

## Chapter 5

### Aliens, Slackers, and Lukewarm Americans

As the war effort encompassed Americans to an extent never seen before, nearly every aspect of the lives of German Lutherans came under scrutiny. In an atmosphere where every citizen was expected to do his or her share, Wisconsin Synod members were accused of "slacking" in a myriad of ways. Those not under the umbrella of citizenship had their difficulties compounded. Thus an immigrant community which had been incessantly reminded throughout previous decades of their lack of an American outlook and morality confronted yet another aspect by which they failed the Americanization process. Finally, their frustration and exhaustion—as well as their stubbornness—became apparent at the ballot box in 1918.

#### II. Alien Enemies

Still citizens of their former country and technically under an oath of allegiance to the Kaiser, unnaturalized German Americans found themselves in a peculiar situation during the war. Since government officials believed these denizens to be the most probable spies and saboteurs, they felt it necessary to classify and monitor these individuals. In early 1918, after a revival of the ancient 1798 Alien and Sedition Act, all "German alien enemies" were required to fill out registration affidavits, giving information about their birth, family members, real estate, financial holdings, and other information deemed material. They were to take these affidavits and register themselves as an "alien enemy" to U.S. Marshalls around the country. Wisconsin's registration ran from February 4th to the 9th, 1918. Minnesota declared February 25th, 26th, and 27th as "Alien Registration Days."<sup>1</sup> In a telling sign of their opinion about

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<sup>1</sup> CPS Proclamation, 103.L.8, Folder 163, CPS Files.



Marlow that his suggestion "is now under consideration and preparation by authority of the Commission."<sup>1</sup>

All aliens who neglected to register either through ignorance or obstinance were tracked down by the Department of Justice. John and Minnie Racisperger, Wisconsin Synod members from Portland, Oregon, were among the many who failed. APL agent W.M. Hudson travelled to the Racispergers' home and places of employment, but neither of them could be found. He then tracked down Rev. F.J. Eppling, their pastor, and interviewed him to discover their whereabouts.<sup>2</sup> Finding the Racisperger's new location in Eppling's records, he notified the Sheriff at Hillsboro, Oregon, who "promised to place the subjects in custody if apprehended."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as aliens, John and Minnie could not be afforded the protection of constitutional guarantees. Internment could last for an unspecified period of time, or until the end of the war.

Aliens surrendered numerous other rights during the war. If they wished to change their residence to a new registration district, they needed to obtain a permit to do so. This required a screening from the American Protective League.

A change in residence without following this process subjected German aliens to arrest and detention for the period of the war, among other penalties.<sup>4</sup> Several Midwestern states which had previously granted suffrage to aliens holding first naturalization papers rescinded these laws. Aliens were also expelled from all ships and boats except public ferries, as well as anything deemed to have military importance, from wharves to railroad depots.<sup>5</sup> Idleness even became illegal. The Wisconsin State Council of Defense displayed posters telling aliens to "Work or Go to Jail."<sup>6</sup> The penalty for listlessness was three months at hard labor. This atmosphere spurred thousands of German aliens to seek citizenship to protect



5.2: Herman Roeder's Photograph for his naturalization form.

<sup>1</sup> CPS to J.C. Marlow, 8 April 1918, 103.L.8, Folder 163, CPS Records.

<sup>2</sup> W.M. Hudson Report, 27 August 1918, OG 276759.

<sup>3</sup> W.M. Hudson Report, 13 September 1918, OG 276759.

<sup>4</sup> "Notice!" *Gemeindeblatt* 53:19 (16 September 1918), 300.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Jensen, *The Price of Vigilance* (Chicago: RandMcNally, 1968), 166.

<sup>6</sup> Rutherford Pixley, *Wisconsin in the World War: An Account of the Activities of the Wisconsin Citizens in the Great War* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin War History Company, 1919), 292.

themselves. As Herman Roeder, a Lutheran from Peshtigo, Wisconsin, applied for citizenship, he, like everyone else, received a thorough investigation during the application process. Bureau chief Bielaski told his agent to be especially scrupulous with this German Lutheran, requesting, "Please make a very careful investigation of this party regarding his loyalty."<sup>7</sup> With numerous opportunities to either participate or "slack," Roeder's loyalty could usually be ascertained from his wartime contributions, or lack thereof.

### III. Slackers

The Selective Service Act of 1917 subjected men ages 21 through 30 to register for the draft. With Registration Day approaching, the Wisconsin State Council of Defense distributed a circular "To All Drafted Men in the State of Wisconsin," which told these men that "Your government is about to apply the acid test to your manhood and your patriotism."<sup>8</sup> Registration Day passed on 5 June 1917 without a major incident. Nonetheless, an unknown number of slackers—those who failed to register—still roamed the streets, to the abhorrence of patriotic citizens. The matter of rooting out these slackers remained an open question during the early days of the war. During the summer months of 1918, with collective patience waning, the advocates of "slacker raids" saw their dream become reality.

The APL supplied the manpower for these raids, in which "the innocent and ignorant conscript and the veiled enemy alike got the largest and swiftest lesson in Americanism this country ever had."<sup>9</sup> Raids targeted public events, movie theaters, and even residential areas. Locales with a high foreign population, particularly German, received first priority. During these raids, agents rounded up all the men who appeared to be within the draft age. Those who carried a registration card were allowed to leave, the rest were taken into custody. The largest slacker raids netted thousands. Simultaneous slacker raids in New York and New Jersey rounded up 32,000 potential slackers. Thousands were brought into custody and examined, whereby 200 slackers were filtered from this group.<sup>10</sup> Slackers in Atlantic City, New Jersey even "jumped into the

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<sup>7</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to R.B. Spencer, 19 November 1918, OG 327164.

<sup>8</sup> Pixley, 119.

<sup>9</sup> Emerson Hough, *The Web: The Authorized History of the American Protective League* (Chicago: The Reilly & Lee Company, 1919), 144.

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, 4 September 1918;

ocean" rather than being taken into custody.<sup>11</sup> A raid in Racine, Wisconsin gathered 3,000, including "a number of real dodgers and deserters."<sup>12</sup> In Madison, Wisconsin, a carnival at a baseball park was interrupted by a slacker raid, where 360 men were brought into custody for not carrying registration cards. After 360 court sessions, forty-two spent the night in jail. Five of these men—four from out of state—were unable to furnish proper credentials within a week. Agent W.N. Parker reported to Bureau chief Bielaski that the Madison raid "was largely educative, as men of draft age in the city seemed utterly ignorant of the requirement to carry questionnaire receipts with them."<sup>13</sup>

For those within the draft age, a registration card became an essential accessory for protection. Those too young or old to register, but still liable to suspicion, could not be protected in this way. It therefore became essential to carry some proof of age. In August 1918—about a month after the raids began—The *Gemeindeblatt* advertised a "Certificate of Baptism" for "young men nearing draft age to prove their age."<sup>14</sup> Churches could buy a dozen of these for fifteen cents and distribute them to the young men of their congregation. These certificates were small enough for the young lad to "wear it in an envelope in his pocket." Furthermore, "As it is written in the English language, one also avoids unpleasant remarks, which are often made about the German certificates." This certificate would have come in handy for E.J. Beckmann, a member of Salem Lutheran Church in Milwaukee who was taken into custody by draft officials. Beckmann was a large man, wore a heavy mustache, and "would easily be taken for 30 years of age."<sup>15</sup> Instead, Rev. Hagedorn had to forward a copy of Beckmann's birth records to officials to prove Beckmann was only twenty years old on the registration date. A slacker raid in Minneapolis and St. Paul also netted at least four Lutherans who had to await documents from their churches to prove their birth age. There being no violation, the subjects were released from custody.<sup>16</sup>

Authorities often became aware of alleged slackers through citizen complaints. In September 1918, when the draft registration extended to those of eighteen years, several citizens in Plymouth, Michigan complained to authorities that Albert Minehart was eighteen years of age but did not register.

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<sup>11</sup> Hough, 406.

<sup>12</sup> W.N. Parker Report, 21 June 1918, OG 16291.

<sup>13</sup> W.N. Parker to A. Bruce Bielaski, 29 July 1918, OG 16291.

<sup>14</sup> "Certificate of Baptism," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:17 (18 August 1918), 271.

<sup>15</sup> John Ferris Report, 8 November 1917, OG 87124.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph J. Joyce Report, 14 August 1918, OG 266865.

An investigator reported that "there has been so much discussion that the boy is somewhat afraid...he refuses to go to Northville, Michigan for fear the boys in that town will do him violence."<sup>17</sup> A member of the local board requested Albert's mother to come into the office with the boy. Mrs. Minehart produced a baptismal certificate which showed Albert and his twin sister were born September 11, 1901 and baptized by Rev. George Ehnis of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Plymouth, Michigan. This certificate did not convince everyone. Prompted by further complaints, agents sifted through school records and census reports in a search for conflicting evidence. In two other cases, complaints about Wisconsin Synod members forced investigators to track down Revs. John Brenner of Milwaukee and John Witt of Norfolk, Nebraska, to examine church baptism and confirmation records.<sup>18</sup>

Synod pastors were occasionally accused of doctoring evidence to secure draft exemption for their members. William Raddatz of Doylestown, Wisconsin got himself and his minister into trouble when he submitted an exemption claim on the ground that he was a member of the Lutheran religion, "whose existing creed forbade its members to participate in war in any form."<sup>19</sup> The bottom of this claim included a signed affirmation from Rev. Hugo Koch of St. Johannes Lutheran Church in Doylestown. The State Council of Defense subpoenaed Koch to appear before the Council on 12 September 1917. The alarmed minister claimed he did not willingly make the statement on Raddatz's exemption form. In a sworn statement, Koch claimed he was in Milwaukee when he received a letter from Raddatz requesting him to sign his exemption claim, "and that he, Koch, wrote to W.J. Kirley, cashier of the State Bank of Doylestown," and requested that Kirley sign the exemption using Koch's signature, "on condition that Kirley not sign anything which in his, Kirley's, opinion was not proper."<sup>20</sup> Koch freely admitted there is no teaching of the Lutheran Church which forbids its members from engaging in war. After careful analysis of Koch's signature and letters proving his presence in Milwaukee, Koch was allowed to leave.

While exemption for Lutheran beliefs was not an option, clergy from all denominations received draft exemption. Some believed that German Lutherans took advantage of this situation. A U.S. attorney wrote Bielaski and

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<sup>17</sup> A.L. Barkey Report, 21 April 1919, OG 366352;

<sup>18</sup> Harry P. Meurer Report, 23 July 1918, OG 256799; Wade A. Wilson Report, 11 June 1917, OG 26693.

<sup>19</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 11 September 1917, OG 66555.

<sup>20</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 12 September 1917, OG 16935.

reported that "German ministers are seeking to have their sons exempted from service by sending them off to school and claiming that they are ministerial candidates, whereas, as a matter of fact they are simply preparatory students and not members of any regular theological seminary or divinity school."<sup>21</sup> Rev. Harvey Kerstetter, of the Methodist-Episcopal Church in Mobridge, South Dakota, alerted authorities of a former German Lutheran minister, F. Wittfaut, who was employed as a bank clerk, but "resigned to re-enter Lutheran work when he learned that the extension of the draft age would include him."<sup>22</sup> He later revealed Wittfaut to be in contact with Wisconsin Synod minister Arthur Blauert, who was helping Wittfaut reenter the ministry.<sup>23</sup> Kerstetter then helped authorities track down the two men for an interview. Documentation of the interview appears to be no longer extant.

Other tactics for improving one's draft status were investigated. Near Antigo, Wisconsin, a report claimed "that there have been some transfers of farms made from father to son with the evident purpose of enabling the sons to make claim for deferred classification and evade the draft."<sup>24</sup> Agents proceeded to Antigo and interviewed five German Lutheran farmers who had made the transfer. Agents inquired about their finances, real estate holdings, farm machinery, and other factors which could help determine if the sons could reasonably claim their parents as dependants. Many of the deferments were allowed to stand, but the investigation eventually spilled over to the Lutheran minister at Antigo. Even marriages were investigated for false motives. Although they were engaged two years, authorities investigated the wedding of Herbert Fritschel and his wife in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They suspected these two rushed their ceremony with an intent to improve Herbert's draft status.<sup>25</sup>

Local boards set the draft status for the eligible men of the locality, and typically did honest work, but sometimes German Lutherans were victimized by receiving a worse draft status than deserved. School teachers were not automatically exempted from the draft, but their inclusion was a rare occurrence. The local board in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, however, took exception with First German Lutheran Church's teacher, Ernest Krause, and he was forced to abandon his students and sail for France.<sup>26</sup> In Reeseville, Wisconsin, Rev.

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<sup>21</sup> Attorney to A. Bruce Bielaski, 13 August 1917, OG 37083.

<sup>22</sup> Rev. Harvey Kerstetter to E.W. Fiske, 7 September 1918, OG 22490.

<sup>23</sup> Rev. Harvey Kerstetter to J.F. McAuley, 14 September 1918, OG 22490

<sup>24</sup> Harmon Stacy to Julius Rosin, 10 October 1917, OG 67847.

<sup>25</sup> A.A. Viall Report, 1 July 1918, OG 67847.

<sup>26</sup> WLS Archives, Manitowoc Congregation.

Frederich Raetz filed a formal complaint concerning the local board. In numerous letters, he described the local board's decision to provide deferred classification to a number of English citizens, which in turn moved the members of his congregation into Class I, the most likely to be drafted. Raetz felt this action was done intentionally. To exemplify the prejudice in Reeseville, he included persecutions of his congregation by the local chapter of Wisconsin Loyalty Legion. Because Raetz had been previously investigated for pro-German views, authorities were slow to believe Raetz, and it appears nothing was done to remedy the situation.<sup>27</sup>

In June 1917, Carl Fenska, a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran living in Chicago, drew the attention of investigators by "talking very badly about the United States and the President."<sup>28</sup> People who had come into contact with Fenska claimed he was "Pro-German to the core and probably gathering information for German consumption." Fenska was subpoenaed by the Justice Department, where it became apparent he was no German spy. However, Fenska, a naturalized citizen, appeared to be within the age range for the draft. When asked of his age, Fenska "replied without hesitation, that he was born November 8th, 1886."<sup>29</sup> After a few moments, he stated "with some confusion that he had made a mistake, that he was born November 8th, 1885 in Berlin, Germany." Unfortunately for Fenska, investigators perked their ears to the 1886 date. Upon further investigation, they found that Fenska "was confirmed at a young age in the German Lutheran Church in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, and that his mother was now living at that place." The investigation moved to Rhinelander to prove that Fenska was a slacker who lied under oath.

Agent William Steiner visited the Fenska home on 25 July 1917 and found Ida Friday, Carl's sister. Steiner asked Friday if her mother had the birth records of her children. She showed Steiner a German prayer book which contained the names and birth records of the Fenskas on the inside cover. Carl Fenska's date read "Nov. 8, 1885." However, agent Steiner noted, "The date...appeared as though the figure six had been erased, and the figure five written instead, as the other dates of birth were very plain, and that of Carl Fenska appeared to be very faint and almost impossible to read it."<sup>30</sup> Steiner then visited Rev. John Dejung of Zion Lutheran Church to look at his records.

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<sup>27</sup> L.E. Sawyer Report, 17 August 1918, OG 273121; Ralph IZard Report, 30 November 1917, OG 100489.

<sup>28</sup> John P. Wilson Report, 13 June 1917, OG 45176.

<sup>29</sup> Ward E. Thompson Report, 23 July 1917, OG 45176.

<sup>30</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 25 July 1917, OG 45176.



Steiner found eerily similar results on Carl's confirmation records. When he questioned Dejung about this, Dejung admitted that he received a visit from Carl's mother three days prior, whereby she requested him to change the date of birth of Carl from 1886 to 1885, claiming that was the year he was born. The postal system also intercepted a letter from Ida to Carl which corroborated this testimony:

Dear Brother: Chief of Police Strobe was over to the house this morning and asked mother about your age. You were born in Mansfeld, Germany, November 8th, 1885 and was thirty-one years old November 8th, 1916, your last birthday. We went over to [Dejung's] house and found out that you had made a mistake when you gave him your age at the time you were confirmed. In looking over the Church book, I noticed that he also made a mistake on my paper by one month. My birthday comes in September and he had it in October. We told him about these errors and of course he corrected them to have it right. With love, your Sister Ida."<sup>31</sup>

The facts brought out during the examination led Steiner to report, "[We] believe that Rev. J. Dejung, Karl Fenska and Fenska's mother, [and] Mrs. Ida Friday, may be involved in a conspiracy to obstruct justice."<sup>32</sup> Fenska was detained on 9 August 1917, whereupon he was released after paying a \$1,000 bond. An agent present at the Grand Jury reported, "This case was strongly contested, Fenska being represented by three attorneys. His mother appeared for him at the hearing and her testimony was to the effect that he was born November 8, 1885."<sup>33</sup> Investigators visited anywhere they could possibly ascertain Fenska's age, including his former employers, his school records, his National Guard service, and his immigration records.<sup>34</sup> In January 1918, Steiner returned to Rhinelander "for the purpose of making a thorough investigation of the effects of Rev. J. Dejung" to secure further evidence in a prosecution against Fenska.<sup>35</sup> Steiner searched through Dejung's effects in his home and church. All essential



5.3: Rev. John Dejung, Jr.

<sup>31</sup> Ida Friday to Carl Fenska, 24 July 1917, OG 45176.

<sup>32</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 15 January 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>33</sup> Ward H. Thompson Report, 9 August 1917, OG 45176.

<sup>34</sup> Peter P. Mindak Report, 14 January 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>35</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 16 January 1917, OG 45176.

items he packaged for Chicago, "including birth records and correspondence to and from Carl Fenska."<sup>36</sup>

The prosecution arrived at the trial on 4 February 1918 with a mountain of evidence to show that Carl Fenska was born on 8 November 1886, making him 30 years old and eligible for the draft. Despite a rigorous defense, the jury declared Fenska guilty of violating section five of the Selective Service Act. He was sentenced to one year in the House of Correction at Chicago, and instructed to register for the draft before being committed to the institution.<sup>37</sup> Fenska was put in Class 1A, the second highest draft position, but was never called. He served time at the House of Correction until his release on 9 December 1918.<sup>38</sup> No action was taken against Rev. Dejung or any other members of the Fenska household. Fenska's attempt to circumvent the draft likely stemmed from his dislike of the war combined with regret of being on the outskirts of age eligibility. The Justice Department's resolve to put Fenska behind bars exemplifies how seriously they considered "slacking" to be an issue. Eventually, the concept of slacking would expand beyond the realm of the absent draftee.

#### IV. Other Forms of Slacking

Despite the belief among many German Lutherans that non-resistance to the war was good enough, few could escape unscathed without making financial or physical contributions to the war effort. Officials spent as much time tabulating contributions as they did soliciting them. A poor report concerning one's community could spell trouble. An APL agent submitted a report to his superiors which contrasted the German Methodists of a small town, "always buying very liberally and being very patriotically inclined," to the German Lutherans, to whom the "bonds were scarcely sold."<sup>39</sup> An informant then frequented the Lutheran church services in order to discover the root of the problem. Theodore Cashman's letter to the CPS exemplifies the need to expose all Liberty Loan slackers: "I don't think that any fellow should be allowed to escape on this proposition. The man who is able to pay and is allowed to go on without subscribing, will try to find an excuse and will continue excusing himself for not doing his part and become stronger and more seditious all the time."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 1 February 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>37</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 6 February 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>38</sup> J.C. Drautsburg Report, 9 December 1918, OG 45176.

<sup>39</sup> J.H. Lege Report, 13 November 1918, OG 316240.

<sup>40</sup> Thos. E. Cashman to Sec. H.W. Libby, April 1918, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.

Indeed, the Liberty Loan became the best documented—and least escapable—form of contribution.

Pressure for the Liberty Loan was exerted from all directions. Even citizens got in the act. A Congregational pastor in New Ulm publically admonished Lutheran preachers in the surrounding area during the third Liberty Loan drive for their lack of pulpit contribution.<sup>41</sup> Pressure from members of the APL or State Councils of Defense had an official aura. State representatives would visit homes, insist upon a statement of earnings, expenditures, and savings, and then "calmly announce the amount of the contribution" these individuals were expected to make.<sup>42</sup> This tactic succeeded in Two Rivers, Wisconsin. W.H. Phillips reported visiting "several farmers who are members of the German Lutheran Church of Two Rivers, who were reported as pro-German in their attitude."<sup>43</sup> Phillips interviewed each of them and "succeeded in obtaining their subscription for Liberty Bonds." Not everyone gave into pressure, however. Interviewing a Lutheran farmer in Hutchinson, Minnesota, Theodore La Mott was told by the farmer, "No, I haven't got a red cent for Liberty Bonds. You quit right here. Let the people that make their money out of the farmers buy Liberty Bonds."<sup>44</sup> La Mott concluded this man had been seduced by Nonpartisan League propaganda. When visits failed, many slackers were often handed a legal-looking summons requesting them to appear before an examination board at a specific time and date to explain their slacking. County directors of the CPS repeatedly requested additional forms, as they found them to be the most useful tactic in garnering adequate contributions.<sup>45</sup>

During the second year of the war, Liberty Loan campaigns were more successful because of this pressure. For example, for the first Liberty Loan, the heavy German Lutheran Minnesota counties of Brown and Sibley subscribed to less than half their allotments. Only nine percent of Sibley residents subscribed, ranking it among the worst.<sup>46</sup> During the third Liberty Loan, statisticians noted that "the final results are going to surprise many people in those sections where they least expect it."<sup>47</sup> Another CPS official noted, "Germans are subscribing generously...Many of these were those that were openly disloyal some time

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<sup>41</sup> Rehwalt to Chas. W. Henke, 13 December 1918, 103.L.8.4, Folder 148, CPS Records.

<sup>42</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 180.

<sup>43</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 31 October 1917, OG 20595; W. H. Phillips to Ralph Izard, 20 October 1917, OG 20595.

<sup>44</sup> Robert F. Davis Report, 9 January 1918, OG 81572;

<sup>45</sup> Minnesota Liberty Bond Subscription Summons, 103.L.9.4F, Folder 44, CPS Records.

<sup>46</sup> County Liberty Loan Reports, First Liberty Loan, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 103, CPS Records.

<sup>47</sup> A.B. Stewart to CPS, 24 October 1917, 103.L.8.24, Folder 101, CPS Records.

ago. Over subscription will probably be reached [in Brown County]."<sup>48</sup> One APL agent reported that not one German Lutheran Farmer in Penn township subscribed to either the first or second Liberty Loan. However, these same farmers "went over the top" in the third Loan after "receiving instructions from the German Lutheran minister to subscribe liberally or he 'would get into awful trouble.'"<sup>49</sup>

Slacking from the pulpit was deemed unacceptable and was vigorously watched. A German Lutheran minister, E. Schroeder, had to flee his hometown after he received threats for his refusal to display a Liberty Loan poster on his pulpit.<sup>50</sup> In Ohio, APL agent Henry McLarty confronted a German Lutheran minister, Gustav Meyer, and requested his excuse for "not observing National Prayer Day" in his church. Meyer told McLarty that he "had forgotten it."<sup>51</sup> Meyer was then informed he would be watched. Another agent was both angered and mystified at Lutheranism's lack of pulpit support for the YMCA, especially in an age where "there is a universal yearning for a religion devoid of denominational distinctions."<sup>52</sup> In another report entitled "No Patriotic Preaching," the Justice Department noted that "whatever the other denominations did, the Lutherans have lagged behind."<sup>53</sup> Most Lutheran sermons "failed entirely to touch the cord of patriotism, to rouse enthusiasm for the war aims, for the devotion of the United States to a lofty unselfish purpose." Instead, they "confined themselves to purely religious themes." The writer shuddered at the thought of what might have happened if all denominations had acted in the same manner. By the end of the war, Justice Department and APL agents visited Lutheran churches and requested English "copies of points made in sermons" to determine their adequacy for the righteous cause.

In addition to war bond and Red Cross purchases, a general lifestyle of thrift and conservation was expected of each individual. All extra yard space was to be converted to a "victory garden." President Wilson asserted that "every one who creates or cultivates a garden helps."<sup>54</sup> Those who failed drew unwelcomed attention. A female informant named "Fifty" reported a subject lived "in a filthy condition and [had] appearance of 'poor white trash;' that there is no evidence of thrift as the yard has grown to weeds instead of a vegetable

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<sup>48</sup> CPS to A.B. Stewart, 27 October 1917, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.

<sup>49</sup> L.A. Fritsche Report, 29 July 1918, OG 17438.

<sup>50</sup> J.H. Lege Report, 27 May 1918, OG 182986.

<sup>51</sup> Henry W. McLarty Report, 13 December 1918, OG 341691.

<sup>52</sup> DOJ Report: Alleged German Activities, OG 37083, 42-43.

<sup>53</sup> J.C. Lemar Report, 4 February 1919, OG 345618.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas, *Unsafe for Democracy*, 61.

garden."<sup>55</sup> She felt it necessary to remind this subject that "this is the time to work and not to loaf." To promote food conservation, a "housewife" food pledge campaign originated in various states. In Wisconsin, 87 percent of homes in Dane County and near 100 percent in Green Lake County pledged to save food. The more German counties like Washington, Dodge, and Jefferson helped lower the state average to 44 percent, with a "total of 247,814 housewives having signed the cards."<sup>56</sup> For the opposite behavior, the Department of Justice created a subdivision titled "Destruction of Foods." Many claimed that German Americans purposefully destroyed foods to hinder the war effort. Charles Chrisman, for example, reported to the CPS rumors of German Lutheran farmers destroying food, and claimed his friend "dug up over 2,000 [bushels] of old wheat" which were strategically hidden by these "descendants of Prussia."<sup>57</sup> Fuel became a major item of concern as well. The APL assigned 3,500 agents to check for fuel violations in restaurants, hotels, saloons, and other places. Monday and Tuesday nights were to be lightless. No gasoline was to be used on Sundays for pleasure. "Heatless" days were instituted and buildings were thoroughly checked for working radiators on those days. The majority of reports that claimed violations surfaced not from the APL, but nosy neighbors. The APL historian rosily attributed this to a "sternly roused sense of American loyalty which would brook no traitor or near-traitor under the Stars and Stripes."<sup>58</sup>

#### V. Hotbeds of Kaiserism

The title of this subsection received its inspiration from Gustavus Ohlinger's 1919 book, *The German Conspiracy in American Education*. Inside, he described the Lutheran parochial school system and its role in preserving German *Kultur* beyond its borders. He wrote, "The evidences of this [Pan-German] programme, a definite part of Germany's higher strategy, are writ large over the parochial schools."<sup>59</sup> Testifying before the United States Senate, Ohlinger read from a book published in Germany which laid out a strategy to spread German influence, "The principal matter would be the foundation of

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<sup>55</sup> Fifty Report, 20 June 1918, OG 231053.

<sup>56</sup> KarenFalk, "Public Opinion in Wisconsin during World War I," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 25 (June 1942), 211.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Chrisman to CPS, 24 August 1918, 103.L.9.2F, CPS Records.

<sup>58</sup> Emerson Hough, *The Web: The Authorized History of the American Protective League* (Chicago: The Reilly & Lee Co., 1919), 183, 187.

<sup>59</sup> Gustavus Ohlinger, *The German Conspiracy in American Education* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1919), 16.

independent German schools, society and congregational schools, in which the language of instruction would be German, and with English as the foreign language."<sup>60</sup> Ohlinger was not alone in suspecting sinister intentions behind the parochial school. The author of the "official" APL history also distrusted the parochial schools, "taught by their German Lutheran ministers under the pretense of teaching religion."<sup>61</sup> Rumors spread about un-American practices inside the school walls. Charges included that the national anthem was neglected, no American flags adorned the interior, and that students studied German cultural heroes instead of Washington, Franklin, and Lincoln.

Popular indignation against the Lutheran schools reached its peak during the war. German schoolbooks often became symbols of this anger. In Elkton, South Dakota, the local public school dumped all its German textbooks into the outhouse of Trinity Lutheran Church located near school property.<sup>62</sup> In Menominee, Michigan, students of the public school gathered together and burned their German textbooks in a great public demonstration. The crowd challenged Christ Lutheran School of Menominee, saying, "Let the parochial schools fall in line and do the same thing."<sup>63</sup> Countless citizens filed complaints about parochial schools. In Ottertail, Minnesota, one citizen complained to the CPS about a newly created Lutheran parochial school, which "almost ruined the *American* public school."<sup>64</sup> With the public school in dire straits, he hoped the Commission would intervene: "it would be a blessing to us few Americans in and around Ottertail if this German school could be knocked in the head." A mayor of Stillwater, Minnesota reported to the CPS numerous students fleeing the public school and enrolling in the parochial schools, and hoped that in some way the Commission could remedy the situation.<sup>65</sup> A postmaster wrote to the Justice Department, "We have had considerable trouble with these German schools here and they are antagonizing our American schools in this section of the country. Steps should be taken to abolish them."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, *Hearings on the National German-American Alliance*, 65th Cong., 2d sess., 1918, p.70.

<sup>61</sup> Hough, 73; Frederick Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (Dekalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 254.

<sup>62</sup> Otto Engel, "The Anti-German Spirit Experienced by German Americans during World War I," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 14 (1996), 38.

<sup>63</sup> La Vern J. Rippley, "Conflict in the Classroom: Anti-Germanism in Minnesota Schools, 1917-1918," *Minnesota History* 54 (1981), 180.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur Madsen to CPS, 4 August 1918, File 184, CPS Records.

<sup>65</sup> J.R. Kolliner to CPS, 2 October 1918, File 184, CPS Records.

<sup>66</sup> Postmaster W. Cipell to Department of Justice, 12 August 1918, OG 284018.

Others took the situation into their hands. Citizens of New Auburn, Minnesota instituted a "Loyal Service League" with its purpose the elimination of parochial schools. They advocated dissolution for several reasons:

The German parochial school bars patriotism; that such schools are under the domination of the German ministers in the community and they are progerman [*sic*] to the core and espouse the cause of Kaiserism...in a secret and cowardly manner which makes it all the harder to neutralize; pupils in the German parochial school fostered Little Germanies.<sup>67</sup>

The "Minute Men" in Snohomish, Washington were proactive against a newly formed Lutheran parochial school. They threatened members of the congregation, telling them that if their pastor "opened his Lutheran school this fall there would be trouble, something would happen, etc."<sup>68</sup> Rev. Heck reported these activities to the Justice Department and stated that he intended to open up his school during the coming term and asked for advice. "This the Agent could not give." After finding out that Rev. Heck filed a complaint, one of the vigilantes told Heck to "tell this to your Board, the gang has sworn to tear the building down." When authorities interviewed the Minute Men to determine their grievance against the school, one member replied that the school "had but two little dirty [American] flags" on the premises.

Public officials typically shared these anti-parochial school sentiments. During a Senate Hearing on the National German-American Alliance, a couple of Senators were floored by testimony that hundreds of schools in the United States used German as the medium of instruction. Minnesota State Superintendent Shulz tabulated 307 parochial schools in the state with an enrollment of 38,853 pupils. Of these schools, nearly two-thirds used the German language primarily. Shulz refrained from legislating to these schools, but proposed "that school boards, principals and teachers be urged, as a patriotic duty, to require the use of the English language as the exclusive medium



5.4: Confirmation class: Zion, Olivia, MN.

<sup>67</sup> L.W. Grace to CPS, 23 January 1918, File 68, CPS Records; C.W. Ames Correspondence, File 184, CPS Records.

<sup>68</sup> Petrovitzky Report, 4 September 1918, OG 155869.

of instruction."<sup>69</sup> Unlike other states, he made an exception in the case of religious instruction. However, in April 1918, the CPS stripped non-citizens of their teaching positions in all schools, public and private.

Investigators kept themselves busy to ensure that no pro-German teachers poisoned any young minds. In Winona, Minnesota, operatives looked into Wisconsin Synod teacher Max Hackbarth, whom they considered "very pro-German before the declaration of war, as were all the members of his church."<sup>70</sup> During a Thrift Stamp campaign, the report listed "that it was with great reluctance that he would inform any of his students relative to the value of Thrift Stamps or the details of said campaign."<sup>71</sup> Agents visited Rev. Sauer of St. Matthew Lutheran Church and asked for Hackbarth's address. Sauer objected to this request, and "claimed the full right to know what business the party in question had with Hackbarth." When it came to a "show-down," Sauer was unable to find Hackbarth's address in his study. The investigation into Hackbarth hardly materialized, however, as most of the evidence against him was based on rumor. In Hustisford, Wisconsin, another Wisconsin Synod teacher, William Riem, was studied and reported "very strong in his pro-German remarks."<sup>72</sup> Agents inquired about Riem's citizenship, believing this to be the best course to get at the teacher. A lack of a follow-up report likely meant disappointment in the results. In New Germany, Minnesota, an APL member hit the jackpot when he stumbled upon a school play at a Lutheran parochial school. This play depicted a captured German soldier who conspired to be recaptured to return to his countrymen. The agent remarked after the play, "If a government officer were there and saw that, he would arrest all of them."<sup>73</sup>

A government report late in the war struck at the heart of the parochial school issue. A school's main purpose, it claimed, was "the development of the spirit of national unity...It is considered as essential for the children of a nation to receive ideas and knowledge of such a nature as to be in conformance with the aims of the whole country and nation."<sup>74</sup> The parochial school, instead, had its chief aim in the preservation of "an ideal, a tradition, and a history different from that of the rest of the community." As proof, the report discussed annual church services in the "German synods" which featured the "exhortation for the

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<sup>69</sup> *German American Alliance Investigation*, 588-591; Rippley, 175.

<sup>70</sup> Donald B. Pritchard to A. Bruce Bielaski, 30 March 1917, OG 173248.

<sup>71</sup> A.F. Kearney Report, 27 May 1918, OG 173248.

<sup>72</sup> Olaf Olson Report, 23 April 1917, OG 16703.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph J. Joyce Report, 12 January 1918, OG 130064.

<sup>74</sup> Report: Alleged German Activities, 33-42, OG 37083.



upkeeping of the *Gemeindeschule*." In the sermons, "the secular public school is depicted as a danger to the religion and the very souls of the children; contamination with American ideas, harmful contact of good Lutherans with members of other Protestant denominations...are held up before the guileless members of the congregations as the baleful consequences of entrusting their youngsters to the public schools." This report predicted a swift end to the parochial school system during or after the war. After referring to popular action and various state laws restricting parochial schools, it concluded with the remark, "This action will not cease after the war; America is going to finish its house-cleaning."

At first glance, this opposition to the parochial school appears to have a specifically anti-German sentiment. But when the periodization of this issue is broadened, it reveals an historically-based animosity toward Lutheran parochial schools, as shown by the Bennett Law controversy in Wisconsin Synod history. These schools were a thorn in the side to the attempts of evangelical religious organizations to "Christianize" students in a pietist mold through the common school system. Even before the declaration of war, the parochial school was a red-hot issue. During the early months of 1914, the *Northwestern Lutheran* published some sort of defense of the church schools in nine consecutive issues. Knowing the motivation behind the anti-parochial school rhetoric, the Wisconsin Synod remained obstinate on this issue.<sup>75</sup>



5.5: St. Peter's Gemeindeschule, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. One of the synod's largest.

## VI. Un-American Voting

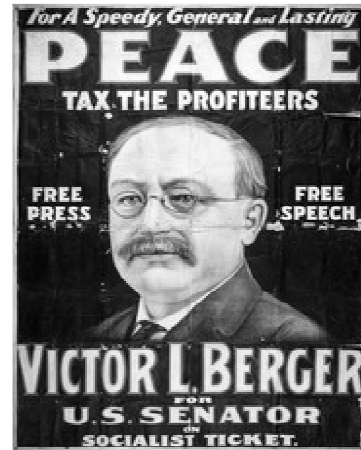
In the 1916 presidential election, the German Lutheran counties of Washington and Jefferson, Wisconsin, submitted a paltry amount of votes for the Socialist Party candidate—59 and 71, respectively.<sup>76</sup> In February 1915, the *Northwestern Lutheran* even mentioned Belgium's "atheistic socialism" in one of

<sup>75</sup> *Northwestern Lutheran* 1:4 through 1:13, "A Defense of the Church School" to "Our Nation's Hope."

<sup>76</sup> Falk, 391.

its articles, revealing an attitude that socialism had an essence of irreligion.<sup>77</sup> Despite a lack of cooperation in the past, the two groups were not too far apart before the war on anti-business rhetoric. The *Northwestern Lutheran* even boasted that "the church school [as opposed to the public]...is free to tell the truth about corporation greed and preach against theft in high places."<sup>78</sup> Wisconsin Synod Lutherans usually shared the small independent farmer's disdain for big business, and the *Northwestern Lutheran* in early 1917 even quoted Martin Luther's thoughts on the subject: "Yea, we might well let the lesser individual thieves alone if we could arrest the great powerful thieves, with whom princes and rulers associate...They daily pillage not only a city or two, but all of Germany." Furthermore, during an unpopular war believed to be provoked by business interests, and with synod customs and religious practices under attack from members of both major political parties, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans became more receptive to Socialist Party rhetoric. Wisconsin Socialist figure Victor Berger was the strongest proponent for expanding the party's base beyond the urban worker to include rural farmers.<sup>79</sup> Rather than it being planned, however, the German Lutheran and Socialist Party connection came about quite naturally. Both groups used harmonious rhetoric about the war. Both ridiculed the cry that the war would "make the world safe for democracy," and claimed that the United States entered to benefit munitions manufacturers and speculators. As previously shown, officials often encountered German Lutheran members in the Nonpartisan League and the People's Council, which both heavily leaned socialist.

Specific targeting was used nonetheless. The 1918 Socialist Party platform included such pledges as "freedom of conscience and for religious liberty—and for the unrestricted right to use any language in church services."<sup>80</sup> The platform also supported the right for churches to run parochial schools and



5.6: Victor Berger's anti-war profiteering had great appeal.

<sup>77</sup> "Belgium's Boast," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:4 (21 February 1915), 32.

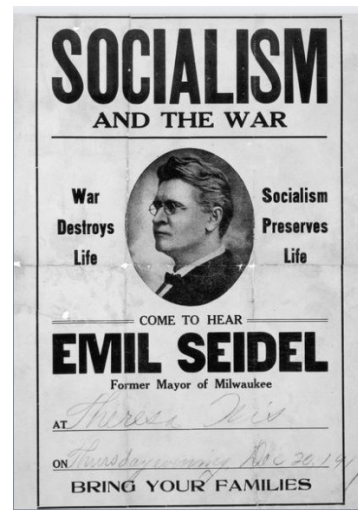
<sup>78</sup> "Big Business and Education," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:7 (7 February 1917), 54.

<sup>79</sup> Report: "Socialistic Literature," OG 329166.

<sup>80</sup> Report: "Socialistic Literature," OG 329166.

stood against "race hatred and against mob rule." Clearly, the Socialist Party had German Lutherans specifically in mind when it created the platform. The pro-war *Milwaukee Sentinel* even suggested that Milwaukee Socialist mayor Dan Hoan "might change into a Lutheran."<sup>81</sup>

The Socialist Party took its message on the road in preparation for the midterm and gubernatorial elections in 1918. Socialist candidate for Wisconsin governor Emil Seidel found rural German American districts "eager to hear a Socialist talk."<sup>82</sup> He found there was "always time to make an evening meeting within 60 or 70 miles of Milwaukee." Seidel believed that the German farmers were so receptive "because they realize that Democratic and Republican parties will not serve...their purpose." The socialist current was so strong among German Lutherans that a Wisconsin Synod conference in Minnesota discussed the topic, "How should we behave in relation to the socialist current in our land?"<sup>83</sup> Socialist units and organizations sprang up in new areas across the Midwest, such as Kiel, Horicon, and West Bend, Wisconsin.<sup>84</sup> In Hot Springs, South Dakota, F.M. Greene complained to the Justice Department about the German Lutherans of that town gathering together for Socialist Party purposes.<sup>85</sup> The Justice Department kept a keen eye on German Lutheran socialist activity elsewhere across the Midwest as well. For example, as Seidel travelled to deliver a speech at Theresa, Wisconsin—a Wisconsin Synod town—the Department helped organize a group of 600 patriotic citizens to prevent the meeting. These citizens flocked to the village and physically



5.7: Seidel's visit to Theresa

<sup>81</sup> Sentinel claim found in *Victor L. Berger: Hearings before the Special Committee appointed under the authority of House resolution no. 6 concerning the right of Victor L. Berger to be sworn in as a member of the Sixty-sixth Congress* (Washington: Government Print Off, 1919), Volume 1, 854.

<sup>82</sup> Seidel, "Autobiography," 180, 182, Found in Lorence, "Dynamite for the Brain: The Growth and Decline of Socialism in Central and Lakeshore Wisconsin, 1910-1920," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66 (Summer 1983), 255.

<sup>83</sup> "Die Gemischte Konferenz von Sudwest-Minnesota," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:20, 29 September 1918, 316.

<sup>84</sup> Falk, 404.

<sup>85</sup> J.F. McAuley Report, 14 September 1918, OG 100602.

thwarted Seidel from speaking.<sup>86</sup> They threatened to do the same in nearby Mayville if Seidel tried speaking there. He eventually opted for a farm in neighboring Horicon, Wisconsin. Afterwards, the Theresa citizens hid Seidel in a stack of hay until he could safely return to Milwaukee.<sup>87</sup>

Some Wisconsin Synod Lutherans even began assisting the Socialist Party in its work. Rev. Otto Engel wrote to fellow WELS pastor Herman Zimmermann: "Victor Berger is my man. A few days ago, I was in Milwaukee and had a long talk with this Socialist leader."<sup>88</sup> He suggested that Zimmermann "read the platform on which Berger is contesting for the Senatorial Toga." Zimmermann took Engel's advice and corresponded with Otto R. Hauser of the Wisconsin Socialist Party.<sup>89</sup> Engel then got in touch with Louis Arnold, Secretary of the Socialist Party. Arnold sent Engel 1,000 circular letters and 1,000 party platforms to distribute. Engel replied, "I am in a position to send 1,000 letters to Lutheran pastors and teachers, who believe in strict divorce of church and state advocated in the State platform."<sup>90</sup> Engel also wrote a letter of encouragement to *The Issue*, a new socialist magazine. "This is a heyday for the Socialist press," Engel wrote, "No truth-seeker can afford being without *The Issue*, a paper that dares to tell the ill-advised government where to draw the line...Personally, I am convinced the Democratic and Republican parties having become thread-worn, the Socialist Party is bound to come into its own."<sup>91</sup> Rev. Engel's nephew, Walter Engel, was investigated by the Justice Department for distributing Berger platforms in Western Wisconsin during the Senatorial campaign. The Department also looked into a Wisconsin Synod minister in Washington state,

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<sup>86</sup> A.A. Viall Report, 16 February 1918, OG 16703.

<sup>87</sup> "Socialist Hid under Hay in Theresa Fifty Years Ago," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, 29 December 1967.

<sup>88</sup> Otto Engel to H.R. Zimmermann, 7 March 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>89</sup> Otto Robt. Hauser to Herman Zimmermann, March 1918, found in Wm. H. Steiner Report, 8 October 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>90</sup> Louis Arnold to Otto Engel, 23 March 1918, OG 5025; Otto Engel to Louis Arnold, 22 August 1918, 5025; Louis Arnold to Otto Engel, 26 August 1918, OG 5025. When Engel's home was searched in September 1918, the following literature was confiscated, among others: A circular from the *Milwaukee Leader*; "A copy of the Constitution of the Social Democratic Party of Wisconsin"; A receipt of subscription to the *Christian Socialist*; A copy of the magazine *Appeal to Reason*; A copy of *The American Socialist*; A circular letter of the Organizing Committee of the Second National Conference of Labor, Socialist, and Radical Movements, New York; A campaign platform of Morris Hillquit, Socialist Mayor candidate; A circular letter entitled "Persecution of American Socialists"; Numerous circulars by Presidential Candidate Eugene Debs.

<sup>91</sup> Otto Engel to *The Issue*, 29 June 1917, OG 5025.

Frederich Soll, who was "reported as being very radical at the present time."<sup>92</sup> The agent declared Soll's thinking to be in line with "Bolsheviki [*sic*] doctrines."

Eventually, investigators began to anticipate this working relationship between Lutherans and Socialists. As Agent #83 of the CPS received instructions for his investigation of Wisconsin Synod Professor Adolph Ackermann, he was specifically told to keep watch for any interaction between Ackermann and Socialist leaders.<sup>93</sup> Another telling example was the Justice Department's undercover investigation of the German Lutherans in Norwalk, Wisconsin. They decided the best way to earn the trust of the Lutherans was for the agent to pose as a "red hot socialist."<sup>94</sup>

The first election shock came in January 1918, as Marathon County, Wisconsin held an election for state legislature. Socialist Party candidate Herman Marth uncompromisingly advocated immediate peace and freedom of speech, press, and assembly, among other issues. German Lutherans in Marathon flocked to the Socialist banner. In Berlin and Hamburg, Wisconsin, the German Lutherans voted over ninety percent Socialist.<sup>95</sup> Marth was swept into office. Democrats and Republicans feared that "what happened in [Marathon] would set entire Wisconsin ablaze."<sup>96</sup> Socialists especially eyed two key elections: one special election to replace the vacant U.S. Senate seat left by the late Paul Husting, the other for governor of Wisconsin. Like the election in Marathon, Socialist candidates Victor Berger and Emil Seidel fared best wherever Lutherans predominated, specifically Sheboygan, Calumet, Manitowoc, Marathon, Dodge, Washington, and Jefferson Counties. To exemplify this voter turnaround, the Wisconsin Synod town of Jackson, Wisconsin gave 0.02% of its votes to the Socialist senatorial candidate in 1914, but gave Berger 86% of the vote in the 1918 election, which included nearly double the voter turnout.<sup>97</sup> Overall, Berger ran a strong senatorial race, receiving 110,487 of the 423,343 votes cast, but he placed third. The result still irked Justice Department officials, who claimed "The State of Wisconsin recently cast 105,000 un-American votes."<sup>98</sup> Emil Seidel's bid for governor also fell short; he placed third as well. A lenient Governor Philipp somewhat mitigated

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<sup>92</sup> B.F. McCurdy Report, 11 July 1919, OG 368492.

<sup>93</sup> #83 Report to CPS, 20 August 1917, Brown County HSS Records.

<sup>94</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 5 April 1918, OG 5025.

<sup>95</sup> General results, including tables, found in Lorence, 258, 259, and 262.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 259.

<sup>97</sup> Jackson voting results for the special Senatorial election found in the *Milwaukee Journal*, 7 April 1918.

<sup>98</sup> Henry W. McLarty Report, 7 January 1919, OG 341691.

Lutheran Socialist voting, as Seidel received approximately seventy-five percent of their votes in this election. Somewhat disappointed, the Socialist Party settled for a congressional seat, sending Victor Berger to the House. Berger won this seat despite being under indictment for violating the Espionage Act. After his release from prison, the House refused to seat him. His seat remained vacant until 1921.

The Lutheran flirtation with the Socialist Party severely antagonized public officials. An agent travelled to Door County, Wisconsin to seek out the "disloyalty existing in the German Lutheran communities throughout Door County."<sup>99</sup> For proof that his mission was needed, "a number of votes [were] given to Victor L. Berger, Socialist candidate in the senatorial election recently." In this process, the Department failed to realize that their actions helped ignite this political phenomenon. Many German Lutherans cast their lots with the Socialist Party as a means to protect their religious and cultural way of life. These votes represented the frustration this community felt with the mobs, investigations, coerced patriotism and integration, and religious persecution that came hand in hand with the war they so desperately tried to avoid. By 1920, with the war crisis two years past, the Socialist sentiment lost some of its vigor. The presidential vote among German Lutheran voters was evenly split between Socialist Eugene Debs and Republican Warren Harding, with hardly any choosing to stick with the Democratic status quo.<sup>100</sup> A "return to normalcy" sounded equally as appealing as the rhetoric against the war profiteers.

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<sup>99</sup> William H. Steiner Report, 23 April 1918, OG 183007.

<sup>100</sup> Lorence, 268.

## Chapter 6

### Patriotism, Apologetics, and Perseverance

*B*orn in 1912, Reginald Siegler of Bangor, Wisconsin was only six years old at the height of the war, but he was well aware of the antagonism faced by his German church community. "I was old enough to think that people [who] were suspicious were creeping around the house and looking into [our] windows."<sup>1</sup> Reginald's father, Carl W. Siegler, the minister at St Paul's church in Bangor, also understood the issues at stake for his congregation. According to Reginald, "my father and mother often discussed the suspicions that were encountered, and...how careful they were to give nobody justification for being suspicious." For many Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, the burden weighed on their shoulders to disprove the notion that their church was an epicenter of disloyalty. This pressure caused a wide array of defensive actions from Lutherans to prove their loyalty and patriotism.

Some like Carl Siegler chose a direct method. R.M. Jones, an APL informant for the Justice Department, paid Siegler a visit in July 1918. He stated that Siegler's "pro-German attitude is strong enough to convince one that he is heart and soul with Germany."<sup>2</sup> Siegler had not made any public remarks to arouse suspicion, but this conclusion was drawn because he had "never been active in any move to aid the United States in the war." While confronting Siegler, Jones stated his belief that Lutheran ministers were "a menace to the country." Siegler stopped the lecture then and there. He retorted that he "hated to be classed...as a menace to the country." In his defense, Siegler stated that he was



6.1: Rev. Carl W. Siegler

<sup>1</sup> Reginald Siegler, interview by author, La Crosse, WI, 5 July 2012, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Chas. I. Rukes Report, 18 July 1918, OG 241152.

never one to make public speeches and was not qualified for that type of work. Instead, he called Jones's attention to his participation in patriotic programs and his encouragement to his congregation to buy Liberty Bonds and Thrift Stamps. Siegler also offered his rebuttal to Jones's statements on the language issue. He protested that the government was mistaken in attempting to bring about a change too fast. A middle ground was offered by Siegler, who suggested that the change be attempted over a course of three years to allow for transition within the congregation. Spirited retorts like this one did not always have their desired effect. However, in this case Jones closed his testimony with "the subject has not been far out of the way at any time."

While direct confrontation was not an option for most, Reginald Siegler and other German Lutherans used their actions to quell detractors. "I was aware there were people thinking I was the enemy," recalled Siegler, "I felt that they were foolish, and I participated in any activity that showed my support for the army and country."<sup>3</sup> Even in a small town like Bangor, opportunities abounded for showcases of patriotism and loyalty. National holidays and Liberty Loan drives included demonstrations and parades in which many Lutherans of Bangor participated. The Ladies' Aid Society of the church assisted the Red Cross by sewing and collecting donations. In addition to this, they sewed together a service flag with around 25 stars representing members of the congregation serving in the war. Of those who served, one returned home with only one arm, and four paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Reverberations such as what happened in Bangor echoed across the Wisconsin Synod throughout the war. Whether their patriotic efforts to defeat Germany were genuine or for cover varied by the individual. The choice became much simpler once family and congregation members began serving in the war. Efforts to support their soldiers became the favorite method of contribution. Most congregations proudly erected service flags and posted honor rolls to pay tribute to the sacrifice of soldiers in the congregation. The Red Cross, by virtue of its sole purpose to provide welfare for soldiers, became the preferred program of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans to fund and participate. On the other hand, programs which conflicted with Lutheran goals, like the YMCA, received little support.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, whenever a community attempted to bring churches together for patriotic displays, the Lutheran church obeyed conscience and stayed on the sideline. The Wisconsin Synod's search for a war service that was doctrinally acceptable is perfectly illustrated by its camp pastor program.

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<sup>3</sup> Reginald Siegler, interview by author, La Crosse, WI, 5 July 2012, 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "War Memorials," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:24 (1 December 1918), 188.



## II. Soldiers and Camp Pastors

While the exact number of Wisconsin Synod "doughboys" was never tabulated, if the statistics compare similarly to Missouri Synod numbers, the total should be around 3,000.<sup>5</sup> Many individual congregations hoisted service flags with over thirty stars. The stories of their courage and sacrifice provided congregations with much pride on the home front. It also caused difficulty for many families. Letters poured in to the writers of the *Gemeindeblatt* from family members wondering if they were allowed to write their soldiers in the German language. A few incidents of rejection spurred these questions. A train depot agent in Elkton, South Dakota, for example, refused to mail a letter from Julius Engel to his son, Walter, because it was written in German.<sup>6</sup> Thankfully, when the Synod put the question to General Isaac Sherwood, he responded, "I don't believe any officer who is broad-minded and patriotic enough to appreciate the value of free speech and real patriotism, could possibly object to either fathers or mothers writing to their sons in the language in which they can best express their feelings and convictions."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the *Gemeindeblatt* felt the need to give further advice to parents corresponding with soldiers. For example, "If you write to soldiers in the army or the navy, one should write the address as legibly as possible."<sup>8</sup> The article also advised parents to put stamps on envelopes and to provide a full return address. While these steps may seem elementary, for many of these boys it was their first time away from home, and this may have been the first time parents needed to write their sons.

Their sons' extended absence from their religious community also worried parents and the church. The *Northwestern Lutheran* summarized these fears:

There is a real danger to the boys and therefore real needs. The separation from Christian homes and from the holy influences of the church is itself a most serious thing for any young man. The danger is doubly great when, separated from safe surroundings, he is encased among influences such as generally exist in army life...the strange and questionable atmosphere of the camp and army.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Missouri Synod figures located in Julius Rosin Report, 3 December 1918, OG 284018.

<sup>6</sup> Otto Engel, "The Anti-German Spirit Experienced by German Americans during World War I," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 14 (1996), 38.

<sup>7</sup> "Ist es erlaubt, an unsere Jungen in Heer und Flotte deutsche Briefe zu schreiben?" *Gemeindeblatt* 53:11 (26 May 1918), 167.

<sup>8</sup> "Winke für solche, die an Soldaten schreiben," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:18 (1 Sep 1918), 279.

<sup>9</sup> "A Real Danger," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:5 (10 March 1918), 34.

The synod was then taxed with the problem of sustaining the church's religious culture for the soldiers scattered across the country. For starters, the synod was able to secure a pocket-sized English New Testament for every soldier, and even extras to share with others.<sup>10</sup> Yet the issue remained of providing pastors for the soldiers. The simplified and cheaper route would have been to participate in the Lutheran Commission, a government subsidized chaplaincy program for Lutherans. Other synods pressured the WELS to join in this venture; the Norwegian Synod's J.A. Stubb urged Lutherans to be "one and dissoluble behind our boys," and that "we can return to our doctrinal, racial, or synodical differences after the war if we must."<sup>11</sup> Despite the financial and logistical benefits of this program, the WELS never seriously considered joining. A major fear within the synod also surfaced about the nature of the subsidized ministry programs. Said WELS minister Hans Moussa, "nearly all of the work was under management of sectarian (evangelical) organizations."<sup>12</sup> The Committee on Public Information even boasted that religious services at the YMCA camps "are so nondenominational, that a Mohammedan will find himself as much at home as a Protestant or Greek Catholic."<sup>13</sup> Involvement in the government program therefore would invariably lead to participation in religious assimilation with denominations who were often antagonistic to Lutheran beliefs.

In its place, the Wisconsin Synod worked with the Missouri Synod and other members of the Synodical Conference to create the Lutheran Church Board for the Army and Navy. This organization would send these synods' own Lutheran ministers to serve the soldiers at their camps. With hundreds of training camps across the country, the task was daunting. Not only would numerous pastors need to leave their congregations for an unspecified period of time, but this program included a heavy price tag. As Wisconsin Synod president G.E. Bergemann explained to the Michigan District Convention,

A chaplain costs us monthly about \$200, not because their salaries are so exceptionally high, but because of the costly extras. Because of the great distances involved we had to buy Fords for several chaplains. We also have to supply our boys gratis such things as books, writing materials, and church periodicals.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Hans Moussa, "Has Your Soldier His Testament?" *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:17 (7 Sep 1917) 129.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Braun, "Being good Americans and better Lutherans: Synodical Conference Lutherans and the Military Chaplaincy, *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 19 (2001), 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> "Now is the Time to Say it," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:15 (27 July 1919), 115.

<sup>13</sup> John Brenner, "Why we do not Cooperate," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:4 (24 February 1918), 31; Committee on Public Information: Division of Four Minute Men, "Maintaining Morals and Morale," *Official Bulletin* 19, (12 November 1917), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Bergemann letter found in Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992) 137.

Another pricey aspect which Bergemann failed to mention was the construction of numerous "Lutheran centers" around the army camps. In many cases, the YMCA buildings, the place for official army chaplains, did not offer the Synodical Conference pastors any use of the building, or if they did, the time slot received was too inconvenient to conduct regular services. To remedy this, the Lutheran Church Board quickly assembled places for worship around the camps.<sup>15</sup> In all, this camp pastor program cost roughly \$400,000. Considering the relative worth of the 1917 dollar, this figure translates to \$6 million in the early twenty-first century. This price tag would have been much higher and the task nearly impossible had it not been for the Missouri Synod, which had a footprint in the southern states where most of the army camps were located. This allowed many pastors from those areas to serve both their home congregation and the soldiers in the camps. Much credit is also due to the tremendous efforts of many camp pastors who served multiple army camps at great distances. WELS minister Arthur Sydow, for example, served seven different camps in the San Antonio area, and then found time to minister to soldiers in Laredo and Eagle Pass, Texas. William Beitz of Tucson, Arizona travelled to camps in Douglas and Nogales near the Mexican border, and somehow found time to minister to the camp up north in Prescott, Arizona, a roundtrip of over 700 miles. This lengthy traveling to serve the spiritual needs of Wisconsin Synod soldiers likely did not please members of the Fuel Administration.<sup>16</sup>

The need for a separate Lutheran mission to the soldiers was not self-evident to government officials. While discussing the Lutheran Church Board to another agent, G. Jones of the Justice Department commented, "It would appear...with regimental chaplains and YMCA workers, the troops would not suffer spiritually without [Lutheran] missionaries."<sup>17</sup> Because of this judgment, nearly every aspect of the Lutheran Church Board came under suspicion and scrutiny. The Justice Department first focused on the money "presumably being raised for the support of Lutheran preachers enlisted in the service of the U.S. Army." Amazed that "every member of the church contributed from \$1.00 to \$5.00,"<sup>18</sup> and that such collections were general throughout the German Lutheran churches, it was decided that "the use to which this fund is being applied may probably be the subject of investigation." Even though contact with

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<sup>15</sup> "Unsere 'Lutheran Centers'" *Gemeindeblatt* 29:20 (29 September 1918), 310-311.

<sup>16</sup> Camp Pastor List Located in DOJ Files, OG 281118.

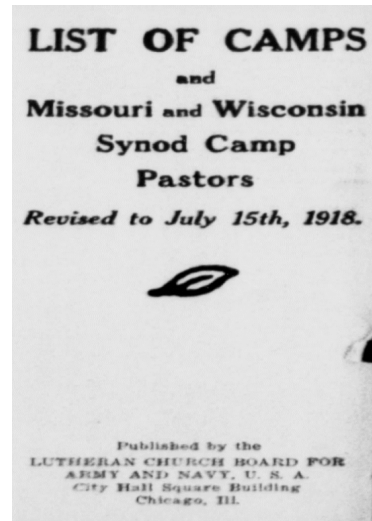
<sup>17</sup> Special Agent in Charge Chas. Jones to John K. Wrenn, 11 December 1917, OG 112360.

<sup>18</sup> E.B. Sisk Report, 8 August 1918, OG127609.

Germany was strictly controlled through the Trading with the Enemy Act, officials still feared the prospect of Lutherans gathering large donations.

While the Lutheran Church Board fund raised eyebrows, the thought of German Lutheran ministers serving future soldiers sounded alarms for public officials. It was bad enough that Lutheran ministers "poisoned" efforts on the home front, but now it appeared to government officials that they were taking their seditious message on the road to the soldiers. One investigator noted that Synodical Conference "camp pastors with few exceptions refuse to preach patriotic sermons."<sup>19</sup> Captain Lester testified before a Senatorial investigation that "great difficulty was experienced...on account of the activity of certain pro-German Lutheran clergymen in and about the camps among the soldiers."<sup>20</sup> Suspicions also arose that these camp pastors were reporting troop movements to Germany, with one official labeling the camp work of the Lutheran Church a "vast smooth running potential spy organization."<sup>21</sup> The Department made investigations and gathered information for every single Lutheran Church Board camp pastor, and often used synod publications of camp pastor locations as the starting point.<sup>22</sup> Investigators were to follow a four step process. First, locate the pastors who are or will be serving in or near a specified camp. Second, investigate the "nature of the activities of these men." Next, a subject should be determined loyal, disloyal or suspicious. And lastly, "if disloyal or suspected, state the facts upon which conclusion is based."<sup>23</sup>

The criteria to make a camp pastor "pro-German," however, were especially vague. Even before the investigation of Pastor Arthur Sydow began,



6.2. The Justice Department made heavy use of this Lutheran Church Board Pamphlet, as indicated by numerous markings on the inside.

<sup>19</sup> Report: Alleged German Activities, OG 37083, p. 33, 62.

<sup>20</sup> U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, *Hearings on Brewing and Liquor Interests and German and Bolshevik Propaganda*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919, p. 1788.

<sup>21</sup> Henry W. McLarty Report, 7 January 1919, OG 341691.

<sup>22</sup> Confiscated Camp Pastor List located in DOJ files, OG 281118.

<sup>23</sup> Wm. Neunhoffer Report, "Activities of Lutheran Ministers and Camp Pastors in the Southern Department," 21 November 1918, OG 37083.

the case title read, "Rev. Arthur Sydow: Probable Pro-German."<sup>24</sup> Subtleties like this often show the disposition of agents making the investigation, and hence conclusions of "disloyal or suspected" should not surprise. Investigators heard rumors that Sydow spread stories of troop revolts on transport ships and that he told soldiers that the army should stay on American soil, but both turned out to be groundless. Despite the APL investigation which gave Sydow a "clean bill," the commanding officer at Camp Travis, San Antonio informed Sydow on 3 October 1918 that his services were no longer desired after October 27.<sup>25</sup>

The creation of separate Lutheran Centers also raised suspicion, and after William Beitz established one at the University of Arizona in Tucson, an agent determined "this camp pastor will bear watching."<sup>26</sup> On another occasion, the Bureau of Investigation director A. Bruce Bielaski suggested that George Schmidt, an official of the Lutheran Army and Navy board, be kept under surveillance, noting that "in common with nearly all members of the Lutheran clergy he is an object of suspicion."<sup>27</sup> This guilty until proven innocent mentality also revealed itself in the investigation of the Missouri Synod pastor A.J. Soldan at the camp in Rockford, Illinois. The agent claimed "no one could be found who would testify to his loyalty," and based on this, felt "that an investigation as



6.3: Arthur Sydow with his wife

to loyalty of subject could best be made at the Leavenworth [Kansas] Penitentiary."<sup>28</sup> Many times, camp chaplains made the best informants. Rev. Carden, serving the Episcopal Church in Taylor, Texas, followed Missouri Synod pastor Arthur Hartmann and reported his activities to authorities.<sup>29</sup> While WELS camp pastors escaped arrests, a few Missouri Synod pastors were interned.<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, if the Justice Department's main concern was the morale of the soldier, the internment of his spiritual counselor before he crossed the Atlantic

<sup>24</sup> Wm. Neunhoffer Report, "Rev. Arthur Sydow," 12 July 1918, OG 237146.

<sup>25</sup> Louis De Nette Report, 1 October 1918, OG 237146.

<sup>26</sup> Report: Alleged Violation of Conscription Act, 24 August 1917, OG 37082.

<sup>27</sup> G. C. Van Dusen to Bielaski, 26 July 1918, OG 243145.

<sup>28</sup> Report: Alleged German Activities, OG 37083, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> Ward E. Thompson Report, 8 July 1918, OG 236110.

<sup>30</sup> Report: Alleged Violation of Conscription Act, 24 August 1917, OG 37082, p. 38.

to "save democracy" likely inflicted more doubt than any propaganda could have.

The war's end on 11 November 1918 was a welcomed blessing to the Lutheran Church Board. The war's short duration of 18 months allowed the program to avoid problems which may have surfaced over a prolonged war. A price tag of \$400,000 a year would have been financially unsustainable in a long war. The heavy work load of the camp pastors may have become too burdensome as well. Additionally, since war becomes more frustrating for belligerents as time passes, Lutheran camp pastors may have become scapegoats for setbacks in the war, and confrontations with the Justice Department may have multiplied. In a report after the war, the Justice Department declared that "the institution of camp-pastors is to be abolished, and the army chaplains attached to the military units are to take their place."<sup>31</sup> Looking back, the synod did not have much good to say about the system in place, either:

Lutheran activities were sorely hampered in some cases by this unfortunate sectarian division of responsibility. We made the best of it and our work suffered a little, but it was humiliating at times to be dependent upon the good will of some YMCA secretary for opportunities to do our most essential work.<sup>32</sup>

The camp pastor program met its end with enthusiasm from both the Synod and government officials, one of the few times both parties could agree about something.

### III. Patriotism: Genuine, Awkward, and Ugly

Hans Moussa, one of the prominent writers for the *Northwestern Lutheran*, noticed a transition among his fellow Lutherans taking place only six months into the war. "It seems that this year we are trying to make up at one stroke the indifferences of former years," he observed.<sup>33</sup> He also noticed that the wartime program receiving the most enthusiasm was the Red Cross, and he approved: "It is well that there is general interest in the Red Cross. It is the only authorized national agency with an opportunity to soften the hardships of war." He even pointed out that the first local branch of the American Red Cross was organized at a Lutheran Church in 1881. WELS Lutherans' choice to support the Red Cross was plainly understandable and well-summarized by Moussa.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>32</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Now is the Time to Say it," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:15 (27 July 1919), 115.

<sup>33</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "The American National Red Cross," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:17 (7 September 1917), 134-135.

Certainly, WELS Lutherans supported an array of government wartime programs, and many buried their animosity to the war and gave every effort for its successful conclusion. The line was drawn, however, whenever patriotic displays became excessive or required religious collaboration with those who rejected what the Synod confessed.

Red Cross work proliferated across the synod. In New Ulm, Minnesota, fifty three students at DMLC, over half of the student body, formed a Junior Red Cross chapter, and resourceful methods were used to fund the relief organization.<sup>34</sup> Fritz Reuter and Lydia Wagner composed "a national anthem," titled "America," to encourage donations to the Red Cross. The song was presented at a program which included the mixed choir, organ and piano. The song was considered such a success that the *Gemeindeblatt* advertised its sheet music for members to buy across the synod. Its lyrics exhibit a devoted love for their country:

America, most blessed land; Where freemen ever shall gather; Where high  
and low and rich and poor; United as man with man...; My country, my  
glorious, glorious land...<sup>35</sup>

Lutherans in New Ulm perhaps felt extra incentive to display their loyalty for the United States ever since the draft meeting in July 1917. Unfortunately, events like the patriotic program at DMLC went seemingly unnoticed by the Minnesota Public Safety Commission, who were too busy looking for proof of disloyalty.

Ladies' Aid Societies, or *Frauvereins*, became essential to WELS congregations' work with the Red Cross. In Peshtigo, Wisconsin, an APL member visited St. Johannes to discover that every member of the congregation's *Frauverein* held membership in the Red Cross.<sup>36</sup> In Plymouth, Michigan, the *Frauverein* of St. Peter's Congregation became "determined to counteract the ignorant fanaticism of the hundred percenter Americans, who called everyone of German extraction a Hun."<sup>37</sup> They organized meetings every week to sew for the Red Cross and arranged clothing drives for war relief in Europe. A Red Cross flag was hung in the church parlor next to a service flag, the latter created by the society. These societies also took responsibility to provide care and holiday packages to their soldiers in camps across the country.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Morton Schroeder, "Adolph Ackermann, Chauvinism, and Free Speech," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 2 (1984), 16.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 16; "Buchertisch," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:9 (28 April 1918), 140.

<sup>36</sup> A.A. Viall Report, 6 April 1918, OG 172536.

<sup>37</sup> WLS Archives, Plymouth Folder, *Church History of St. Peter, Plymouth*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> J.W. Behnken, "The Home congregation and Her Boy Under the Flag," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:10 (19 May 1918), 79.



6.4: St. Peter's Frauverein, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. These societies became the face of loyalty across the synod.

As previously demonstrated, Liberty Bond drives provoked some animosity among German Lutheran circles, especially early in the war. As the war progressed, however, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans displayed much more organized and enthusiastic support for Liberty Bonds. Government officials took notice, as a CPS official remarked, "This Liberty Loan is the best thing I know to change seditious people into patriots. A number of fellows that have sulked in their tents in the past, some of them decidedly pro-German, have even worked on the committee and are among our best hustlers."<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Lutheran in Wellington, Minnesota held a church meeting where 52 of 57 eligible voting members attended.<sup>40</sup> Members of this meeting were asked to pay \$2.50 as soon as possible to buy bonds and war stamps. At Grace Lutheran in Milwaukee, the church accepted the US Secretary of Treasury McAdoo's request for churches to



6.5: Rev. Otto Engel poses with St. Jacob's Frauverein in Norwalk, Wisconsin.

<sup>39</sup> Thos. E. Cashman to CPS Sec. H.W. Libby, 103.L.8.2F, Folder 101, CPS Records.

<sup>40</sup> Engel, 41.



get involved in the Third Liberty Loan. At a congregational meeting, a synod member "explained this type of propaganda in convincing and clear ways how we as Lutherans, as patriots, should deal with this bond issue, and how the whole congregation should partake."<sup>41</sup> The congregation decided to hang posters in the school and vestibule of the church "in order to bring the point across that one's money was needed." The pastor at Grace was even asked "to say appropriate words from the pulpit regarding this matter." While not all congregations would approve of Grace's promotion of bonds from the pulpit, their acquiescence in the matter shows how much outside pressure had taken a toll on a strong position taken by the Wisconsin Synod earlier in the war of non-pulpit participation in government propaganda.

The synod as a whole eventually felt obligated to organize and systematize work with Liberty Bond drives. The Committee on Public Information called for the enlistment "of all organized bodies in the coming campaign for the Third Liberty Loan." The WELS responded by designating a committee in Milwaukee to calculate the contribution of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans and to send a report to the CPI. Its director, George Creel, sent back this reply:

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter...and assure you that the so valued co-operation of the Lutheran Church along thoroughly organized lines in behalf of the Third Liberty Loan is most highly appreciated...To receive tabulation of final results as soon as possible will be greatly welcome, and is of great value, since it will enable us to embody same in our official report to the Secretary of Treasury.<sup>42</sup>

Members of Wisconsin Synod congregations were told to report to their pastor or church committee to what measure they had taken part in the Loan, and that church was to gather this information and report it to the synod committee. The WELS committee ran into difficulty in receiving reports from all congregations, and pleaded in the *Northwestern Lutheran* that "a large number [of congregations] are still to be heard from." The final results are uncertain, but the committee claimed to be highly gratified by the reports made by many WELS congregations. Officials of the synod were certainly anxious to see satisfactory results to refute those who doubted the loyalty of German Lutherans.

In total war, nearly every aspect of life can be made into a contribution to the war effort. WELS Lutherans found many other ways to support the United States. The *Gemeindeblatt* urged its readers to "save wheat, bread, sugar, oil, coal, and whatever else may be added." The publication decided to set an

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<sup>41</sup> Quarterly Meeting Minutes of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI, 11 April 1918.

<sup>42</sup> F. Graeber, "Report on the Third Liberty Loan!" *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:11 (2 June 1918), 82.

example for its readers by saving paper and ink through condensing its "Receipts" section from three columns to one and a half.<sup>43</sup> It later publicized a "thank you" to the government for refraining from "digging theology students for military service," for this would have caused many more vacancies than there already were.<sup>44</sup> Other WELS members publically put their loyalty on display. Professor M.J. Wagner, who spoke at the earlier New Ulm draft meeting, took part in a patriotic program on Lincoln's birthday and gave a speech entitled "Lincoln and Patriotic Address."<sup>45</sup> Upon a surprise visit from an APL agent, Pastor John Helmes of Menasha, Wisconsin showed membership cards of the Red Cross and Food Administration. When asked, he also furnished English copies of his sermons from the past two months. Fully convinced, the agent reported that "Rev. Helmes has been a capable supporter of the interests of this government in the successful prosecution of this war."<sup>46</sup> With the prospect of a visit from a government official always looming, it was prudent to blanket oneself with patriotic deeds.

Patriotic sentiments were not always expressed smoothly. A WELS pastor speaking in German to a crowd at Olivia, Minnesota spoke on the Matthew 22:21 text, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." Unfortunately, the member from the Commission of Public Safety heard, "So gebt dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist, und Gott was Gottes ist." Shortly afterward he was apprehended by the CPS, which tried to impose a fine for what they believed to be a pro-German speech. The pastor served as his own defense and exonerated himself by showing the CPS that the German word "Kaiser" did not refer to the German Kaiser, but rather a generic term denoting a ruler or king.<sup>47</sup> Another well-intentioned patriotic act gone wrong took place in Milwaukee, where a man named C.D. Reichle thought he could honor both church and state by displaying an American flag with the words "Ev. Salem's Gemeinde" sewed on. After an APL agent informed him of the statute forbidding the desecration of the American flag, the flag was quickly removed.<sup>48</sup>

Because WELS Lutherans differed in their patriotic enthusiasm, some difficulties within congregations surfaced. The most unfortunate occurred at

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<sup>43</sup> "Sparen!" *Gemeindeblatt* 53:3 (1 February 1918), 42-43.

<sup>44</sup> "Das Theologische Seminar," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:13 (23 June 1918), 199-200.

<sup>45</sup> Schroeder, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Wm. H. Steiner Report, "Rev. John Helmes," 29 April 1918, OG 186773.

<sup>47</sup> Engel 42.

<sup>48</sup> A.A. Viall Report, 23 February 1918, OG 155126.

Rev. August Stock's congregation in Neosho, WI. Pastor Stock's participation in the war effort could make any APL member jealous. He organized the Home Guard Reserves in the town and encouraged congregation members to participate. He also put himself in charge of selling Liberty Bonds in the town of Neosho and marketed War Savings Stamps to his congregation. In church, he organized a special collection to purchase numerous flags to decorate the church and preached on patriotic themes. At a time when synod churches were under investigation, these maneuvers provided sorely needed protection to the congregation. Yet for a church body which reluctantly entered the war and strictly guarded the church and state barrier, some conflict was inevitable.<sup>49</sup>

Difficulties already arose by August of 1917. Many members of the congregation felt Stock was overbearing as he pushed the congregation to participate in patriotic activities. Rumors even spread that Stock reported to authorities every member who refused to participate in the Home Guard and Liberty Loan drives. Herman Schuett, the president of the congregation, filed a protest in October 1917 to Rev. Carl Buenger, the president of the Southeastern Wisconsin District of the Synod. Buenger and another minister visited the congregation to investigate the situation, but were unable to create peace. Two days after the visit, a Mr. Petsch and fourteen other members of the congregation sent a letter to Wisconsin Synod President, G.E. Bergemann, claiming they were unsatisfied with the investigation, and argued for more concrete action against Stock.<sup>50</sup>



6.6: Rev. August Stock

During the following months, the strife escalated. After Stock dismissed a woman, Mrs. Griep, from the congregation for penning a public letter against him, she and some other members transferred to the synod congregation in nearby Woodland, Wisconsin. This caused tension between Stock and Rev. Lescow of Woodland, who admitted Mrs. Griep to his congregation against the protest of Stock. Buenger looked to transfer Stock to another congregation, but as he wrote to synod president Bergemann in February, "None of the other

<sup>49</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 1-3.

<sup>50</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 1-3; C. Buenger to A. Toepel, 24 August 1917, WLS Archives, Neosho Folder. G.E. Bergemann to C. Buenger, 29 October 1917, *ibid*; C. Buenger to A.C. Stock, 6 December 1917, *ibid*.

[district] presidents will nominate him, and I do not have any vacancies. I am afraid he digs his grave there." In a last attempt to remedy the situation, Buenger wrote a letter "in bruederlicher Liebe" (in brotherly love) to Stock in March. He pleaded with Stock to solely preach the gospel and to try to let the situation burn out. Stock was apparently unmoved, as Buenger wrote to Stock two months later, "It seems to me that you slandered me as well as Pastor Lescow to your church members by giving a one-sided report why the [synod] has not acted in the affair of Mrs. Griep." Buenger made another visit to Neosho in May, but the situation was clearly worsening beyond his control.<sup>51</sup>

The issue finally reached its culmination at a congregational meeting on 7 July 1918. As the meeting was about to close, a member, Frank Redlin, rose and said that certain members asked of him as deacon to request that Stock desist in his activities with the Home Guard. Upon this request, Rev. Stock immediately demanded the congregation to close the official meeting, "as I would not allow any war talk in an official meeting." But the congregation's president, Herman Schuett, responded that the congregation had a right to demand this promise. Frank Redlin and August Otto reprimanded Stock and said that the congregation called him as their pastor and not the state, and that he should not serve both congregation and state. Another member, Robert Schmidt, arose and said if Stock did not stop all his war activities, "the congregation will be sent to pieces." In his defense, Stock claimed some of his positions were appointed to him from government officials, and he had to willingly obey the government. Mr. Otto replied that he "ought to shirk those things as other ministers do," and if he kept these activities up "our whole congregation would be laughed at and mocked at by the neighboring members of other neighboring congregations."<sup>52</sup>

The quarrel progressively became more intense. After Stock continually refused to desist from his activities, Frank Redlin rose and spoke, "if you do not give us that promise today, I will not consider you as my minister and will resign as a deacon." Two other members also confirmed his statement. Before Stock could respond, Otto, Schmidt, and August Nell then asked Stock what he expected the congregation to do when Stock had to spend three weeks with the

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<sup>51</sup> C. Buenger to August Petsch, 9 February 1918, WLS Archives, Neosho Folder; C. Buenger to G.E. Bergemann, 25 February 1918, *ibid*; C. Buenger to Rev. C. Lescow, 6 March 1918, *ibid*; C. Buenger to A.C. Stock, 11 March 1918, *ibid*; C. Buenger to E. Griep, 10 May 1918, *ibid*; G.E. Bergemann to St. Paul Congregation, Neosho, WI, 10 May 1918, *ibid*; C. Buenger to A.C. Stock, 29 May 1918, *ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 1-3. This account comes from the testimony of Stock to the APL agent in charge of this case. This account was shown to the members in attendance and they all agreed that it gave an accurate account.

Home Guard Reserves at Camp Douglas. Stock denied that he was obligated to make such a trip, since the Reserves were only an auxiliary to the State Guards. Mr. Redlin seconded the charge, however, and claimed he was certain that the Reserves also must go three weeks to Camp Douglas. Thereupon the meeting moved to the parsonage, where Stock showed official letters from the Adjutant General supporting his argument. Since it was getting late, a member made the motion to close the official meeting. Stock seconded the motion and insisted upon it. It was decided to postpone the matter until Tuesday. Later that evening, however, after an English language service, Rev. Stock handed in a written resignation to the deacons of the church. Stock described his decision to resign with the following remarks:

I loved my congregation but I love my country more...yes that Mr. Herman Schuett and Mr. Frank Redlin were my most intimate friends, but when my most intimate friends in the spur of the moment try to barr [sic] me from doing my duties to my country, friendship ceases and my country first. I cannot even now forget the many personal favors of my most intimate friends...but it is my painful duty to say even to them: My country first. Only the omniscient God knows what battles in my heart I am fighting to take this view and action.<sup>53</sup>

The events at St. Paul in Neosho brought about an investigation by the APL the following day. Stock and the prominent participants in the meeting were interviewed separately. Fortunately, the unnamed agent was genuinely sympathetic to all sides. He even provided a translator for two of the four members who had difficulty communicating in English. He understood the viewpoint of the congregation as he remarked, "While Rev. Stock is a patriotic man and a hundred percent American I am afraid he is somewhat hysterical and has antagonized certain members of his congregation." He was also impressed with Frank Redlin and Herman Schuett's holdings in Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps, about \$400 each. He concluded that the members of the congregation did not object to Stock's activities from want of patriotism, but instead that such activities were provoking difficulties in church doctrinal matters, and this was the source of the objections. It is possible this APL agent understood Lutheran doctrine better than most agents; others, as previously shown, could never grasp that Lutherans withheld participation in some activities for religious convictions. The sad account of August Stock's resignation demonstrates the difficult situation Wisconsin Synod Lutherans encountered because of the all-encompassing war.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> J.C. McFetridge Report, "Rev. A.C. Stock, et. al.," 2 July 1918, OG 263974, p. 5-6.

## IV. Apologetics

Across the Midwest, the numerous State Councils of Defense tried to outdo their counterparts in Americanization legislation. South Dakota and Iowa forbade the use of German in all public gatherings and over the telephone.<sup>55</sup> The Nebraska State Council of Defense outlawed the use of any non-English language for all subjects, including religion, in all public and private schools.<sup>56</sup> The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety forbade all non-citizens from teaching in both public and private schools. Wisconsin banned German from all wireless stations, and shortly afterward APL agents dismantled WELS stations at the Lutheran *Altenheim* and *Kinderheim* in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.<sup>57</sup> Nearly every Midwestern state had bills pending in the legislature to duplicate these laws. States like Michigan, Nebraska, and Wisconsin circulated bills requiring attendance in public schools until the eighth grade. Amid the seemingly unending wave of state laws concerning the German language and parochial schools, German Lutherans sensed that their habits and institutions were in serious danger.<sup>58</sup> Across the synod, leaders and lay members took up the pen and defended their way of life from the "Americanizers" who attempted to use the war as a harbinger for change. The two types of works which appeared most often in the *Gemeindeblatt*, *Northwestern Lutheran*, and the *Theologische Quartalschrift* focused on the German language and the parochial school system.

A favorite method for these writers was to highlight a prejudiced article and dismantle it. A writer in the *Northwestern Lutheran* targeted an article in the Minneapolis Journal that advocated for the abolishment of foreign languages in newspapers, church services, and to insist "socially and legally" on the use of the English language in America. The *Northwestern Lutheran* writer retorted, "We cannot understand by what process of reasoning a person at this time in our history should become nervous about the predominance of the English language in the United States," and later mocked, "We cannot believe that the editorial writer in the *Journal* has carefully considered what he wrote,

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<sup>55</sup> Engel, 41.

<sup>56</sup> "Enemies of Lutheran Schools in Nebraska," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:3 (9 February 1919), 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> Wm. S. Fitch Report, "Wireless Stations," 28 April 1917, OG 14300.

<sup>58</sup> "Wie haben wir unsere schulen einzurlichen," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:17 (18 August 1918), 265; F. Graeber, "Danger Threatens," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:14 (14 July 1918), 107.

but it must have been written in a weak moment of war fanaticism without careful consideration."<sup>59</sup>

Writers often used American war propaganda to justify their position on the language question. One of the writers in the *Gemeindeblatt* put it aptly:

One of the freedoms we are fighting for is freedom of speech. It has been America's proud reputation, that every alien immigrant can use any language to write, speak and read, and indeed, America has its reward, for never has a nation of so many different types of people revealed such loyalty and unity to America now in its current crisis.<sup>60</sup>

The article then pointed out how autocratic regimes in Europe outlawed the language of the enemy, subtly hinting that the United States was Prussianizing itself by implementing these laws. When writers were not busily defending the German language against outsiders, they were encouraging German Lutherans to stay strong despite outside pressure. "Just now we need to emphasize and exercise our Constitutional rights of free speech and free press. Let us not be intimidated to give up this unalienable right," wrote the *Northwestern Lutheran*.<sup>61</sup> The *Gemeindeblatt* was much more blunt: "He is even a coward who lets anyone dictate anything to him."<sup>62</sup>

Despite the apologetics for the use of the German language, most synod leaders understood that a transition to English was inevitable in the long run. A generational gap existed in language usage, with the younger more adept and comfortable using the English language for religious purposes. Despite this inevitability, the hope remained that the church would steer clear of the influences which often came hand-in-hand with the English language in the church. Seminary Professor August Pieper summarized these fears well:

In the German language lie all the roots of genuine, solid, strong Lutheranism and Christianity, in the English, not one. Tear this plant forcibly from the soil of the German language, and it will become a dry tumbleweed driven by the wind against the fence. We must *hold fast to the German language in church and school* as long as there still are those who can be edified better in German than in English. In our training-schools for pastors and teachers we must cling to the German language *until Judgment Day*...O that the Lutheran Church, especially as it becomes an English speaking church would guard against this moralistic gospel and common sense Christianity of the Reformed as against the devil himself! O that we might say to them until Judgment Day as Luther said to Zwingli, "*You have a different spirit than we!*" This gospel of the sectarian churches is nothing else than the authority of the blind but proud human reason over the Gospel of Christ. If we as a Synod were already dominated by the Reformed spirit of reason, then

<sup>59</sup> "Use the American Language," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:10 (21 May 1917), 78.

<sup>60</sup> "Über die Frage der Sprachen," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:13 (23 June 1918), 202-203.

<sup>61</sup> "Use the American Language," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:10 (21 May 1917), 78.

<sup>62</sup> "Obrigkeit und Sprache," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:16 (4 August 1918), 253.

no study of Scripture, be it ever so intense, could produce a spiritual renewal in us, but would become mere modern criticism of the Bible and rob us of our faith.<sup>63</sup>

Even before the United States entered the war, WELS Lutherans sensed an animosity toward their school system. "There is an element in our American society which nurses a sullen resentment against every form of private and parochial schools," wrote Moussa in 1915.<sup>64</sup> The same forces which tried to undermine their parochial school system with the Bennett Law in 1890 reemerged during the First World War, and the rhetoric remained mostly unchanged. They claimed Lutheran parochial schools did not Americanize their students, that German language instruction left them ill-equipped for life, and that only one common school system could truly unite the country ideologically. Rev. Fred Graeber could see past the rhetoric: "The enemy is employing whatever our troublous times afford in the way of camouflage and is making another assault on our constitutional liberty."<sup>65</sup> When it came to their parochial schools, WELS Lutherans did not reject outright an "American viewpoint" for their pupils, but they flatly repudiated Americanization in morals and religion, and used their parochial school system as a bulwark against it.<sup>66</sup>

WELS Lutherans understood who was behind these parochial school laws, which they claimed were "backed by the Reformed sectarian element and by the foes of our church generally." As a case in point, the *Northwestern Lutheran* referred to the proposed Blair Educational Amendment in the Senate. The amendment would empower Congress to enforce upon the public school the teaching of Christian religion, "and its object is to open the way for the national power to eliminate all parochial schools, and to take control of religious as well as secular education of the children of our nation." Senator Blair did not hide his intentions, and the author quoted one of his arguments: "If this idea of church authority should come to permeate the public school system, the parochial school would disappear."<sup>67</sup>

As further proof of "sectarian" church involvement, the *Northwestern Lutheran* printed verbatim the sermon of A.A. De Larme, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Omaha, Nebraska:

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<sup>63</sup> August Pieper, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 62 (1965), 194. Emphasis is his.

<sup>64</sup> "Sullen Resentment," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:15 (21 August 1915), 127.

<sup>65</sup> F. Graeber, "Danger Threatens," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:14 (14 July 1918), 107.

<sup>66</sup> F. Graeber, "Un-American Legislation," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:5 (9 March 1919), 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> John Jenny, "Would Eliminate Parochial Schools," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:8 (21 April 1919), 61-62.



I most heartily approve of some of the bills regarding the public schools of the state that have been recently introduced in the legislature. One of the most important, in my estimation, is that introduced by Senator Perry Reed of Hamilton County, requiring boys from seven to sixteen years and girls from seven to seventeen years of age to attend the public schools during the full school year.<sup>68</sup>

While citing his reasons for the abolishment of church schools, the preacher said, "Parochial schools devote considerable time to the teaching of antiquated creeds and dogmas that are anachronisms to this age. If taught at all, these things should be taught at home." Another *Northwestern Lutheran* article featured a Detroit lodge, which it believed was behind "this notorious anti-church school amendment that it hopes to spring on the voters this fall." The article shared a petition created by the society with the following argument:

We do not believe that there is anything in the Lutheran creed that would suffer, should their children be obliged to attend the public school; but if there is anything in their doctrine that would suffer, the sooner they abandon that part of their doctrine, the better for the Lutheran children and the people that adhere to it.<sup>69</sup>

When defending their schools, writers most often appealed to the Constitutional right of parents to decide which education is best for their child. This argument became essential as states considered laws to make attendance at public schools compulsory. "The Constitution does not take from parents the right to train their children in their own Christian faith; nor does it take from them the right to repudiate compulsory acceptance of public teachers, high and low, whose chief business is to undermine the Christian faith of the children and the youth of the land," quoted the *Northwestern Lutheran*. No one, argued Rev. John Brenner, should enjoy a government-instituted monopoly over the young minds of the nation. "The inhibition of Church schools, whether parochial or academic, by the state is distinctly unconstitutional and un-American."<sup>70</sup>

The verbal and legislative onslaught, however, continued to pour on parochial schools as the war dragged on, and many WELS members got involved in the struggle. On 13 January 1918, the *Milwaukee Journal* quoted a German Baptist pastor from Milwaukee, who said, "I absolutely disapprove of the parochial school, where the point of view and the language of the old country is kept up, and the children do not learn to think *in American terms*."<sup>71</sup> Later in the article, a German Methodist pastor gave this tribute: "Our church has never believed in the parochial school, because we wanted the children to become

<sup>68</sup> F. Graeber, "Intolerance," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:7 (6 April 1919), 50.

<sup>69</sup> F. Graeber, "Un-American Legislation," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:5 (9 March 1919), 38-39.

<sup>70</sup> John Brenner, "Our Schools," *Northwestern Lutheran* 2:15 (7 Aug 1915), 119-120.

<sup>71</sup> Anna Hoppe, "A Defense of the Lutheran Parochial School," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:2 (27 January 1918), 12-13.

thoroughly Americanized in the Public School." Anna Hoppe, a former WELS parochial student, came to the defense of the Lutheran parochial school and used herself, "a patriotic American," as evidence of its effectiveness. "Lutheran schools were not founded for the purpose of maintaining the German language, but for rooting and grounding the children entrusted to their care in the infallible Word of the Lord," said Hoppe. The virtues inculcated were not specifically German, but "Christian virtues." She closed her article with a prayer:

God bless our Lutheran parochial schools, these bulwarks of Christian life, Christian citizenship, Christian patriotism, these staunch advocates of the greatest American principles: the separation of church and state...these defenders against the countless false doctrines and isms of the day, which lay traps to ensnare and beguile the Church's treasures: its children.<sup>72</sup>

When it came to the persecution of German Lutherans, Hans Moussa concluded the "Lutheran" half of the term played a more important role: "It has nothing, or very little, to do with the German character of the Lutheran church."<sup>73</sup> Instead, Moussa pointed out the offensive nature of Lutheranism to the "self-appointed guardians and exponents of American liberty and tolerance." First, Lutheranism's outspoken criticism of lodge and fraternalism often created animosity. Secondly, claimed Moussa, "Our policy of tenaciously clinging to our own schools" caused conflict as well. But most of all, "our refusal to be party to the unionism which the so called American churches are forever substituting for Christianity caused critics to grow peevish because we sometimes refuse to give encouragement to efforts which they heartily approve." Moussa may have somewhat downplayed the role of the anti-German sentiment during the war, but his conclusions about Lutheranism have much support. Another *Northwestern Lutheran* article was cynical about attempts to argue the Lutheran position in the war "Blank stares and frowns greeted every attempt to make plain that the Lutheran church, second to no other in its devotion to the state, did not propose to compromise its own faith by adopting every view any government official chose to promulgate."<sup>74</sup> The remedy to this, they claimed, was to stay strong to Lutheran principles, as Moussa argued, "Those unfortunates who try to escape from persecution by outwardly conforming to the wishes of the persecutors, are not winning the good will they seek. They are not respected but suspected." Contrarily, "Conscious of your own

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<sup>72</sup> Anna Hoppe, "A Defense of the Lutheran Parochial School," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:2 (27 January 1918), 12-13.

<sup>73</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Are We to be Persecuted?" *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:15 (7 August 1917), 115.

<sup>74</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Again, Church and State," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:26 (29 December 1918), 202.

worth and public righteousness, you will win the respect of our enemy if you convince him, by remaining true to your principles, that you were never wrong."

While apologetics in the *Gemeindeblatt* and the *Northwestern Lutheran* encouraged German Lutherans, these publications had very little possibility of being read by the persecutors and detractors. The *Northwestern Lutheran* understood this: "We know little or nothing about those things which we instinctively dislike. They do not like us, therefore they do not want to know anything about us." The best apologetics, therefore, occurred on the individual scale:

There is but one way to combat the foulmouthed slanderer: begin at home. Do not attempt to effect sweeping change by publishing your sentiments broadcast, but go to the man next door and find out where he heard that last bit of slander...You have your Council of Defense. These men are human. Most of them decent. Hardly any know much about Lutheran affairs. Don't sit at home and mope about the injustice of it all; seek out the best men on the Council and talk it over with them. They will be grateful for every correction you make of their mistaken notions.<sup>75</sup>

The best remedy for the injustice, however, was acceptance of the persecution, even rejoicing. The Michigan District Convention happily decreed, "If our Christianity arouses no opposition, we should question ourselves: Are we indeed followers of that Christ who shall be a sign that it is spoken against?" Lutherans, therefore, need only rejoice in their sufferings and to persevere through them.<sup>76</sup>

#### V. Perseverance

Despite protests, many bills became law which severely restricted worship and school practices of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. Even when laws were not in place, many APL members or other vigilantes tried to enforce change as they saw fit. WELS Lutherans used several different methods to cope with these changes. Sometimes even civil disobedience was advocated. "It is Christian duty to obey the law of the land; it is the duty of government to rule according to the law of the land. The government that nullifies the constitution under which it holds power has forfeited the right to the obedience of its citizens."<sup>77</sup> Moussa later reminded his readers that Martin Luther practiced civil disobedience when authorities tried to compromise his faith. This steadfastness

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<sup>75</sup> "Fellow Citizens," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:10 (19 May 1918), 73.

<sup>76</sup> "Proceedings of the Michigan Dist. Synod Assembled at Scio, Mich, 1918," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:15 (28 July 1918), 114.

<sup>77</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "The Birth of Freedom," *Northwestern Lutheran* 4:21 (7 Nov 1917), 171-173.

was not without controversy, and one incident even found its way to the Supreme Court in Washington D.C.

With the extremity of anti-German laws varying between the states, borders between these states created opportunities for perseverance and conflict. Julius Engel's congregation in Elkton, South Dakota was forbidden use of the German language by the South Dakota legislature. After Engel made this announcement to his congregation, many members could be seen kneeling in the benches, crying and praying. Elkhorn's location and small size had allowed Engel and the congregation to previously converse almost exclusively in the German language. Engel was neither proficient nor conversant in the English language, and he expressed his difficulty in a letter to his parents in Milwaukee: "Right now I conduct all my services in the English language. What that means to me you have no idea. I must have the dictionary in hand the whole week and if I should deliver the sermon freely I must read it."<sup>78</sup> Since Elkhorn was just a few miles away from the Minnesota border, however, the congregation bypassed the South Dakota law by holding German services in Minnesota. One of the member's farms on that side became the favorite meeting place for the Lutherans at Elkhorn until the conclusion of the war.<sup>79</sup>



6.7: Rev. Julius Engel,  
brother of Otto Engel.

The actions of the congregation in Elkhorn and other German Lutherans near the border angered Minnesota residents. Charles Chrisman wrote a letter of protest to the Minnesota Commission on Public Safety:

Dear Sirs: Enclosed find copy of the South Dakota order forbidding the use of German in that state. The result of this is that they come over to our side of the line and hold meetings in that jargon. If you are unable to make such an order for our entire state could you not cover the counties adjoining the state line? We have enough traitors living on our side without furnishing asylum for criminals from Dakota...Leniency does no good with those public enemies. Why not try some of the only medicine that reaches them: Force?<sup>80</sup>

Chrisman then listed location where Lutherans had been gathering, most likely in the hope that agents of the CPS or APL would pay them a visit. Unaware to

<sup>78</sup> Engel 38; Julius Engel was the brother of aforementioned Otto Engel.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 38-39.

<sup>80</sup> Charles E. Chrisman to Public Safety Commission, 24 Aug 1918, 103.L.9.2F, CPS Records.

Chrisman, the APL had already visited Engel's congregation, where they dejectedly reported that he "preached the Bible from his pulpit and nothing else."<sup>81</sup> To Chrisman's disappointment, no law passed in Minnesota to restrict the use of German for worship in Minnesota.

The German Lutherans in Pipestone, Minnesota, persevered through their crisis via compromise. E.N. Prentice, the minister at First Presbyterian Church in Pipestone, had it in for the Lutheran church ever since they declined to hold a joint patriotic religious procession, and instead determined to "pull off a so called patriotic rally at one of the country homes."<sup>82</sup> The Lutherans at St. Paul in Pipestone had recently remodeled their church, and were planning a dedication service on 25 August 1918. Prentice and others tried to see to it that not one word of German would be spoken at that service, and threatened to use force if necessary. The congregation had used German exclusively in their worship up to that point, but Pastor Bonhoff agreed to split the service evenly between English and German. This somewhat abated the pressure, but Prentice was not pleased. He and another member of his church wrote Minnesota governor Burnquist pleading for intervention:

I assure you, my dear Governor, that I speak the sentiment of the men of Pipestone County who willingly pledge their lives, their property, and their sacred honor for the defense of America in imploring you to immediately issue a proclamation permitting the use of the American language only in any public assembly in the State of Minnesota. Of course it is the hun [*sic*] and his language that hurts us the most and does the most damage and we plead with you to stop it at once.<sup>83</sup>

Prentice and his church member subtly hinted that unless the Commission intervened, mob rule may intercede on behalf of the American position. "If they undertake to hold the services in German," said Prentice "they will in all probability be dealt with by a righteously indignant community." His member, J.H. Robson, considered force a foregone conclusion, and promised if the Commission flexed its muscle, "we will see that it is in force...with the use of less force than would be necessary without a proclamation."<sup>84</sup> Hans K. Moussa's earlier prediction that those who conform will nonetheless endure persecution came to fruition in Pipestone, Minnesota.

A very effective method that German Lutherans employed to persevere was to work together as a religious community to ward off attacks. The Missouri Synod set up a Bureau of Defense to assist congregations in the Synodical

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<sup>81</sup> Willis Toland Report, 28 May 1917, OG 21396.

<sup>82</sup> E.N. Prentice to J.A.A. Burnquist, 16 August 1918, 103.L.9.2F, Box 15, CPS Records.

<sup>83</sup> E.N. Prentice to J.A.A. Burnquist, 16 August 1918, 103.L.9.2F, Box 15, CPS Records.

<sup>84</sup> J.H. Robson to Gov. Burnquist, 16 August 1918, 103.L.9.2F, Box 15, CPS Records.

Conference "during the present crisis." The Bureau's duty was to investigate where persecution existed and to support congregations in need. The Bureau's objectives included the following:

1. To assume the official representation of our congregation and our synodical interests before our State authorities wherever a situation of distress arises;
2. To prepare and disseminate suitable literature to exhibit the attitude of our church on every moot question, and to rebut any erroneous or slanderous reports about our Synod;
3. To aid our people in making proper reply to such reports wherever they appear in the public press;
4. To advise our people as to their conduct whenever their cooperation is required at public meetings and demonstrations, and religious scruples arise whether they may conscientiously do so,<sup>85</sup>

The Bureau also sent out a questionnaire to schools in the Synodical conference and tried to gauge the level of hostility each school was facing from the community. The common defense of German Lutheran institutions followed less organized channels as well. When the Axel-Johnson bill was being discussed in Madison, Wisconsin to eliminate foreign languages in all state schools, a large crowd of objectors arrived at the state capitol, including a significant bloc of Synodical Conference Lutherans. Ernest von Briesen of the Wisconsin Synod made the principal address before the legislative committee, emphasizing the injustice of interfering with the rights of parents in the education of their children. Wisconsin chose to maintain freedom of language in religious instruction.<sup>86</sup>

While the stories of German Lutheran patriotism and perseverance are numerous, nothing could signify these virtues quite like the soldiers fighting across the Atlantic. Hans Moussa understood this, and after the war he urged congregations to use the soldiers to personify the patriotism of German Lutherans:

Nearly every church has a service flag and an honor roll. Now...would be the time to make them a permanent and easily available record...Tell when they went, where they trained, to which part of the army they were assigned, and if they went to France, in what actions they were engaged. Tell of their wounds and hospital experiences...<sup>87</sup>

Lest the historical record get it wrong, Moussa was convinced these accounts could serve as a rebuttal. "[They] would be a constant reminder that the Lutheran church did not fail its civic duties in the trying times of 1917-1918." This display could also help the church persevere in the uncertain years after the

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<sup>85</sup> Julius Rosin Report, "Synodical Wartime Bureau," 3 December 1918, OG 284018; The intentions and workings of the Bureau were investigated and discussed in the Department of Justice.

<sup>86</sup> "Language Legislation," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:6 (23 March 1919), 46-47.

<sup>87</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "War Memorials," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:24 (1 December 1918), 188.

war, as Moussa claimed, "If we do something of this kind we will not be molested by officious 'patriotic' organizations." Moussa and his fellow German Lutherans hoped this would not be necessary, and prayed that peace and tranquility would return to the church in the following years.

If these war memorials served as the only testament to the Wisconsin Synod's reaction to the First World War, they would severely gloss over the ambiguities. In the early days of the war, many members in anger and dismay openly clashed with an equally hostile "war party." This culminated in the anti-draft movement at New Ulm and the anti-Espionage Act expressions of Otto Engel's American Liberty League. As German Lutheran ministers and members moved into the Justice Department's short list, this combativeness could not last. It is clear that many of the positive war contributions were brought about by the "stick" instead of the "carrot." This should not take anything away from the expressions of patriotism from the synod, however. This was simply a different brand of patriotism than that espoused by mainstream America. It advocated American ideologies such as freedom of conscience and religion, and took up the role of guardians of these principles. A strict focus on the dissent would also do a complete disservice to the thousands of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans who complied with the draft or volunteered their lives for their adopted country. As Rev. Palechek told an agent, "our young men will cross the sea and fight, but they will never approve of the war."<sup>88</sup> Otto Engel's nephew, Walter Engel, fits Palechek's description. During March 1918, Walter helped Otto distribute pamphlets for the Socialist Party—which advocated a quick or immediate peace. Walter was then drafted one month later, whereby he reported and traveled to France for combat.<sup>89</sup> This sense of duty for these Lutherans usually trumped personal indignation.

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<sup>88</sup> R.B. Spencer Report, 16 June 1917, OG 26572.

<sup>89</sup> Frank F. Wolfram Report, 18 February 1919, OG 5025. Also the son of Julius Engel from this chapter. Despite his compliance with the draft, Frank Wolfram still investigated Walter's activities with the Socialist party after he returned from the war.

## Conclusion

### No Armistice Here

**A**rmistice Day on 11 November 1918 triggered a collective exhale and sense of merriment across the country, especially among the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. The students at Grace Lutheran School in Milwaukee, for example, "heard the excitement" from their classroom, and "ran out of school to join in."<sup>1</sup> The *Gemeindeblatt* posted poems which celebrated the newly arrived peace.<sup>2</sup> Anxious individuals with relatives in Germany, after not hearing from them for at least eighteen months, and often fearing the worst, looked into regaining contact. The *Northwestern Lutheran* informed its readers that "it will be some months before the usual exchange of mails may become effective."<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, the publication listed instructions for synod members to send mail to their relatives through the American Red Cross. With the passing of the Hohenzollern dynasty in Germany, many detractors believed that German Lutherans met this development with despair. While the *Northwestern Lutheran* admitted Hohenzollern's demise was "not without interest," this development could hardly moderate the joy of the armistice. Besides, "the greatest injustice done the Lutheran church" in Germany was done by a Hohenzollern in 1817, when he "decreed the 'union' of the Lutheran and Calvinistic churches in his domain of Prussia in 1817."<sup>4</sup> A new democratic regime in Germany could mean conditions "more favorable to the free and untrammelled development of the [Lutheran] church."

German Lutherans felt antagonism and disillusionment over developments after the war. In September 1919, President Wilson addressed a

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<sup>1</sup> Historical Archives of Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI, 11 November 1918.

<sup>2</sup> "Silvester 1918," *Gemeindeblatt* 54:3 (2 February 1919), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Letters to Enemy Countries," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:25 (15 December 1918), 194.

<sup>4</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "The Passing of Hapsburg and Hohenzollern," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:25 (15 December 1918), 195.



crowd with the following remarks: "Is there [anyone] here, who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry?...This war was a commercial and industrial war. It was not a political war...The commercial advantage will be ours [because of victory]."<sup>5</sup> Wisconsin Synod Lutherans fumed over the inconsistency of rhetoric over the past two years. Wisconsin Synod minister John Jenny wondered what happened to "that humanity, the freedom of the world, the root of civilization, which, as was reiterated time and time again, were at stake?" In Wilson's rhetoric, a disconnect emerged between a war with moral and religious undertones and a war for commercial supremacy. "Personally, we never took such [religious] statements regarding the issues of this war seriously, much less did we believe in them," Jenny further iterated.

Wisconsin Synod Lutherans generally understood that peace did not completely remedy the situation. "The outlook for a triumph of sane Americanism is not very bright," wrote the *Northwestern Lutheran*, nearly a year after the war. "The stories of mob violence...[are] too fresh in our minds to find consolation in the vaunted 'American sense of fairness and justice.' The idea that might makes right does not seem to be peculiarly and exclusively a European error."<sup>6</sup> In an article titled "Will Religious Persecution Return?," Rev. Hans K. Moussa warned Wisconsin Synod Lutherans to "be awake to the fact that unless they guard their [religious] treasure bravely, they will lose it."<sup>7</sup> Many men in the country, according to Moussa, "are eagerly seeking the opportunity to wipe out our parochial schools...they stoke the whole church by cutting off its children." Even though the synod already faced charges of disloyalty, Moussa claimed that "we have no right to make even the slightest concession to the forces that are cloaking their conduct and their persecution with many fine patriotic phrases." Seminary professor John Schaller, giving in to the fact that persecution would prevail, avowed that "we may as well make ready to meet all kinds of religious oppression with stout hearts, steeled to bear sufferings for Christ's sake."

War reconstruction efforts included the same cozy relationship between evangelical churches and the state. The Treasury Department announced a Victory Liberty Loan for 21 April 1919, "a purely financial

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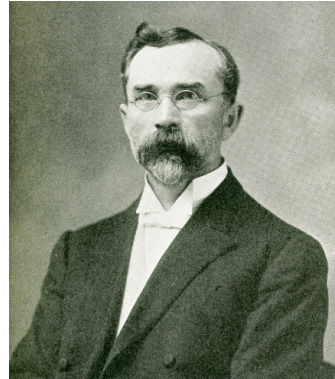
<sup>5</sup> John Jenny, "The Inconsistency of it All!" *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:21 (19 October 1919), 164-165.

<sup>6</sup> John Schaller, "Untitled," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:14 (13 July 1919), 107-109.

<sup>7</sup> Hans K. Moussa, "Will Persecution Return?" *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:2 (26 January 1919), 10-11.

enterprise of the government," according to Seminary professor John Schaller.<sup>8</sup> Even without the war emergency, the Treasury dictated biblical texts for ministers to use in their sermons, and, with a calm assumption of authority, told them to "remember that a Minister's duty in this day of 'human service' stretches far out from the theological path." Those ministers who refused were threatened with the stigma of disloyalty. Most churches around the country complied, nonetheless, leading Schaller to remark, "the hysterical scheming of most churches to take a hand in the political reconstruction of all the world, including our own country, foreshadows nothing but disaster." Schaller hardly blamed the government for assuming the church to be its handmaiden. Instead, he blamed the "sectarian" churches, "who have for so many years engaged in political and social agitation, [who] have worked hard to produce this impression."

Despite the end of the war and the ensuing sense of respite, many Lutherans of the Wisconsin Synod were not out of the woods yet. As previously shown, numerous Department of Justice cases, from Otto Engel to Carl Fenska, spilled over into peacetime. Some investigations were just beginning. A month after the armistice, the Department of Justice received a complaint concerning a Wisconsin Synod church in White Bluffs, Washington. The sender reported that "the Rev. L.C. Krug...took up a subscription among Germans here about a year ago."<sup>9</sup> He was naturally suspicious because "members of this man's church are well known by their sayings and action to have been strong[ly] pro-German." The subscription check was traced to Wahluke, Washington, and it was suggested that an agent go over Rev. Krug's records and make a personal call on the minister. The Department thanked this informant and promised to send an agent to do just that at the first opportunity. A drop in urgency is noticeable here, however. Either the Department of Justice neglected to follow up or the agent failed to report his findings. Either way, the case file abruptly ends. In 1919, Wisconsin Synod president Rev. G.E. Bergemann was likely contacted by government authorities. Captain



C.1: Rev. G.E. Bergemann,  
Wisconsin Synod President

<sup>8</sup> John Schaller, "Religious Freedom Endangered II," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:12 (15 June 1919), 92-93.

<sup>9</sup> R.R. Woods to Department of Justice, 20 November 1918, OG 332660.

George B. Lester testified in 1919 in a hearing before the Senate: "I personally conducted a number of conferences with representatives of these large [Lutheran] synods, and pointed out to them the facts in reference to individual cases."<sup>10</sup> Lester claimed he encouraged the better element, "the American element of the Lutheran Church," to curb these men. The "Americanization" of the Wisconsin Synod remained, nonetheless, a complicated and delicate matter.

## II. Selective Assimilation

Before the war, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans already practiced selective assimilation to some extent. While their cultural and religious habits remained "foreign" to popular opinion, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans consistently professed their love for the American Constitution and its decrees of religious liberty. This became especially clear during neutrality, as many leaders consistently quoted the Constitution to defend non-aggression principles.<sup>11</sup> During the war crisis, officials consistently made their sentiment clear that this was not good enough. The Wisconsin Synod sought to compromise with these demands without giving up their religious nature. A practice of selective assimilation was needed and eventually applied.

While habit and a pride in German culture played a role in the particularly slow transition of the church to English, this issue had religious undertones as well. Lutheran histories were careful to point out that the loss of the German language typically went hand-in-hand with a compromise of Lutheran doctrine. A Lutheran history in 1916 used the term "American Lutheranism" to describe the synods which used English, by which he meant, "A

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<sup>10</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to R.R. Woods, 29 November 1918, OG 332660; A. Bruce Bielaski to F.A. Watt, 29 November 1918, OG 332660; F.A. Watt Report, "Rev. L.C. Krug," 9 December 1918, OG 332660; U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, *Hearings on Brewing and Liquor Interests and German and Bolshevik Propaganda*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919, p. 1788.

<sup>11</sup> For examples of Constitution rhetoric during neutrality and the war, see Prof. Ackermann's remarks in the *New Ulm Review*, 4 April and 29 September 1917; Prof. M.J. Wagner in *New Ulm Review*, 1 August 1917; Rev. Atrops in Eberstein Report, 23 January 1918, OG 133065; R.H. Retzlaff in Robert Davis Report, 3 August 1917, OG 47665; Rev. Walter Hoenecke in "Etliche Fragen uber Prohibition," *Gemeindeblatt* 53:3 (1 February 1918), 37-38; Rev. John Jenny in "The Language Question," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:23 (17 November 1918), 178-179; Rev. F. Graeber in "Danger Threatens," *Northwestern Lutheran* 5:14 (14 July 1918), 107; Rev. Hans K. Moussa, "The Birth of Freedom," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 4:21 (7 November 1917), 171-173; among numerous others.

Lutheranism modified by the Puritan element."<sup>12</sup> The author blamed this development on the lack of English Lutheran literature and the intermingling effects of learning the American language. The "American Lutherans" gave up on their parochial schools, joined lodges and other secret societies that promoted doctrinal indifferentism, and allowed "Methodists" and other evangelicals to "rant" from their pulpits on Sunday.<sup>13</sup> Wisconsin Synod seminary professor August Pieper warned that "the gospel of the English [churches] is the product of common sense, the spirit of reason...*It is a terrible danger that threatens our Church from that source.*"<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, the wartime strife prompted reflection and even concessions concerning the language issue. At the convention of the Wisconsin Synod in 1919, its first resolution on the language question bluntly states, "The transition into the English language is unavoidable." It then pledged to continue using German as long as there were those who were better served through that language. Seminary students were to learn to preach in English, but also remain competent enough to read German Lutheran sources.<sup>15</sup> Professor August Pieper confirmed this sentiment: "For the next fifty years we must become bilingual."<sup>16</sup> The transition slowly took effect. The *Northwestern Lutheran* surpassed the *Gemeindeblatt* in readership in 1939.<sup>17</sup> Churches across the synod rewrote their constitutions at varying speeds. St. Lucas Lutheran in Kewaskum, Wisconsin, for example, revised its church constitution to include both English and German services in 1939.<sup>18</sup> A second World War with Germany certainly helped speed the process. It would be another thirty years before the *Gemeindeblatt* ceased publishing and the German language could not be consistently heard at Wisconsin Synod services.<sup>19</sup>

The synod also made small concessions concerning its parochial schools. The Convention of 1919 reaffirmed that "no government has the right to

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<sup>12</sup> Juergen Ludwig Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Burlington, IA: The German Literary Board, 1916), 100, 104, 110-111, 113-114, 116, 145, 436-437.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Kleppner, *Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900*, (New York: Free Press, 1970), 81.

<sup>14</sup> August Pieper, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 62 (1965), 193. Emphasis is his.

<sup>15</sup> "Convention of Joint Synod," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:21 (19 October 1919), 165.

<sup>16</sup> Pieper, 201.

<sup>17</sup> Schroeder, 18; John Brenner, "Forward in Christ: Doctrinal Challenges and Language Change," *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Files*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Constitution at St. Lucas Lutheran Church, Kewaskum, Wisconsin, 1939.

<sup>19</sup> James P. Schaefer, "Untitled," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 69:3 (February 1982).

prescribe to us in which language the Gospel is to be preached in the church and school."<sup>20</sup> However, Synod leaders redoubled their efforts to put the secular education in the parochial schools on par with the public schools. August Pieper even conceded that states had a right to pass certain laws requiring that children be educated, and he encouraged synod teachers and principals to report statistics to the state promptly and correctly.<sup>21</sup> Before the war, this opinion would have been met with scorn.

The major concessions eventually came from the church's opposition. After the failed experiment with national prohibition in the 1920s, such efforts dwindled in the ensuing decades. Sabbatarian laws met the same fate. These behaviors were eventually viewed as less of a danger to American society. In one of the many ironies of this narrative, the parochial school eventually became highly regarded among many evangelical religious groups. The development which spurred this change of opinion was the secularization of the public school. Now without an institution to instill pietistic norms to the young, the parochial school suddenly became an attractive alternative. Since the Lutheran and Catholic religions have the longest tradition of parochial schools, many Christians not of those faiths attempt to enroll their children at these schools.

Nearly one hundred years after the war, countless ministers across the country are still asked to preach for ecumenical religious ventures. Ministers from the Wisconsin Synod will either decline or, more likely, be avoided because the supplicant already knows the answer. The ministers decline because they know they must make concessions to Lutheran beliefs to participate. In this way, the Wisconsin Synod never assimilated. Like in 1918, detractors attack this policy as either intolerant or quixotic. Few understand the historical and religious basis for their actions. To this day, the Wisconsin Synod has not fully embraced "American Lutheranism."

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<sup>20</sup> "Convention of Joint Synod," *Northwestern Lutheran* 6:21 (19 October 1919), 165.

<sup>21</sup> August Pieper, "Zum Kampf um die freie Christliche Schule," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 17:3 (1920), 177.

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Unless otherwise noted, German language sources from the Wisconsin Synod (*Gemeindeblatt*, *Theologische Quartalschrift*, or church records) were translated by myself. The Justice Department also unwittingly made my task easier by spending entire weeks translating Otto Engel's and other synod members' letters and publications. While they may have spun the translation somewhat to fit their purposes, they expected their translations to be upheld in the court of law. Furthermore, the original German letters are no longer extant, so personally translating them is not an option.

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John DeJung, Jr. Biographical Folder

Otto Engel Biographical Folder

August Ernst Biographical Folder

E. Edgar Guenther Biographical Folder

Hans K. Moussa Biographical Folder

**Carl W. Siegler Biographical Folder**

Congregational Records of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Chaseburg, WI  
 Congregational Records of Trinity Lutheran Church, Elkton, SD  
 Congregational Records of St. John's Lutheran Church, Fairfax, MN  
 Congregational Records of St. Peter Lutheran Church, Fond du Lac, WI  
 Congregational Records of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Gibbon, MN  
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