, Germans were often heard to remark proudly that their country could "lick the world."⁸⁹ An Ashland man pronounced himself "glad that the German Kaiser is giving the Allies hell."⁹⁰ After April, 1917, such feelings often erupted in the course of an argument, and they were recorded with striking frequency. An Austrian in Lyndora commented on the sinking of Allied ships that "they are getting it and it is good for them."⁹¹ A German in Lancaster boasted that "Germany was born in blood, reared in blood and will die in blood . . . [Germans] would first whip England and France and then come over and show us where we stand and that we would then see what they would do to the United States."⁹² A man in Crawford County made the indiscreet boast that he would "beat you in this game just as the Germans were going to whip the world."⁹³ In rural areas, it was believed that the declaration of war would lead to God's direct intervention against the United States, in the form of hailstorms, worms and natural catastrophes.⁹⁴

Though active willingness to serve the Kaiser was not much in evidence among Germans or Austrians, neither was there unqualified support for the war effort. The remarks quoted sound quite convincing, as when two Slavs of Austrian nationality living in Herminie (Westmoreland County) expressed the desire to enlist in the American armed forces. Several of their colleagues "resented this and informed [the men] that if they desired to get killed it was not necessary for them to go to France, but that they would kill them here."⁹⁵ The confrontation came to light when State Police investigated the ensuing fight.

One constant theme was that America was failing to mind its own business, a point made both by active pro-Germans and by less committed opponents of war as such. In Butler in October 1917, the manager of a local bookstore asserted "that Germany was not the cause of the war and that the Americans had butted in."⁹⁶ In Milton, a former State Senator declared that the country "had no cause to declare war on Germany."⁹⁷ Linked to this was a dim view of American military capacities, a point reinforced by what was

perceived as the Army's ineptitude in the recent incursion to Mexico. German and Austrian sympathizers were scornful of Pershing's "Tin Soldiers" in this campaign, especially when compared to the Kaiser's forces: "What can the bullfrog Americans do?"⁹⁸ The same themes occurred repeatedly. Americans were interfering where it did not concern them and without the resources necessary to enforce their wishes. Moreover, the announced reasons for interventions were hypocritical. Germany had done nothing to neutral Belgium that the United States had not done to Mexico.

Forced to Choose

Foreign-stock Pennsylvanians unenthusiastic about the war were usually content to keep their opinions to themselves, which they could afford to do if their age or occupation permitted them to avoid military service. However, an increasing number of occasions demanded that every person take a positive stand in favor of American policy, and these often led to conflict and official intervention. Use of the flag and patriotic emblems became a critical sign of pro-war sentiment. Conversely, demeaning treatment of the flag was a blatant sign of treasonous attitudes. Curiously, many of those suspected appear to have been unable to use the flag as a harmless or neutral symbol of patriotism without feeling that it committed them to a particular stance in international affairs. In consequence, individuals were denounced for remarkably tactless manifestations of anti-war sympathies, like the teacher who used the Stars and Stripes as a rag to clean ink, and conspicuously trampled the flag.⁹⁹ At Bovard in Butler County, a farmer tore down a flag from his barn and threatened to burn it, crying that "no decent woman would keep that kind of a flag . . . on their house." In the same area, one Julius Yoos had been seen "to take down an American flag from his barber shop and tear it into several pieces."¹⁰⁰

Sensitivity about the flag extended to permitting displays of other national symbols, especially when they reflected a poorly understood international situation. While everyone recognized French or British flags, there was no consensus about the colors of nascent nations like Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia, which were approved by the United States government, but which were felt by local vigilantes to signify alien and probably hostile states. At Palmerton in 1918, a patriotic pro-American parade was attacked for its display of Czechoslovak flags and Hungarian colors among the mass of American symbols.¹⁰¹

The Liberty Loan also became a touchstone of loyalty, and contributions were seen, correctly, as a contribution to the war effort: in effect, as an indirect means of helping kill German or Austrian fellow-citizens. In some cases, protesters complained that they were literally being asked to kill their brothers. In York, for example, a man declared that "he would never support the United States in this war, much less buy bonds. He has a brother in the German Army

and he would not furnish any money to fight him.”¹⁰² By early 1918, the Committees of Public Safety were commonly making support for Liberty Bonds their chief criterion for demanding loyalty investigations.¹⁰³ Officials charged with boosting bond sales also provided a vigorous new source for reports of suspected disloyalty.¹⁰⁴

Loyalty investigations often made reference to the subject’s willingness to invest in the bonds, while protests about the loan were much heard. The voluble pro-German Dick Allday called them simply “Butcher Bonds.”¹⁰⁵ A German worker in Philadelphia was typically reported as crying, “Damn their Liberty Loan. I give money to fight against it.”¹⁰⁶ In York again, a prominent Socialist “agitated against the purchase of Liberty Bonds, against the war, and entered a vigorous protest against the purchase of \$2500 worth of Liberty Bonds by the Printers Union.”¹⁰⁷ In Shenandoah, a Lithuanian who refused to buy bonds was quoted as saying that “he would rather fight for Germany than for this country.”¹⁰⁸ Aggressive pro-German Rudolf Wagner admitted to having a bond, “for I was the only one who didn’t, but when I go back [to Germany], I will give it to some kid or throw it away.”¹⁰⁹ Probing a York County family, an investigator made the typical inquiry “whether or not the family had subscribed to the Liberty Loan or donated to the Red Cross.”¹¹⁰ In Saxonburg (Butler County), an accused preacher “redeemed himself by preaching a sermon advocating the sale of liberty bonds, also speaking highly in favor of the government.”¹¹¹ Once again, State Police investigations sometimes offered a different perspective on accusations, showing that a family which had failed to buy Liberty Bonds was not making a political statement, but simply lacked the money to afford them.¹¹²

Against War

State Police officers were obviously not versed in the subtleties of radical theory, and we are often reminded of the accusation against Postmaster-General and *de facto* chief censor Albert S. Burlison, that he “didn’t know Socialism from rheumatism.”¹¹³ This often makes it difficult to identify precisely the ideological motives of an accused person. Some were pro-German, some Socialist, some IWW, but many fall neatly into no category. This may reflect deficiencies of reporting, but might also suggest the existence of ill-focused anti-war sentiment. This might have been termed “defeatism” in the parlance of the day, but which is better viewed as sweeping skepticism of the official view of the war, and a scathing rejection of government propaganda. These ideas were often manifested in lengthy and undiplomatic tirades which easily earned the speakers a place in official files.

Typically, these jeremiads affirm the moral equivalence of the American and German causes, suggesting in effect that Germany had committed no atrocity or injustice worse than those commonly wrought by the United States.

From these documents at least, there were clearly many Pennsylvanians who had no illusions about a “war to end wars”. John Frantz of Monroe County earned an Espionage Act charge by asserting that “they should take both Wilson and the Kaiser out and shoot them through the heart”; Wilson had dragged the country into war on the strength of a few sunken ships that scarcely mattered in the great scheme of things. A Philadelphia man exclaimed “Damn their patriotic posters! None in my house.”¹¹⁴

Henry Wolheiter of Mifflinburg refused to buy Liberty Bonds, and demanded that American troops be brought home forthwith. Rather than giving money to support the war, the nation should cease armament production, thereby ending the war and bringing America into compliance with the Ten Commandments. This was a Wall Street war, the liberty Bonds were a money-making fraud. Mrs. Wolheiter urged her son to shoot himself rather than allow himself to be drafted. In similar vein, Mrs. John Raber of Mount Carmel complained “that her boy would not have to go to war were it not for the son-of-a-bitch of a President and his crowd. The President borrowed money from foreign nations and this is the way he is paying it back, starting a war and having our boys to get killed. . . . it was all money gouging, and only for Wilson, damn him and his crowd, we would not be in this war. I don’t take no government bonds, as they took my boy and that is enough for them. . . .”¹¹⁵

In York, a man became engaged in an altercation in a restaurant when war news was discussed. Dismissing optimistic accounts of imminent victory, he exclaimed “It is nothing but a bunch of lies. Our government never tells the truth. This is no government, they are all a bunch of grafters at Washington. My brother is a seaman and he saw an American transport torpedoed and the soldiers swimming around in the water. The other transports would not even stop for them This damn government don’t allow free speech but never mind, we will have a civil war here soon and capital and labor will fight in place of labor fighting Germany. The guns they are sending against Germany should be in the service of the hands of the laborers who earn this blood money.”¹¹⁶

The remark about torpedoed ships also highlights the copious rumor-mongering that was clearly under way in these years, some of which may have been sponsored by malevolent agents, but which mostly reflected genuine fears. One alleged seditionist was Edward Heidelbring, who asserted in Shamokin and elsewhere that “the draft was against the Constitution . . . Wilson’s election had been controlled by the capitalistic interests and that Wilson owed his election by promising these money interests that he would immediately declare war on Germany.” Heidelbring appears to have been a one-man news service of anti-government propaganda, stating variously that the government was concealing the torpedoing of the USS *Pennsylvania*; that American soldiers on the Mexican border had carried out ruthless atrocities, raping local women

and cutting off their breasts; that soldiers in Mexico were using dum-dum bullets with the consent of American authorities; that sentries patrolled streets where the expeditionary force was to pass for France, to conceal their appalling conditions and lack of equipment; and that large numbers of workers had been casually tortured or murdered by the government. The conditions of American workers in 1917 were worse than those of American slaves in 1861, so that the Statue of Liberty should more properly be titled "a statue of imprisonment or slavery." "Any man who stated he was willing to be drafted was a slacker and a traitor to the human race."¹¹⁷

Correctly or otherwise, German sympathizers attributed many of the rumors to serving members of the armed forces, though it is controversial whether the very grim remarks quoted could have passed official censorship. In either case the reports suggest real pessimism about the state of the armed forces, their equipment, and the scale of casualties. One soldier in France was reported to have said that "the condition over there is dreadful, and if a change isn't made within six months we, the Americans, will be paying a heavy indemnity to Germany as victory is theirs." Soldiers were also said to be suffering dreadfully for lack of medical supplies.¹¹⁸

Lessons

Whatever the objective reality, the anti-subversion campaign of these years had an immense influence in circumscribing the scope of what was considered appropriate and acceptable in American public discourse. A plausible German sabotage threat was used as a foundation to construct a panorama of "un-American" belief that included Socialism, pacifism, and suspicion of government, and to taint all of them with words as damning as treason. The implication was that critical words, however reasonably phrased, had as their logical consequence the commission of unpatriotic deeds that caused the loss of American lives and property. This proved to be a precious rhetorical lesson for the organizers of Red Scares and anti-labor vigilantism for decades afterwards. As Reading Socialist James H. Maurer declared in 1919, "The IWW and Bolshevism have replaced the Yellow Peril and Prussianism as the great menace;" though as we have seen the "red threat" had never lain far below the surface of wartime fears.¹¹⁹

The subversion panic of 1917-18 would also carry many lessons for the ethnic groups involved, both in accelerating the process of Americanizing immigrants, and in producing a reaction to that process best exemplified by interwar nationalist movements like the Italian Fascists and German-American Bund. However, the strictly limited success of the Bund even in German centers like Pennsylvania shows how far ethnic leaders had learned the bitter lessons of 1917, as the great majority of German-Americans were loath to engage in public activities that might provoke a savage reaction. One possible ideological

outcome is represented by Philadelphia Bund leader Gerhard Wilhelm Kunze, who suggested that his later support for Hitler owed much to his experiences as a schoolboy in 1917: "I received enough beatings to remind me of that for the rest of my life."¹²⁰ His ally in the Pennsylvania Bund in its aggressive pro-Nazi rhetoric was none other than Sigmund von Bosse, the former head of the National Alliance. A more widespread reaction was that of A. Raymond Raff, also of Philadelphia, who organized a national anti-Hitler movement among German-Americans, partly in order to prevent the recurrence of a xenophobic reaction like that of 1917.¹²¹ The success enjoyed by Raff, and the limited progress made by Kunze and von Bosse, ensured that for Germans at least, 1941 would produce nothing like the horrors of the previous war (the Japanese were obviously less fortunate).

However, the relative lack of ethnic persecution in 1941 owed more to the comparative tact of German- and Italian-Americans in this period, and reflected a widespread recognition that the earlier panics, anti-German and anti-radical, had involved gross injustices. Alongside the plethora of books and articles questioning the rightness of American's involvement in the war, there was a new hostility to the vigilantism and mob violence which had accompanied it, and a desire to avoid a repetition. In fact, fears of such a revived chauvinistic upsurge played a role in encouraging isolationist sentiment in the late 1930s. This reappraisal was both necessary and long overdue, but its corollary was a refusal to pay adequate attention to the quite genuine concerns which had motivated at least some of those concerned about internal security. Ours is by no means the first age that has had to deal with problems of state-sponsored violence and sabotage, of the social disruption caused by terrorism. In 1917, the authorities in Pennsylvania were not too wrong in seeing their state as standing on the front line. Their actions must be judged accordingly.

Notes

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1. Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War One*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974; David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

2. William H. Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals 1903-1933*, second edition, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994 (originally published by Harvard University Press 1963); Samuel Walker, *In Defense of American Liberties*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, especially pp. 11-47; Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955.

3. These papers are found in the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg in RG30, State Police Records, Office of the Commissioner, General Correspondence, "Wartime Activities Files," which are chiefly organized by date. Except where otherwise stated, all manuscript materials here refer to letters and papers in this State Police collection. Most survive in the form of letters from investigators to the Commanding Officers of the respective troops, but there are also special reports, affidavits, and correspondence with other agencies, including Military Intelligence. The fact that the State Police records are the chief source for this paper has important implications for the coverage of the material, which reveals little about affairs in major metropolitan centers, but concentrates instead on small-town and rural communities, and smaller industrial settlements where the State Police conducted most of its work.

4. Oke R. Campbell to C.O. Troop C, February 23, 1918. The State Police in these years was divided into four troops, one for each of the major industrial regions in which labor conflict was thought likely. Troops were

headquartered respectively at Greensburg (Troop A), Wyoming (B), Pottsville (C), and Butler (D). Philip Conti, *The Pennsylvania State Police*, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1977; Katherine Mayo, *Justice to All: The Story of the Pennsylvania State Police*, second edition, New York: Putnam's, 1917.

5. For one area of intense German covert action in this hemisphere, see Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution*, University of Chicago 1981.

6. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955; H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War 1917-1918*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1957. Murray's *Red Scare* appeared in 1955, Preston's *Aliens and Dissenters* in 1963.

7. Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, vii.

8. Civil liberties struggles in these years marked the origin of the American Civil Liberties Union, for which see Walker, *In Defense of American Liberties*.

9. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 23.

10. Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., "The Socialists of Reading, Pennsylvania, and World War I", *Pennsylvania History*, (36:4) 1969, 430-450; James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in the United States*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967.

11. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 45-92.

12. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans*, 2 vols., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985; Frederick C. Luebke, "The Germans," in John Higham, ed., *Ethnic Leadership in America*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978, 64-90; Carl Wittke, *The German-Language Press in the United States*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957; Harry W. Pfund, *A History of the German Society of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia: German Society of Pennsylvania, 1944; Oswald Seidensticker, *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft von Pennsylvania 1764-1917*, 2 vols., Philadelphia: Graf and Bruening, 1917. The turn of the century was a great era for German cultural organizations in Pennsylvania: the invaluable

- Proceedings and Addresses of the Pennsylvania German Society* date from 1890.
13. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*; Clifton James Child, *The German-Americans in Politics 1914-1917*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1939.
 14. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 128-138.
 15. Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed., University Park: Penn State Press, 1980, 429.
 16. Luebke *Bonds of Loyalty*, 166.
 17. Childs, *The German-Americans in Politics*, 118-122.
 18. *Ibid.*, 166.
 19. Russell F. Weigley, et. al., *Philadelphia: A Three Hundred Year History*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1982, 560.
 20. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 249.
 21. *Ibid.*, 279; Cheryl Miller, "Der Volksblatt und Freiheits Freund: The Loyalties of German-Americans in Pittsburgh During World War I," in *Pittsburgh Undergraduate Review* (51), 1985.
 22. Emerson Hough, *The Web*, Chicago: Reilly and Lee 1919. For Monessen, see Alexander Vought to C.O. Troop A, August 2, 1918.
 23. Henry Landau, *The Enemy Within: The Inside Story of German Sabotage in America*, New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1937, 8, 275-278; Dennis Clark, *The Irish of Philadelphia*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973, 148-158.
 24. Hendrickson, "The Socialists of Reading," p. 443.
 25. Weigley et al., *Philadelphia* 559-560; Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, 31-32.
 26. "Wartime Activities of the Pennsylvania State Police Force," p. 11. This typescript account is hereafter cited as "State Police Activities"; Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, 31-32.
 27. "State Police Activities," 3. The confrontations in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties represented a culmination of repeated battles between the State Police and the Wobblies over the previous two years, chiefly involving the Italian community: Mayo, *Justice to All*, 223-243.
 28. "State Police Activities." 12. Incidentally, these intelligence reports offer a superb and largely untapped resource for Socialist and revolutionary activities in the industrial areas. See for example the account of Lithuanian activism in the Minersville area in Charles A. Hanes to C.O. Troop C, "Special Report", November 19., 1918.
 29. Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, 32; Walker, *In Defense of American Liberties*, 26-29.
 30. Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, 98.
 31. State Archives, MG 348, Papers of Governor Martin Brumbaugh, Frank D. Beary (Adjutant-General of Pennsylvania) to Chief, Militia Bureau December 3, 1917.
 32. State Archives, MG 348, Papers of Governor Martin Brumbaugh, Frank D. Beary (Adjutant-General of Pennsylvania) to Governor Brumbaugh December 8, 1917.
 33. Frederick A. Flint to C.O. Troop C, March 8, 1918.
 34. "State Police Activities." 8-10; Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, 119-120.
 35. William D. Plummer to C.O. Troop B, March 21, 1918; Oran D. Riggs to C.O. Troop C, April 29, 1918.
 36. "State Police Activities;" R. H. Van Deman to George F. Lumb, May 15, 1918.
 37. "State Police Activities;" "Statement of Expenditures Incurred by Members of the Pennsylvania State Police Force for the Period October 1917 to March 1919, Inclusive . . ." July 8, 1919. For Military Intelligence activities in this period, see *United States Military Intelligence 1917-1927*, introduced by Richard D. Challener, New York: Garland, 1978-79.
 38. Landau, *The Enemy Within*. It is important to stress the reality of the sabotage threat, especially since the charges made at the time so often seem far-fetched, and undoubtedly made grossly excessive claims for propaganda purposes. See for example William H. Skaggs, *German Conspiracies in America*, London: Fisher Unwin, 1915, 130-148; Thomas J. Tunney, *Throttled! The Detection of the German and Anarchist Bomb Plotters*, Boston: Small Maynard, 1919.
 39. Landau, *The Enemy Within*, 77-84.
 40. *Ibid.*, 92-96.
 41. *Ibid.*, 305-310.
 42. *Ibid.*, 113.
 43. Weigley, et al., *Philadelphia*, 558.
 44. Klein and Hoogenboom, *A History of*

Pennsylvania, 430-431.

45. "State Police Activities." The work of National Guard units assigned to internal security duties is described at length in the materials of the War History Commission in Pennsylvania State Archives, RG 19, Department of Military Affairs.
46. State Archives, MG 348, Papers of Governor Martin Brumbaugh, Frank D. Beary (Adjutant-General of Pennsylvania) to Chief, Militia Bureau December 3, 1917; my emphasis.
47. Colonel R. H. Van Deman, Chief, Military Intelligence Section to Superintendent, State Police, December 8, 1917.
48. Colonel R. H. Van Deman, Chief, Military Intelligence Section to Superintendent, State Police, December 8, 1917; Daniel M. Donahue to C.O. Troop D, December 18, 1917; John A. Reilly to C.O. Troop A, December 20, 1917.
49. Oke R. Campbell to C.O. Troop C, November 20 and 22, 1917; "State Police Activities," 11.
50. "State Police Activities," 9; "Acting Superintendent" to Frank L. Garbarino, Agent in Charge, Justice Department, Philadelphia, December 21, 1917.
51. Tommie D. Rucker to C.O., Troop D, December 17 and 18, 1917; Samuel Gearhart to C.O. Troop D, December 20, 1917.
52. Samuel Gearhart to C.O. Troop D, December 20, 1917.
53. Charles P. Snyder to C.O. Troop B, December 12, 1917.
54. Nicholas Biddle to John C. Groome, Oct. 25, 1917.
55. Report of Todd Daniel, November 24, 1917, "Re—Hynes".
56. Report of work done for Department of Justice, April 17, "1917", recte 1918.
57. B. G. Walter to C.O. Troop B, November 21, 1917.
58. David L. Miller to C.O. Troop C, "Special Report," June 6, 1918.
59. Captain, State Police, Commanding Troop C to Superintendent, State Police, January 8, "1917," recte 1918; Frederick A. Flint to C.O. Troop C, December 1, 1917.
60. Hough, *The Web*, 210-225; Kennedy, *Over Here*, 82 terms the A.P.L. "a rambunctious unruly *posse comitatus* on an unprecedented national scale".
61. Hough *The Web* 240.
62. *Ibid.*, 370-373.
63. *Ibid.*, 239-245.
64. *Ibid.*, 372.
65. Grier Hersh to C.O. Troop C, November 23, 1917.
66. Guy McCoy to Col. Lewis E. Beitler, Secretary, Public Safety Committee of Pennsylvania, November 10, 1917.
67. L. C. Wagner, "Activities of German Sympathizers at Palmerton PA," August 1918?
68. Frederick A. Flint to C.O. Troop C, December 1, 1917.
69. Martin J. Crowley to C.O. Troop D, December 20, 1917.
70. Martin J. Crowley to C.O. Troop D, December 20, 1917.
71. Francis H. Grey to C.O. Troop D, December 21, 1917.
72. Francis H. Grey to C.O. Troop D, December 21, 1917.
73. Henry O. McGowan to C.O. Troop D, November 24, 1917.
74. J. D. O'Brien to George Wharton Pepper, September 29, 1917.
75. Testimony before Hon. N. L. Bonebrake, U.S. Commissioner, at Chambersburg, PA, December 15, 1917.
76. John L. Marshall to C.O. Troop B, November 29, 1917.
77. Harry Rethoret to C.O. Troop C, February 9, 1918.
78. Martin J. Crowley to C.O. Troop D, December 20, 1917.
79. Thomas H. Close to C.O. Troop D, February 11, 1918; W. H. Gaither to W. H. Bull, c. February 1918.
80. George H. Burmeister to C. O. Troop A, July 30, 1918.
81. Francis P. Sinn to Sergeant Walter C. Snyder, Troop C, August 19, 1918.
82. A. W. Eckess to C.O. Troop B, November 13, 1917.
83. Martin J. Crowley to C.O. Troop D, April 17, 1918; Adam G. Robertson to C.O. Troop D, May 21, 1918.
84. Thomas H. Close to C.O. Troop D, June 3, 1918.
85. Harry Rethoret to C.O. Troop C, February

- 1918.
86. Robert E. Tipton to C.O. Troop B, April 10, 1918.
87. Francis H. Grey to C.O. Troop D, December 21, 1917; William E. Rucker to C.O. Troop D, December 22, 1917.
88. Testimony before Hon. N. L. Bonebrake, U.S. Commissioner, at Chambersburg, PA, December 15, 1917.
89. C. A. Davies to Superintendent, November 30, 1917.
90. Harry Rethoret to C.O. Troop C, December 8, 1917.
91. Tommie D. Rucker to C.O. Troop D, January 7, 1918.
92. Harry Rethoret to C.O. Troop C, February 9, 1918.
93. Tommie D. Rucker to C.O. Troop D, February 12, 1918.
94. Thomas H. Close to C.O. Troop D, June 17, 1918.
95. "State Police Activities," 12.
96. Tommie D. Rucker to C.O. Troop D, December 17, 1917.
97. B. G. Walter to C.O. Troop B, November 21, 1917.
98. Robert Ammon to C.O. Troop B, March 19, 1918; Francis F. Kane to Frank L. Garbarino, April 24, 1918.
99. Earl Trimmer to C.O. Troop C, April 27, 1918.
100. Affidavits of Mamie Thompson, Mary Thompson and Ira Thompson, July 5, 1918; Tommie D. Rucker to C.O. Troop D, January 17, 1918.
101. L. C. Wagner, "Activities of German Sympathizers at Palmerton, PA.," August 1918?
102. Harry Rethoret to C.O. Troop C, December 12, 1917.
103. Grier Hcrsh to Captain George F. Lumb, April 18, 1918.
104. Elmer Leithiser to C.O. Troop B, May 7, 1918.
105. Harry Rethoret to C.O. Troop C, December 22, 1917.
106. J. D. O'Brien to George Wharton Pepper, September 29, 1917.
107. Harry Rethoret to C.O. Troop C, December 12, 1917.
108. Frank L. Garbarino to John H. Pollard, December 17, 1917.
109. Frederick A. Flint to C.O. Troop C, December 1, 1917.
110. Oke R. Campbell to C.O. Troop C, February 28, 1918.
111. Reynold Florentine to C.O. Troop D, April 23, 1918.
112. Adam G. Robertson to C.O. Troop D, May 21, 1918.
113. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 76, quoting Norman Thomas.
114. John J. Marshall to C.O. Troop B, April 4, 1918; J. D. O'Brien to George Wharton Pepper, September 29, 1917.
115. Elmer Leithiser to C.O. Troop B, May 7, 1918; "Special Report" of John J. Lenahan to C.O. Troop C, August 24, 1918.
116. Harry Rethoret to C.O. Troop C, December 12, 1917.
117. Affidavits of Albert H. Johns, January 7, 1918; A. E. Leach, January 7, 1918.
118. Anonymous letter to War Secretary Newton D. Baker, from Mount Carmel, PA., Spring 1918.
119. Hendrickson "The Socialists of Reading," 447.
120. *Investigation of Un-American Activities in the United States (The Dies Committee)* vol. 14, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1942, pp. 8252-8254; Higham, *Strangers in the Land*.
121. Philip Jenkins, "Hoods and Shirts: The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania c. 1930-1950," forthcoming book; LaVern J. Rippley, "Ameliorated Americanization", in Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans*, 2 vols., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985, vol. 2, 217-231.