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British propaganda: Its impact on America in World War I

Robert V. Banks
University of Nebraska at Omaha

BRITISH PROPAGANDA: ITS IMPACT ON AMERICA IN WORLD WAR I

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Robert V. Banks

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789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
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Chairman Department

Graduate Committee

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Department

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Paul V. Peterson I.S.U. - Journalism
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Psychological warfare, with propaganda as one of its principal instrument, emerged in World War I as a lethal force which in some ways was comparable to technological advances in weaponry. Just as aerial bombing, deadly gases and modern arms marked a new era in wholesale killing, so propaganda was a milestone in the battle of warring nations to control public opinion. The war did not usher in propaganda; its roots have been traced back to the Crusades and beyond. It was the "Great War," however, that produced the beginnings of today's sophisticated propaganda techniques. So effective, in fact, was World War I propaganda that some scholars hold it chiefly responsible for America's decision to take up arms against Germany.

These scholars base their proposition on the premise that the nation's nineteenth century hands-off diplomacy toward Europe, had it not been influenced by British propaganda, could have preserved American neutrality. They contend that the war was a typical European power struggle in which the United States had no stake. Their thesis further maintains that German-American grievances could have been resolved peacefully had Wilsonian neutrality been applied in equal measure to all belligerents. To the contrary, their proposition advances the argument that American diplomacy with Germany was, in effect, a hostile neutrality. They assert that Washington assumed an on-guard stance against Berlin -- the speedy dispatch of ultimatums at the slightest provocation, a philosophy of suspicion and mistrust, the threat of severing diplomatic ties. In all of this is detected the

thread of British propaganda, stirring up anti-German feeling in the United States. Pushed on by London-generated publicity, according to the argument, the United States in 1917 had played out all the options which might have averted war with Germany. The blame reposed at the doorstep of British propaganda.

The problems in assessing the validity of this proposition include a survey of the development of British propaganda and a study of the scope of London persuasion in the United States. These findings must be weighed against the German program in order to contrast the extent of belligerent publicity activities. Finally, the American reaction, the charges against British propaganda and the issues involved in America's decision to take up arms can be assessed in trying to determine whether England induced the nation to go to war.

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH PROPAGANDA

The Government of Prime Minister H. H. Asquith began moving at the outset of World War I to organize a propaganda campaign which would project a favorable British image at home and abroad. Charles Masterman was appointed in September, 1914, to organize and direct a Propaganda Bureau. Masterman, who had been a Member of Parliament and Financial Secretary to the Treasury, was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Chairman of the National Health Insurance Joint Committee at the time of his appointment. The offices of the Insurance Committee were located in a building in London called Wellington House, and it was there that Masterman set up the Propaganda Bureau.[1] The Government disclosed few facts about the new organization. Asked in Parliament to describe Masterman's activities, the Prime Minister refused to discuss the matter. "The work is of a highly confidential nature," Asquith said, "and much of its efficiency depends upon its being conducted in secret."[2] On another occasion a Government spokesman, Sir A. B. Markham, told Parliament that Masterman's group was charged with providing the Government with information respecting all

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1 James D. Squires, British Propaganda at Home and in the United States From 1914 to 1917 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 26.

2 The Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, Fifth Series, Vol. 76, House of Commons (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1915), cols. 704-705.

reports that appear in foreign papers."[3] Masterman said the Wellington House staff produced and distributed books, pamphlets, speeches and Government publications dealing with the war. The Propaganda Bureau assisted Government officials in placing articles and interviews in foreign newspapers. In this same vein, the organization helped London-based correspondents of neutral newspapers, especially American, obtain information and interviews.[4]

While the Wellington House staff was the Government's principal propaganda agency, other departments also operated miniature publicity units. Lord Beaverbrook, the last war-time head of British propaganda, wrote that the service ministries were adamant about operating independent agencies.[5] In December, 1916, when David Lloyd George succeeded Asquith as Prime Minister, the Government began forcing the ministries to integrate their propaganda programs. This was attributed in part to the personality of Lloyd George and his determination to strengthen the system. He was credited with perhaps being the first British politician to use to full advantage the press and public opinion.[6]

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[3] Ibid., col. 587

[4] Lord Beaverbrook, Men and Power, 1917-1918 (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1956), p. 277.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Rodney O. Davis, Power, Public Opinion, and Diplomacy (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1959), pp. 226-227.

He established a Department of Information and appointed Colonel John Buchan, who had done extensive work in the Foreign Office's propaganda program, to head it. The Department of Information was divided into four sections. Masterman's Wellington House staff continued to produce books and pamphlets. A political intelligence department was charged with assessing and analyzing world public opinion as it was reflected in the foreign press. The news department prepared stories and arranged interviews for London-based foreign correspondents. The fourth section was a cinema department. Buchan was directly responsible to the Prime Minister.[7]

Still dissatisfied, Lloyd George appointed an advisory committee to assist Buchan. The committee included two eminent publishers, Lord Northcliffe and Lord Beaverbrook. Even this move failed to produce the harmony which the Prime Minister sought. He then placed a member of the War Cabinet, Sir Edward Carson, in charge of the program.[8] Leader of the Irish Unionists and Member of Parliament for Dublin University, Carson had served from May to October, 1915, as Attorney-General in the Asquith Cabinet. Resigning in the dissension which preceded Asquith's downfall, Carson returned to prominence when Lloyd George appointed him First Lord of the Admiralty. His service in that post was marked by bickering so intense that he was removed in July, 1917, and appointed to

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[7] The Parliamentary Debates, Official Report, Fifth Series, Vol. 109, House of Commons (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1918), cols, 949-950.

[8] Squires, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

the War Cabinet as Minister without portfolio. He was placed in charge of all propaganda activity in September.[9] Buchan continued to head the Department of Information. Carson was characterized as having had little interest in propaganda.[10] He resigned from the War Cabinet in January, 1918. His importance to the Department of Information did not stem from personal achievement; rather, the significance was in the stature of the man himself. His appointment demonstrated the high priority which Lloyd George attached to propaganda in naming a Minister of the War Cabinet to head the program.

Despite the discord, the propaganda program apparently satisfied the War Cabinet. The cabinet's report for 1917 noted that propaganda and publicity efforts abroad were being steadily expanded, ". . . the outcome of which can be gauged by the result of the war itself."[11] There remained one last move to complete the streamlining -- the appointment of a Minister of Information. For this new post Lloyd George selected Lord Beaverbrook, publisher of The Times, and already active in propaganda. A native of Newcastle, New Brunswick, Canada, Beaverbrook had received his first experience in war propaganda as head of the Canadian program. In announcing his choice to head the new ministry, the Prime Minister praised Beaverbrook's Canadian publicity

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[9] Ian Colvin, The Life of Lord Carson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), Vol. 3, pp. 277-278.

[10] Beaverbrook, op. cit., p. 268

[11] War Cabinet Report for the Year 1917 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1918), p. 12.

as having been ". . . among the most successful, perhaps the most successful, piece of work of its kind on the Allied side."[12] The appointment was effective February 10, 1918. Of his assignment, Beaverbrook wrote that the public clamored for a ministry which would convince the Allies, the Dominions and the neutrals of Britain's capacity to win the war.[13] He noted that he had no blueprint from which to build a propaganda organization to meet these demands; there was, he wrote, ". . . nothing but a decision of the War Cabinet decreeing that such a ministry should be formed and that I should be the minister."[14]

Given that decree and the War Cabinet's support, Beaverbrook assembled a Ministry of Information which was corporate-like in structure. The revamped organization included Lord Northcliffe as director of propaganda for enemy countries. Lord Rothermere, another publisher, was head of the program for neutral countries. Author Rudyard Kipling was chief of the section for home and colonial publicity. It has been questioned whether Beaverbrook actually was Northcliffe's superior in the propaganda organization. Because both men had direct access to the Prime Minister, there was speculation they might have had equal

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[12] Beaverbrook, op. cit., p. 267.

[13] Ibid., p. 263.

[14] Ibid., p. 267

rank.[15] Such a prospect was unlikely; certainly Beaverbrook's writings did not leave that impression. Whatever the divisions of authority, the two men and their colleagues helped produce propaganda sufficiently effective to be denounced by Germany's General Erich Ludendorff after the war. "We were hypnotized by the enemy propaganda," he wrote, "as a rabbit is by a snake."[16]

Throughout the war the Government's publicity efforts were aided by numerous private groups. Among these were faculty members at Oxford University, who wrote the "Oxford Pamphlets"; the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, the Cobden Club, a nameless group of Anglican clerics, the Loyal Council of British, Austrian and Hungarian Birth, the United Workers, the Atlantic Union, the Victoria League, the Union of Democratic Control and the Central Committee for National Patriotic Organizations.[17] This last group, which offers a good example of volunteer programs, was organized in November, 1914. The Central Committee soon had local chapters in England and affiliated societies throughout the Empire and in neutral countries. British Chambers of Commerce were used as centers for distribution of propaganda literature. The Central Committee assembled a roster of 250 speakers who, by 1916,

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[15] Harold D. Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in the World War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 20.

[16] Erich Ludendorff, My War Memories (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1919), Vol. 1, p. 361.

[17] H. C. Peterson, Propaganda for War (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), pp. 18-19.

had conducted 15,000 meetings; 850,000 leaflets had been distributed to students and 900,000 in industrial districts. Additionally, 250,000 pamphlets, books and other publications had been sent to neutral nations.[18]

Besides its publicity agencies, Britain possessed another instrument which had a significant part in propaganda. The system of censorship, imposed at the outset of the war under the Defense of the Realm Act, established a Press Bureau to sit as watchdog on the release of information which might imperil national security. The Act forbade the communication of news concerning military operations, troop movement and war production. Designed to provide censorship controls on the home front, the measure also became a guideline in propaganda operations.[19] A strong weapon in censorship was British control of the cables. In fact, England's cutting of the cables which linked the United States and Germany was called the first act of propaganda in the war. The cables were cut on August 5, 1914.[20]

This was only the start of a massive campaign which Britain waged to influence world opinion. It was an effort often hampered by discord among governmental offices, each perhaps regarding the others with

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18 Ibid., pp. 19-20

19 Sir Edward Cooke, The Press in War-Time (London: The Macmillan Company, 1920), p. 88.

20 Peterson, op. cit., p. 12.

bureaucratic suspicion. Beginning with the Wellington House staff, the publicity organizations sprouted in hither-and-yon fashion until Lloyd George appointed Beaverbrook to the new Cabinet post of Minister of Information. The publisher of The Times consolidated and centralized the operation. But, this retrenching did not begin until February, 1918, long after the British had fired many of their major propaganda shots. Beaverbrook, for instance, was not at the command post during the heavy publicity barrage aimed at the United States prior to the American declaration of war against Germany on April 6, 1917. It was into this campaign that Britain poured much of her propaganda resources and talent.

CHAPTER III

LONDON'S PERSUASION IN AMERICA

One of the few phases of British propaganda to survive the frequent realignments was the program for the United States. Sir Gilbert Parker, a novelist and native of Canada, was placed in charge of publicity for America at the outset of the war; he served in that post until January, 1917, when poor health forced him to resign. He had traveled extensively in the United States, where his books had been widely read. Settling in England, Parker became a Member of Parliament in 1900. He was knighted in 1902, made a baronet in June, 1915, and a member of the Privy Council in June, 1916.[1] Although technically under Masterman's supervision, Parker was given fairly free rein. He commenced with a nine-member staff in 1914; this had increased to fifty-four by 1917.[2] The specifics of his campaign were relatively simple. Using a Who's Who in America, he compiled lists of prominent citizens to whom propaganda literature was sent. For mailing purposes, he made separate groupings of people according to their profession, supposed intelligence and social standing in the community.[3]

These Americans received pamphlets, articles and other materials which, it was thought, would be of special interest for business or

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1 Squires, op. cit., p. 50.

2 Peterson, op. cit., p. 23.

3 Ibid., p. 16.

professional reasons. Parker also maintained personal correspondence with influential Americans. This group included such figures as university and college presidents, professors, scientists, publishers and industrialists. He prevailed upon numerous distinguished Englishmen to write articles for American newspapers. In the same vein, he arranged for London-based correspondents from the United States to interview high British Government officials. To reach rural areas in the United States, Parker provided 360 small American newspapers with an English weekly newspaper which published reviews and comments on the war. Literature was distributed to public libraries, Young Men's Christian Association groups, colleges and civic clubs. Besides this vast outpouring of publicity, Parker also sent representatives to the United States to discuss the war from the British viewpoint. He relied upon Masterman's staff for films, photographs, cartoons, drawings and diagrams. It was through films, Parker said, that Britain reached America's ". . . man in the street . . . ."[4]

The tenor of this appeal to the United States was analyzed after the war by Harold Lasswell, one of the early students of propaganda. He concluded that the London attempt at persuasion emerged as a hate-Germany campaign. Anglo publicists portrayed Berlin autocracy as satanic, violating all moral standards. Britain, on the other hand, was projected as the defender of the democratic ideals upon which

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[4] Sir Gilbert Parker, "The United States and the War," Harper's Monthly Magazine, Vol. CXXXVI, March, 1918, pp. 526-530.

America was founded.[5] Another student of propaganda, the late H. C. Peterson of the University of Oklahoma, placed Parker's plea in the context of patriotism: For an American to be pro-British was patriotic; to be pro-German bordered on treason. "In other words," Peterson wrote, "the British captured the American flag and waved it in front of themselves."[6] Atrocity propaganda was the principal tool in London's play on American emotions. Stories about acts of German savagery ranged from reports of brutality in Belgium to the sinking of the Lusitania.

One of the most devastating documents was the Bryce Report, officially known as the Report of the Committee On Alleged German Outrages. Lord James Bryce, who had been England's ambassador to the United States and was a scholar of American history, headed a Cabinet-appointed committee which investigated alleged German savageries in Belgium. The committee's findings were released on May 12, 1915; this was only five days after the Lusitania went down, providing England with a double-barrelled atrocity blast. For some years after the war, Britain was accused of releasing the report amid the uproar over the sinking in order to reap maximum publicity. Later, some of the harshest critics of London propaganda in the war -- among whom was Walter Millis, an American scholar of neutrality -- decided the timing was a coincidence.[7] The

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[5] Lasswell, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

[6] Peterson, op. cit., p. 35.

[7] Walter Millis, Road to War (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935), p. 182.

Bryce Committee charged the German militarists with the wholesale killing of civilians ". . . to an extent for which no previous war between nations claiming to be civilized . . . furnishes any precedent."[8] The report related stories of murder, rape, pillage and burning. Authenticity of these stories was widely disputed; Frederick Palmer, an American war correspondent, said the report itself was one of the war's worst atrocities.[9] Allegations about falsehoods and distortions stemmed from the fact that the committee did not make an inspection of Belgium; nor did Lord Bryce and his colleagues take the depositions from Belgian refugees in England. This testimony, which formed the heart of the report, was taken by twenty barristers.[10] Doubt was cast upon the integrity of the witnesses, who were not under oath. One American journalist reported meeting people in Belgium who implored him " . . . to tell the English not to judge us by certain types of our refugees." In another instance an English magistrate referred to the refugees as "scum."[11]

Ranking alongside the Bryce Report in terms of propaganda appeal was the sinking of the Lusitania, an English liner which was torpedoed by

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8 Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd. 1915), p. 40.

9 Peterson, op. cit., p. 59.

10 James Morgan Read, Atrocity Propaganda (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 203.

11 Ibid.

a German U-boat. Justifiability of the sinking has been argued over the years. Berlin contended that the vessel was no ordinary merchantman, but rather an armed boat under orders to use its superior speed to elude submarines. On balance, the evidence in post-war investigations tended to indicate the Lusitania was not armed.[12] The liner carried 4,200 cases of cartridges containing ten or eleven tons of powder; cargo also included 1,250 cases of shrapnel. The sinking claimed 1,198 lives; of these, 128 were Americans, many of them prominent and wealthy. Kurt Hahn, a German scholar who was lecturing on the British press during the war, termed the sinking the great turning point in the collective English attitude toward Germany. "The empty slogan of the English inflammatory press about 'Frightfulness' is filled all at once with flesh and blood through the children that are washed up on the English coast," he wrote.[13] In what was termed a propaganda masterpiece, the British ordered large-scale reproduction and distribution of a privately-issued German medal celebrating the disaster. Berlin denied that such a medal was struck.[14]

It was amid the furor over the Bryce Report and the Lusitania that the Germans executed Edith Cavell, the British nurse. Serving in Brussels, she was arrested on August 5, 1915, and charged with having helped English

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[12] Ibid., p. 200.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Squires, op. cit., p. 33.

and French soldiers and Belgian civilians escape to Holland. Held incommunicado for almost two months before being tried, she confessed her part in the escapes and implicated eight other persons. Miss Cavell also admitted that some of the Allied soldiers whom she aided had rejoined their units. The German Code provided the death penalty in these cases. Despite the efforts of American and Spanish diplomatic officials to save her, she was shot. Parker was reported to have written an American correspondent that the execution "gave us occasion for another real outburst of sentiment."[15]

In addition to such propaganda broadsides as the Bryce Report, the Lusitania and the Cavell execution, the British also maintained a steady barrage of "small arms" publicity fire. Much of its focus was on Anglo-American ties. The Oxford Pamphlets were among the major efforts which attempted to persuade Americans on the basis of their bonds with England. One pamphlet called for the creation of an Imperial Parliament to bind the Empire more tightly together; such a democratic step, the pamphlet said, also would provide an avenue for closer relations with America -- ". . . the great Democracy which was separated from us in the eighteenth century but is united to us by a strong sympathy in our time of trial. . . ."[16] Still another pamphlet, written by the same Oxford scholar, emphasized the need for a Concert of Europe. A first step

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[15] Peterson, op. cit., p. 63.

[16] E. A. Sonnenschein, Idols of War and Peace, Oxford University Pamphlets (London: Oxford University Press, 1914-1915), p. 19.

toward this goal, the writer said, was a little-publicized Anglo-American peace agreement. This pact provided that in case of dispute, both nations would wait a year before declaring war.[17] Of the British books distributed in the United States, one by Lord Bryce reflected the general theme of London's attempts to influence American public opinion. Stressing the historic bonds, he noted that both Britain and the United States had demonstrated a democratic approach in world affairs. For America, this action was reflected in withdrawing from Cuba and resisting the temptation to annex Mexican territory. Likewise, his book praised British attempts to help Africans achieve self-government.[18] These words from English pens were supplemented by stories from London-based correspondents for American newspapers. Parker was helpful in arranging for these journalists to interview British officials, ranging from the Prime Minister downward.[19] In these interviews, too, the British tried to project the image of idealism -- of a democracy's battle to defeat an autocracy. Sir Edward Grey, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, struck this chord in an interview with an American journalist.

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17 E. A. Sonnenschein, Through German Eyes, Oxford University Pamphlets (London: Oxford University Press, 1914-1915), p. 19.

18 Lord James Bryce, Neutral Nations and the War (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1914), pp. 12-13.

19 It well may have been that such interviews provided a vehicle for British propaganda. Granting this, it still was conceivable that American editors viewed as legitimate news the comments of such figures as Lord Grey.

"We want a Europe," he declared, ". . . free from perpetual talks of shining armor and warlords."[20] So spoke the voices of Britain. Whether a treatise by an Oxford scholar aimed at American intellectuals or a patriotic film intended for the "man in the street," Parker's publicists villified Germany and wrapped England in the cloak of righteousness. Britain was not alone in the campaign to woo America. The voices of Germany also spoke.

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20 Collected Papers of Sir Edward Grey on the European War, A Free Europe, an interview with the Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Grey, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, by Edward Price Bell of the Chicago Daily News (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1916), p. 1.

"We want a Europe," he declared, ". . . free from perpetual talks of shining armor and warlords."[20]

And so went the tenor of British propaganda. Alongside contemporary programs, the English effort perhaps appears crude and primitive. Probably it can be said that changes in propaganda techniques since World War I have been as dramatic as the development of new weapons. Yet the psychological "firepower" of British publicity from 1914 to 1917 surely cannot be denied. It may have lacked the subtlety, the sophistication, the social science laboratory concepts of present-day propaganda. The men responsible for Britain's appeal to Americans perhaps were not professional propagandists. Certainly, many of them were skilled "wordsmiths" who knew how to tell a story. If they lacked the refined techniques of contemporary propagandists, London publicists nonetheless packaged their product in the appropriate psychological wrappings. The portrayal of Britons as the defenders of democracy; the projection of Germans as primitive barbarians. Subtlety may have been missing in this tactic. Even so, the appeal was there, playing upon patriotism and democracy. How good was this propaganda? Probably the question is unanswerable. Statistical studies and scientific opinion polls are not available to assess objectively the worth of London publicity. Of necessity, such analyses

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20 Collected Papers of Sir Edward Grey on the European War, A Free Europe, an interview with the Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Grey, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, by Edward Price Bell of the Chicago Daily News (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1916), p. 1.

largely take the form of value judgments. One other yardstick, though certainly far from satisfactory, is to compare Britain's program with the German effort. For Berlin, too, waged a propaganda campaign in hopes of persuading Americans on the merits of the German cause.

CHAPTER IV

BERLIN'S PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN

Count Johann von Bernstorff, the German Ambassador to the United States, was in Berlin when the war broke out. He was ordered back to Washington with instructions to "enlighten Americans on the German viewpoint."[1] Dr. Geheimrat Heinrich Albert of the Ministry of the Interior came with him to set up a propaganda program. It was Bernstorff, however, who proved to be the articulate and public relations-minded German representative. One of his first actions was to establish a news bureau at the Ritz Hotel in New York City. There and at the German Embassy in Washington, journalists found refreshments, courtesy and an ambassador who was readily available for interviews.[2] A wealthy German-American, Hermann Sielcken, offered to pay the salary of a first-rate American journalist to handle Berlin's press relations in this country. His offer stipulated that the German Government must pay the charges for transmission of news telegrams to Washington. Berlin dashed cold water on the proposal, ruling that it was not of sufficient importance to justify the investment. "This was the way the supply of news was organized in a country that imagined it was practicing world politics," Bernstorff wrote after the war.[3]

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1 Millis, op. cit., p. 70.

2 Ibid., p. 72

3 Count Johann von Bernstorff, My Three Years in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 24.

The refusal to approve the telegraphy charges for a Berlin-Washington news link demonstrated the problems which beset Germany -- difficulties similar to those of Britain. The only formal departmental cooperation in Berlin was a press conference held two or three times a week. Building its propaganda machine from scratch, the military establishment developed a press service to report on battle operations.[4] The Foreign Ministry, too, entered the field, organizing a Press Bureau in August, 1914. The New York Times reported that the bureau's purpose apparently was to calm the Germans at home, mislead them about military actions and prejudice them against the enemy -- particularly the Belgians.[5] It was said that steps taken in August, 1918, to close the gap between military and civilian propaganda operations were inadequate and far too late.[6] Nonetheless, there were publicists in Germany who attempted to produce publicity which, it was hoped, would influence American opinion. One such propagandist wrote Captain Fritz von Papen, German naval attache in Washington, about an interview with Princess Leopold of Prussia on "The Spartan Woman in Time of War." The same publicist also described to the naval attache another story -- again

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4 Lasswell, op. cit., p. 22.

5 The New York Times, August 13, 1914.

6 Lasswell, op. cit., p. 22

on the basis of interviews with members of the German nobility -- concerning freedom of the seas.[7]

One of the most vocal figures in the Berlin campaign was George Sylvester Viereck, an American journalist of German descent. He and three friends -- a banker, an accountant and a chemist -- agreed at war's outset that German publicity must be strengthened. The result was establishment of a New York City-based newspaper, The Fatherland. The first issue, financed by fifty-dollar pledges from each of the four participants, was published on August 10, 1914. Bearing the colors of the Central Powers, The Fatherland was so named as a gesture of defiance against Germany's critics. Viereck, who was the editor, said the newspaper's circulation exceeded 100,000.[8] The publication was a voice for the expression of undiluted pro-Germanism.[9] The Fatherland aimed such venomous attacks at the Wilson Administration that an embarrassed Bernstorff tried to take control of the newspaper. Because the publication was self-supporting, Viereck managed to resist these

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7 Selection From Papers Found in the Possession of Captain Von Papen, Late German Military Attache at Washington, Falmouth, January 2 and 3, 1916 (London: Printed Under the Authority of His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), Letter Number 12, written by E. L. Fox, vice president and general manager of Wildman's Magazine and News Service, July 28, 1914, from Berlin to Captain Von Papen.

8 George Sylvester Viereck, Spreading Germs of Hate (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1930), pp. 49-50.

9 Ibid., p. 50

efforts. Revenue came from subscriptions and the purchase at below cost of pamphlets and books, which were resold at a profit.[10]

In its efforts to influence opinion in the United States, Berlin encouraged suspicion of the Allies and tried to nourish a pacifist movement. Germany dwelled on the theme that she was the injured party. Encircled by powerful and hostile enemies, she had been forced into a defensive war. Her propagandists assailed what they claimed was the foes' outrageous conduct. They accused England of seeking to starve the German populace and of violating the laws of war. Germany, so her propaganda said, was a peace-loving nation. Woven into the fabric of this publicity was Berlin's proclamation that her military forces were certain to achieve a decisive victory over the Allies. Many wrongs would be righted in the peace which followed. Despite the holocaust of war, the world would be a better place after Germany had smashed Britain and France.[11]

Coupled with the drive to win over Americans were reports of German conspiracies and sabotage of munitions plants and arms-laden vessels bound for Allied ports. Perhaps the outstanding figure in these intrigues was Captain Franz von Rintelen, who arrived in the United States from Germany in April, 1915. He began with a plot to place incendiary bombs

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[10] Ibid., pp. 74-75.

[11] Readings in European International Relations Since 1879. Edited by W. Henry Cooke and Edith P. Stickney (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931); Survey of War-Time Propaganda Literature, Principally German, P. Chalmers Mitchell, Report on the Propaganda Library, Section 23, British Ministry of Information, 1917, pp. 559-560.

in the holds of ammunition ships. After achieving a small measure of success there, he organized Labor's National Peace Council. Its purpose was to weld together a group of labor union leaders and to demand an arms embargo; the efforts were ill-starred. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, put down a strike at the munitions factories in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Strikes among longshoremen also soon were squelched. Finally, President Wilson put Secret Service agents on the trail of suspected saboteurs. Dernburg returned to Germany amid the furor over the Lusitania. With the pressure mounting, von Rintelen left the country in the fall of 1915 and was captured by the British. The State Department also demanded the recall of Captain von Papen, the naval attache, for involvement in sabotage. He left in December, 1915.[12]

From this point on the course of German publicity efforts was one of catastrophe. Dr. Albert's briefcase, stuffed with documents concerning propaganda activities, was stolen on a New York subway. The thief, a Secret Service agent, turned the documents over to William G. McAdoo, Secretary of the Treasury. He in turn passed some of them along to F. I. Cobb, who was editor of the New York World and a Wilson confidant. The result was banner headlines about German intrigues in the United States.[13] Still another disaster followed. James J. Archibald, an American writer on the German payroll, was removed from his ship at

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[12] Millis, op. cit., pp. 204-207.

[13] Ibid., pp. 214-215.

Falmouth while en route to Berlin. He surrendered numerous documents; these included a proposal by Konstantin Dumba, Austrian Ambassador to the United States, to incite unrest among Austro-Hungarian workers in the munitions plants. It was another Dumba suggestion which provided the crowning blow. He wanted to try to influence the course of American politics, contending this would provide a foreign policy favorable to the Central Powers. These disclosures ended in Dumba's recall.[14]

The effect of these revelations -- compounded by the invasion of Belgium, the sinking of the Lusitania and the execution of Edith Cavell -- added up to failure for Berlin propaganda in America. This was the verdict of German officials at post-war hearings. They traced the setbacks to a gap between the propaganda image of a peace-loving Germany and the portrait of savagery left in the wake of political and military actions. "The main difficulty . . . in the United States," the German hearings concluded, "was . . . that the policy which was announced by the propaganda itself was, again and again, interfered with by political incidents."[15] The same judgment was made by Bernstorff, who criticized Berlin's failure to foresee the consequences of seeming brutality which, he said, contradicted the publicity themes. The diplomat believed that Berlin officials misread the signs when they evaluated

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[14] Ibid., pp. 215-216.

[15] Official German Documents Relating to the War, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 27.

American reaction to the war. Their assessment, in his view, was made on the premise that a profit motive alone was the stimulus to which Americans responded. Germany erred, he wrote, in failing to calculate what Bernstorff called an American tendency to be guided partly by emotional values in judging European affairs.[16]

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16 Bernstorff, op. cit., p. 30

CHAPTER V

THE AMERICAN REACTION

President Wilson proclaimed American neutrality on August 4, 1914, the day that Germany began invading Belgium. The document announcing to the world that the United States would maintain a hands-off diplomacy was not enough. There yet remained, in Wilson's view, a need to post guidelines for the American people -- an attempt to point the direction which thoughts and actions were to take. He issued an appeal to the people. "The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name," he said, "during these days that are to try men's souls." The President admonished the citizenry to be impartial in both thought and deed, to curb feelings which might reflect favoritism for one of the belligerents.[1]

There were few indicators to determine whether Americans were neutral in fact as well as in name. The editors of Literary Digest declared, on the basis of a poll, that there was no belligerency anywhere in the land. Whether for the Central Powers or the Allies, the editors said, war sympathy was that of a distant observer.[2] They made these pronouncements after a war-attitudes survey of 367 newspaper editors. The editors were asked to state their own feelings --

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1 A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, Prepared Under the Direction of the Joint Committee on Printing Pursuant to an Act of the Fifty-Second Congress of the United States (With Additions and Encyclopedic Index by Private Enterprise) (New York: Bureau of National Literature, Inc., 1921), Vol. XVIII, pp. 7978-7979.

2 Literary Digest, "American Sympathies in the War," Vol. LXIX, No. XX, November 14, 1914.

pro-Ally, pro-German or neutral; additionally, they were asked to attempt to determine the prevailing sentiments in their communities. The study disclosed that 242 editors were neutral, 105 were pro-Ally and twenty were pro-German. Among the neutral editors, forty-three resided in the East, 112 in the Midwest, fifty-one in the South and thirty-six in the West. The pro-Ally list included thirty-four editors in the East, thirteen in the Midwest, four in the South and eleven in the West. Of the pro-German editors, one lived in the East, ten in the Midwest, and four each in the South and West. Based on the editors' judgments of war attitudes in their communities, 189 cities and towns were pro-Ally, thirty-eight were pro-German and 140 were neutral or divided. Cities where sentiment favored Britain and France included fifty-two in the East, forty in the Midwest, seventy-one in the South and twenty-six in the West. Among communities classified as showing pro-German preferences, two were in the East, twenty-nine in the Midwest, four in the South and three in the West. The neutral or divided list of cities included twenty-four in the East, sixty-six in the Midwest, twenty-eight in the South and twenty-two in the West. The Literary Digest, projecting the findings on a regional basis, placed New England, the South, the Southwest and the West in the Allied camp. Pro-German tendencies were judged to be most deep-seated in the Central States and regions of the Far Northwest. In each instance these sentiments were attributed to ancestry or to large numbers of recent immigrants.[3] It was questionable whether the poll -- and

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[3] Ibid.

the judgments based on it -- represented valid testing of public opinion. Obviously, the absence of door-to-door samplings of attitudes placed severe limitations on the survey. Literary Digest, as a substitute, elected to accept the newspaper editors' appraisal of the war climate in their communities. Conceivably, the poll represented nothing more than the views of 367 editors.

Whatever the state of public opinion, the nation officially was neutral. But on the home front as abroad, this policy proved difficult in application. There were substantial profits in munitions trade -- and jobs for the country's labor force in war production. Still, the nation was neutral; a proclamation attested to this. Controversy soon arose over whether the nation could be neutral in both name and fact while selling war goods. Pressure for an arms embargo came from the South and the West, where there was strong devotion to isolationism. Grain growers and cotton planters also resented the shortage of cargo space caused by the shipping of munitions.[4] Yet, other economic interests were at stake, too. The industrial section of the economy clamored for Washington's blessing on the war goods traffic. The State Department ruled for the manufacturers; Robert Lansing, the Department's counselor when the war broke out and successor to William Jennings Bryan as Secretary of State, gave the Administration's approval on October 15, 1914. He held that as a neutral, the Government itself could not engage in this trade. International law, however, did not bar private citizens from such manufacturing

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[4] Merle Curti, Peace or War, The American Struggle, 1636-1936 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1936), p. 232.

and commerce. Lansing said the President had no power to halt the trade and that the Government was under no obligation to act merely because one belligerent could not gain access to this market.[5] Colonel E. M. House, a key Wilson adviser, argued against an arms embargo. Such a boycott, he contended, would have the effect of violating the nation's neutrality by changing a situation which had arisen irrespective of anything America had done. Lurking in the background, and perhaps overriding the legal technicalities, was industrialist Andrew Carnegie's warning: An embargo could wreck the national prosperity accruing from war profits.[6]

Still, the issue was not put to rest even after Lansing's ruling and Carnegie's admonishment. A Wisconsin Congressman, Representative William J. Cary, in December, 1915, called for a boycott on the sale of all goods to belligerents. He reasoned that the step was necessary in order to be genuinely neutral. Additionally, he said an embargo would protect the nation's trade from hostile acts of belligerents and safeguard the public from war profiteers.[7] The controversy was finally resolved -- at least

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[5] Harley Notter, The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937), p. 350.

[6] Curti, op. cit., p. 233.

[7] Congressional Record, Sixty-Fourth Congress, First Session, Vol. LIII, Part 14, Appendix (Parts 1 to 13), (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 932.

as a domestic issue -- on August 22, 1916, when a resolution calling for an arms embargo was permanently tabled by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Representative Jeff McLemore, a Texas Congressman, introduced the resolution.[8] The move for a boycott was not raised again until Wilson threatened to use it as a club against Britain in disputes over contraband and blacklisting. Berlin, even though cut off from the market by the British blockade, did not protest the policy until after the Battle of the Marne.[9]

Another Lansing decision also served to stimulate the munitions trade. Reversing a ruling which Bryan had made at the war's outset, the State Department counselor held that American business interests could grant war credits to belligerents. This turnabout stance, one in which Bryan concurred, provided the credit that the Allies needed to purchase American munitions. Again, the nation's economic demands were a factor in the decision. It was estimated that American business firms owed short-term debts of $200 million in Europe when hostilities commenced. Banking houses pressured Washington to approve war credits as a means of helping pay these debts. Supplementing this agitation from private sources was Lansing's conviction that the Executive Branch lacked authority to prevent the transactions.[10]

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[8] Congressional Record, Sixty-Fourth Congress, First Session, Vol. LIII, Part 13 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 13029.

[9] Ernest R. May, The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 45.

[10] Notter, op. cit., pp. 352-353.

Thus favored by the Administration, commercial interests proceeded to thrive on wartime trade. Lansing had resolved two key issues of neutrality -- the granting of war credits and sale of munitions to belligerents. There remained, however, another serious controversy involving national policy. This was the deepening rift between pacifists and proponents of national preparedness -- those who wanted full arsenals and a nation primed for war. Both camps donned the cloak of neutrality; conflict over its application pitted them as adversaries. At the forefront of the pacifists were such figures as Bryan, auto manufacturer Henry Ford and social reformer Jane Addams. The voices of Theodore Roosevelt and General Leonard Wood were among those which spoke loudest for preparedness.

The pacifists were at work long before the war. New York City was the site of a National Peace Congress in 1907, when Boston publisher Edward Ginn established an International School of Peace and pledged a $50 thousand annual contribution to support it. The Congress also convened in New York City the following year. By 1913, Miss Addams thought she detected a national groundswell for pacifism. "There was rising in the cosmopolitan centers of America," she announced, "a sturdy and unprecedented international understanding which in time would be too profound to lend itself to war."[11] In January, 1915, she was elected chairman of the newly-organized Women's Peace Party; another honor came to her that March when she was chosen to preside at the first National Peace Convention

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11 James Weber Linn, Jane Addams (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935), p. 296.

in Chicago. The product of that meeting was the organization of the National Peace Federation; again, Miss Addams was elected chairman. She accompanied forty-two other American women to an International Peace Conference at The Hague in April.[12] The social reformer was aided by such other distinguished Americans as William Howard Taft, Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, and David Starr Jordan, who was president of Stanford University and leader of the American Peace Society. The New York Peace Society had the Carnegie fortune from which to draw support. Bryan, vehement in his determination that the United States must not take up arms, resigned as Secretary of State in 1915 because of foreign policy disputes. He, too, turned his full energies to the pacifist movement.

His was a mission shared by Henry Ford, whose wealth helped finance numerous endeavors in the quest for peace. Perhaps the most noted was the Ford peace ship, fated to go down in history as a misadventure in idealism. Chartering a vessel, the Oscar II, the auto manufacturer planned to organize a group of eminent citizens who would go to Europe and espouse the gospel of pacifism. It was hoped they would foment public opinion among European neutrals sufficient to move the war from the battle-field to the conference table. The ensuing mediation, according to preliminary plans, would bring peace "and get the boys out of the trenches by Christmas." Whatever its lofty humanitarian aims, the expedition was doomed even before the Oscar II weighed anchor on December 4, 1915, from

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12 Ibid, p. 298

Hoboken, New Jersey. What was intended to be colorful and dramatic evolved into grotesque buffonery. Numerous distinguished men and women declined invitations to accompany Ford. Dissension split the ranks of those who did undertake the voyage. Ford deserted the party in Switzerland.[13] Christmas came and went; "the boys" fought on in the trenches.

The words and deeds of the pacifists did not go unchallenged. By voice and pen, Roosevelt unleashed scathing attacks on the peace movement. "The American pacifist," he wrote, "has been the potent ally of the German pacifist and the silly tool of the Hun within our gates."[14] Preparedness was his public forum; indeed, it was his last stand. He and General Wood, a former Chief of Staff of the Army, began agitating for stronger military forces as soon as war broke out. In October, 1914, Representative A. P. Gardner of Massachusetts, who was chairman of the House Committee on Military Affairs, pressed for creation of a National Security Commission to investigate the state of national preparedness. Out of these demands was born the National Security League. Formed in December, 1914, the group claimed an almost instantaneous membership of 100,000. The League adopted a threefold program of pushing for preparedness, publicizing the Constitution and resisting revolutionary

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[13] Curti, op. cit., pp. 244-246

[14] Albert Bushnell Hart and Herbert Ronald Fergler (eds.), Theodore Roosevelt Cyclopedia (New York: Roosevelt Memorial Association, 1941), p. 452

radicalism.[15] Words and objectives were not enough for General Wood. The hero of the Spanish-American War stormed into action, establishing the Plattsburg Movement. The General set up headquarters at Plattsburg, New York. There, under his direction, young business and professional men underwent a month of military training. Sons of some of the nation's most elite families signed up; it was estimated that 1,800 men studied the rudiments of warfare -- or, more aptly, turned their hand to "soldiering" -- in 1915 at Plattsburg. It was Wood's way of filling what he considered to be the gap left by the Administration's refusal to inaugurate a training program.[16]

Meanwhile, Roosevelt's pen and oratory became more virulent. His was criticism laced with scorn as he denounced the pacifists. Bryan and his followers were not the real foes of preparedness, the former President said. He branded them as ". . . too unspeakably silly permanently to delude the nation." Rather, Wilson's halfway measures on preparedness posed the genuine peril.[17] Roosevelt was joined in the outcry by the Navy League of the United States. Wheeling up all the weapons of publicity it could

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15 National Security League Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March, 1927) Published by the National Security League, Inc., 25 West 43rd Street, New York, New York.

16 Eric Fisher Wood, Leonard Wood, Conservator of Americanism (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), p. 293.

17 Selections From the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), Vol. II, p. 477.

muster, the League trumpeted the message that a Europe at war was a threat to national security. Only military might would guarantee American safety; a Navy "second to none" must be the foundation of that strength.[18]

There were charges and countercharges. Carnegie accused the Navy League of fomenting militarism; Bryan called its members the paid agents of ship builders who stood to profit by a huge naval construction program.[19] The furor spilled over into the halls of Congress. Representative Claude Kitchin of North Carolina, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, denied the charge that the nation had degenerated into a third-rate military power. Another legislator, Representative Clyde H. Tavenner of Illinois, echoed the Bryan claim that profits alone motivated the Navy League's drive for a ship construction program.[20] The League struck back, contending that Tavenner in fact had offered to call off the attack if the League would support his bill for Government manufacture of munitions. His sole interest in such a project, the League claimed, was to obtain an armor plate factory for his Congressional District. Tavenner refused to accept the League's challenge to take his profit-motive accusation to court.[21]

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[18] Armin Rappaport, The Navy League of the United States (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), p. 51.

[19] Ibid., pp. 52-53.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., pp. 53-54.

Sandwiched between the pacifists and the preparedness supporters was the League to Enforce the Peace. Hardly a peace movement in the mold of Jane Addams and Bryan, this organization was not designed to stop the war. Rather, its purpose was to prevent future conflicts. Founded in 1915, the group was likened to a League of Nations. By a legal tribunal, a council of conciliation, new concepts of international law, and economic and military forces, the League was to establish and guarantee the future peace.[22] Wilson, in what he considered to be his most important speech up to that time, endorsed this program at the organization's May, 1916, National Assembly in Washington.[23] While not a pacifist movement, the League derived much of its support from the New York Peace Society. As the war clouds thickened over the United States in 1916, numerous pacifists deserted to the other camp. Carnegie, a principal contributor to the New York Peace Society, began to frown on anti-war activity. Both that group and the League to Enforce the Peace supported American entry into the war.[24]

In retrospect, the preparedness advocates calculated that they scored a decisive victory over the pacifists. The attempt to credit Wilson's re-election in 1916 to a peace theme -- "he kept us out of war" -- was perhaps a superficial judgment. It was questionable whether his

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[22] Ruhl F. Bartlett, The League to Enforce the Peace (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), p. 40.

[23] Ibid., p. 48.

[24] Ibid., p. 61.

return to office by a popular majority of only 568,822 votes -- 9,116,296 for Wilson and 8,547,474 for Republican Charles Evans Hughes -- could be construed as an outpouring of pacifist sentiment. Indeed, the President tended to identify himself with the "carry a big stick" philosophy in June, 1916, when he led a preparedness parade of 60 thousand marchers in the nation's capital.[25] Preparationists counted it another victory when Wilson on August 21, 1916, signed a $600 million naval construction bill calling for the completion of 156 new ships by July 1, 1919. The nation was loading its arsenals that summer and fall. Although the pacifists kept talking, the groundswell for peace which Jane Addams thought she saw in 1913 proved to be only a mirage. The United States was on the road to war. Numerous scholars later claimed British propaganda was a driving force in charting America's course.

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[25] Rappaport, op. cit., p. 60.

CHAPTER VI

THE CASE AGAINST BRITISH PROPAGANDA

In the war's aftermath, numerous scholars of neutrality advanced the thesis that the United States need not have been a party to the conflict. They contended it was London publicity which almost single-handedly laid the foundation for America's decision to take up arms. By playing on public sentiment and influencing the Administration, these scholars said, England made a mockery of Wilsonian neutrality. Greedy for munitions profits and pro-Ally at heart, the nation closed its eyes to Anglo violations of international law. Conversely, Washington kept its hand on a loaded gun in dealing with Kaiser Wilhelm's regime. This two-edged diplomacy -- a turn-the-other-cheek attitude toward London and an on-guard stance against Berlin -- finally reached the point of no return. Having played out its hand on issues which might have been resolved in a strict application of neutrality, Washington was left with no alternatives to war in April, 1917. Such were the views of some scholars in analyzing the reasons for the American decision. In all of this they detected the thread of British propaganda. Indeed, they saw it as more than a thread; rather, they conceived it to be a hangman's noose.

Among the students of World War I who advanced this thesis were Walter Millis, H. C. Peterson, Harry Elmer Barnes, James D. Squires, Edwin Borchard and William Potter Lage. Millis wrote that for years the American public had received its day-by-day picture of Europe through a British perspective. He noted that few American newspapers maintained European staffs. In other cases Europeans

often manned the foreign bureaus of American newspapers. The head of The New York Times bureau in London was an Englishman, as was most of his staff. The New York World's London correspondent was an Irishman who had never been in the United States. Beyond this, he declared, those correspondents who were American citizens often had become "Europeanized" in thinking and outlook.[1] Against this background, most New York newspapers sided with the Allies when war broke out. These pro-Ally publications included The New York Times, which Millis credited with perhaps giving the most serious attention to European events of any American newspaper.[2] That newspaper branded Germany's drive into Belgium as ". . . aggression pure and simple . . . ."[3]

He also criticized The New York Times for having retained James M. Beck, a former assistant attorney general of the United States, to examine German and British diplomatic correspondence in an attempt to fix the blame for the war. "Mr. Beck seems not to have doubted," the author observed, "his ability to arrive, upon these partial and patently unsatisfactory disclosures, at a sound judgment."[4] The Times printed Beck's conclusions, which Millis termed a "flaming defense of

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1 Millis, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

2 Ibid., p. 45.

3 The New York Times, August 4, 1914.

4 Millis, op. cit., p. 76.

the Allies and castigation of the Central Powers," on October 25, 1914.[5] Instantly popular, the article was reprinted in pamphlet form. Beck later expanded it into a book, The Evidence in the Case, which Millis called ". . . another triumph of pro-Ally propaganda."[6] Beck concluded that Germany and Austria secretly acted to impose their will upon Europe; he said it could not be determined whether they intended to ignite a general war. Beck claimed that Germany, although having the power to induce Austria to pursue a reasonable course, obviously prodded Vienna in taking an unreasonable position. Further, he contended, England and its Allies made every possible concession in the hope of preserving peace. Germany precipitated hostilities by declaring war against Russia when peace conferences were still in progress; Berlin's invasion of Belgium was without provocation and violated Belgium's inherent rights as a sovereign state; England was bound by treaty to defend Belgium.[7] Along the same vein, Millis pointed out that The New York Times on August 9, 1914, devoted its Sunday magazine to a book, Germany and the Next War, by General Friedrich von Bernhardi. Within the next several days there was overwhelming demand for the book, which contended that war was the instrument to make Germany a great power. Millis noted that no one

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5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 James M. Beck, The Evidence in the Case (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), pp. 250-251.

bothered to reprint similar works of other military writers in the Entente countries or the United States. Soon, the historian said, the ". . . stupefied Germans discovered themselves convicted before world opinion on the evidence of a few writers whom the vast majority of Germans had never read. . . ."[8] Such material, Millis said, provided highly effective ammunition for British publicity.[9] On the other side of this propaganda coin was Hudson Maxim's book, Defenseless America. Written in the heat of the preparedness movement by an American manufacturer of high explosives, the book was the inspiration for a movie, "The Battle Cry of Peace." Discussing the film, Millis wrote that hundreds of thousands of Americans saw this ". . . gory piece of propaganda for preparedness. They were . . . horrified by its portrayal of an unprepared America overrun by the brutal . . . soldiery of a foreign power which . . . uniformed its soldiers in a strangely close imitation of the Germans."[10]

Like Millis, Peterson saw in British propaganda the driving force which largely dictated America's decision for war. He contended that United States ultimately joined the Allies because Washington had surrendered claim to neutrality by giving material, diplomatic and moral support to London and Paris. Norway, Sweden,

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8 Millis, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

9 Ibid., p. 77.

10 Ibid., p. 217.

Denmark and Holland refrained from what he termed this "unneutral conduct." Policies of the Scandinavian countries and The Netherlands enabled them to stay clear of the conflict.[11] The reason America did not follow this course, he wrote, was because of British propaganda. All the persuasiveness of this publicity -- the portrayal of German savagery and the image of England's fight to save democracy -- was accepted at face value in America. "With President Wilson it was especially important," Peterson wrote, "influencing him to such an extent that he subordinated the American desire for peace with his own desire for an Anglo-French victory."[12] In building his case against British propaganda, he relied to a great extent on the American Press Résumé. Issued weekly or bi-weekly from April 12, 1915, to August 8, 1917, this report was a focal point upon which numerous efforts to educate American opinion were based. One column in the Résumé was headed "Influencing the American Press." This represented a summary of war articles in American newspapers, providing a measure of the impact of London publicity in the United States. The Résumés also contained detailed accounts of Parker's correspondence with people in America. Such correspondence helped pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in the British effort.[13]

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11 Peterson, op. cit., pp. 329-330.

12 Ibid., p. 328.

13 Ibid., pp. 23-24.

In remedying weaknesses, according to Peterson, British propagandists resorted to distortion of fact. Their techniques included telling only that part of the truth which aided their cause; the utilization of background material to imply things for which there was no evidence; exploiting the emotions and ideals of those at whom the propaganda was aimed; giving their publicity an aura of authority by using big names, quoting the enemy or appealing to legality; they used simple arguments and eliminated qualifying statements; they used endless repetition.[14] Expanding on this theme, Peterson said the British in some instances used outright falsehoods. He termed these untruths relatively unimportant; rather, it was easier and safer to give warped interpretations. The author said that by ignoring mention of good Germans, all Germans were made to appear degenerate. By omitting reference to evil Englishmen, the Germans were made to appear even worse. This technique of exploiting part-truths became high art with London publicists.[15] Peterson singled out the Bryce Report as a prime piece of propaganda in the context of presenting half-truths and distortions. For instance, this study of alleged atrocities contained an account of three German soldiers who decapitated a baby while the parents stood helplessly by.[16] The historian termed this

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14 Ibid., p. 37.

15 Ibid.

16 Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, op. cit., p. 12.

merely a new version of an atrocity story told during the Spanish-American War. In that version, Spanish soldiers chopped infants to pieces, again in the presence of the parents.[17] Noting the shock many Americans felt about supposed German atrocities, Peterson said an attempt to offset the impact of British propaganda was lost in the waves of emotion and frenzy which swept the country. A group of American newspapermen sent a telegram to the Associated Press asserting that charges of German cruelties and barbarous acts were groundless. The American journalists were in Belgium shortly after the German invasions. This impartial report from then neutral observers had little impact in their homeland.[18]

As did Millis and Peterson, Barnes severely indicted London publicists. Beyond this, he contended that resources of American finance and industry were directed wholly to the defense of the Allied powers and support of their propaganda. This stance of American economic interests was attributed in large measure to greed for war profits.[19] The nation's press, according to Barnes, followed the dictates of finance and industry; thus, most of the leading newspapers were staunchly pro-Ally by 1915 and 1916. This favoritism extended to the point that Englishmen actually took

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17 Peterson, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

18 Ibid., p. 69.

19 Harry E. Barnes, The Genesis of the World War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), pp. 606-607.

control of some newspapers.[20] Chief among the sources that Barnes used to buttress this thesis was material from journalist and author Upton Sinclair, who accused The New York Times of trying to force the nation into the war. Indeed, he said propaganda was reflected in its news columns as well as on the editorial page. As an example, Sinclair noted that the newspaper on November 26, 1915, published excerpts from the Thanksgiving Day sermons of eleven New York City clergymen. The story's headline said: "Preparedness Plea From Many Pulpits; Thanksgiving Sermons Justify War for Defense of American Liberty and Ideals." Despite this headline, Sinclair said, only three of the sermons contained statements which might have been construed as endorsing propaganda.[21] Nor was Sinclair's criticism limited to newspapers; he had equally harsh words for some of the magazines. McClure's, he declared, became an exponent for preparedness even before war broke out. Current Opinion dropped its policy of reprinting from other publications and introduced propaganda of its own. Literary Digest, supposedly an impartial survey of public opinion, became an organ of hate.[22] As for Barnes, he did not confine his charges of pro-Ally sentiments to the press and finance

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20 Ibid., pp. 608-609.

21 Upton Sinclair, The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism (New York: Albert Charles Bonni, 1936 revised edition), p. 377.

22 Ibid.

and industry. Indeed, he accused American officials of falling prey to Anglo publicity. He singled out Walter Hines Page, American ambassador to Britain during the war. The historian charged that the diplomat's pro-British leanings impaired American neutrality. Foreign policy from 1914 to 1919, he wrote, would have been far different had the United States possessed at the Court of St. James an ambassador who was competent, fair-minded and judicious.[23] Page's ". . . maladministration of his duties," Barnes wrote, "was a chief obstacle to American impartiality in dealing with the belligerent nations after 1914."[24] Another scholar of neutrality, C. Hartley Grattan, provided much of the ammunition for Barnes. Page was guilty, Grattan wrote, of swallowing ". . . the whole of British propaganda, hook, line and sinker."[25] The ambassador failed to realize, he added, that Germany was not alone in the use of propaganda; Britain also resorted to it. Page constantly repudiated German opinions as propaganda; he invariably supported English opinions, no matter how much distorted, as the truth. "This propaganda achieved the amazing coup," Grattan observed, "of writing

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23 Barnes, op. cit., p. 603.

24 Ibid., p. 643.

25 C. Hartley Grattan, "The Walter Hines Page Legend," American Mercury, Vol. III, September 1925.

. . . the official communications of the American ambassador to London."[26]

Less venomous than Barnes in his attack on Anglo publicity, Squires concluded that British propaganda was at least a major contributing factor in bringing America into the war. There never will be agreement, he wrote, on the degree to which England's publicists influenced the Washington decision. "It was not the cause," he said, "for American entrance into the World War. But that it was a cause, and a powerful one, it seems impossible for the historian today to deny."[27] He termed his conclusion identical with that of another student of war propaganda, Ralph Lutz.[28] Whether Squires and Lutz actually reached identical conclusions is perhaps open to question. Unlike Squires, Lutz was far less specific in attempting to weigh the impact of British propaganda on America. Whereas Squires termed the publicity "a cause, and a very powerful one" in charting Washington's course, Lutz said only that propaganda ". . . was not the determining factor in forcing the United States into the war."[29] Certainly, the two scholars were in accord on the issue that propaganda was not the principal cause. Yet, Lutz did not even attempt

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26 Ibid.

27 Squires, op. cit., p. 81.

28 Ibid.

29 Ralph Lutz, "Studies of World War Propaganda, 1914-1933," The Journal of Modern History, Vol. V, March-December 1933.

to assess the influence of propaganda as a powerful influence. In this sense, his analysis was not identical with that of Squires.

Squires wrote that two immediate causes -- German resumption of unrestricted warfare and interception of the Zimmermann Telegram -- underpinned the Washington decision.[30] In addition, he found six underlying causes. These included the Anglo-American bonds forged by culture, language and history; indignation in the United States over Germany's invasion of Belgium; a fear, especially along the Atlantic seaboard, that a Berlin victory would imperil American safety; the fact that by 1917 the nation had a tremendous stake in an Allied victory; shock at the cruelty and brutality of modern warfare, epitomized by the sinking of the Lusitania; finally, the impact of British propaganda.[31] "Skillfully interweaving itself into the other five elements," Squires wrote, ". . . the British propaganda was a force of real potency in compelling the decision of April 6."[32] As witness to the skill and cunning of London publicists, he offered Ambassador Bernstorff. Declaring that Americans were fair game for anything clothed in sentiment, the German diplomat said that British propaganda exploited this circumstance ". . . with the greatest refinement in the case of the German invasion of 'poor little

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30 Squires, op. cit., p. 64.

31 Ibid., pp. 64-66.

32 Ibid., p. 66

Belgium,' the shooting of the 'heroic nurse,' Edith Cavell, and other incidents."[33] Squires also noted that Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo praised the expertise of London publicists. McAdoo wrote that an artistic unity and singleness of purpose characterized British propaganda in the United States. London gradually built up the impression that the Germans were barbarians. Eventually, he wrote, the British convinced a large number of Americans that German soldiers had cut off the hands of Belgian children.[34]

Two other scholars of neutrality, Borchard and Lage, declared that Anglo publicity, playing on a naive America, succeeded in making the United States an instrument of England's foreign policy.[35] It was their view that Washington, neutral in stated policy, was unneutral in practice almost from the war's outset. Their documentation for this came from Ray Stannard Baker, who wrote that by October, 1914, the United States was no longer neutral; heavy trade carried with it, even if informally and undeclared, a commitment to the Allied cause.[36] Borchard and Lage maintained that the United States adopted a hostile attitude toward Germany when grievances arose over

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[33] Bernstorff, op. cit., p. 53.

[34] William G. McAdoo, Crowded Years: The Reminiscences of William G. McAdoo (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), p. 322.

[35] Baker, op. cit., p. 181.

[36] Edwin Borchard and William Potter Lage, Neutrality for the United States (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), p. 39.

neutrality. Conversely, the policy toward Britain was a go-softly approach even on issues of major importance. Legal questions might have been approached with far more understanding had the United States been neutral in practice as well as in name.[37] As one example of this double-edged diplomacy, the authors cited the American position concerning armed merchantmen. In what they termed an "unsustainable position," Washington held that German submarines had no right to fire on or sink an armed merchantman which had Americans on board. And this despite the British Admiralty's orders to ram or fire at submarines on sight.[38] Thus, in the view of these two scholars, the United States undertook to defend British merchantmen from attack by their enemy.

Borchard and Lage saw the influence of Lansing in this two-pronged neutrality. As early as July, 1915, they said, Lansing admitted his pro-Ally sympathies. During the furor over the Lusitania, he drafted a personal memorandum concluding that Berlin was hostile toward all nations with democratic institutions. Declaring that Germany must not be allowed to win the war, his memorandum said American public opinion had to be conditioned for eventual abandonment of neutrality in favor of joining the fight for democracy.[39]

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37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

39 Robert Lansing, War Memoirs of Robert Lansing (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1935), pp. 19-21.

Borchard and Lage also noted Lansing's admission that diplomatic correspondence to Britain was couched in language designed to help prevent a rupture in relations. The Secretary of State said that his dispatches were steeped in verbosity, opening up new topics of discussion rather than ending those in controversy. Short, emphatic correspondence, he wrote, carried the peril of damaging beyond repair the bonds of friendship between the United States and England. Often, Lansing said, he feared his notes might have demanded too much of Britain. All of this careful attention to detail was in preparation for the day when America would enter the war on the British side.[40] Borchard and Lage also emphasized Wilson's pro-Ally sentiments. For example, only eight days after issuing the Declaration of Neutrality, Wilson told Colonel House that a German victory would change the course of civilization and make the United States a military nation.[41] It was in this context -- a two-edged diplomacy shaped largely by British propaganda -- that a gullible America took up arms in 1917, according to these scholars of neutrality.

It is, of course, impossible to know what direction American public opinion and Wilsonian diplomacy would have taken had that propaganda not been present. Many of the works that attempt to pinpoint London publicity as the fundamental cause for American entry

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[40] Ibid., p. 128.

[41] Charles Seymour, The Intimate Papers of Colonel House (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), Vol. I, p. 293.

into the war were written on the eve of World War II. Indeed, scholars of neutrality were dealing not only with the past; perhaps it is fair to say their conclusions may have been influenced in part by what they saw, or thought they saw, in the contemporary scene of the 1930's: The specter of a repetition of 1914-1917, with British propaganda at the forefront as a force which might lead the United States into an unnecessary war. One Wilsonian scholar, Arthur S. Link, believed these students of neutrality attached too much importance to London publicity. Writing in 1954, he detected a superficiality in studies of World War I propaganda.[42] Minimizing London propaganda as a molder of public opinion in the United States, he expressed doubt that Americans of the 1914-1917 scene were as uninformed about the origins of the war as a later generation believed.[43] Nor did he conclude that German propaganda was a failure. "Far from being inept and unsuited to the American mentality," Link wrote, "much of the German propaganda was skillfully executed . . . ."[44] In his view, Berlin's publicity effort did not fail because of blunders. Rather, it was because a majority of thoughtful Americans had made up their minds on the causes and issues of the war ahead of the time that either

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[42] Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), p. 145.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., p. 146.

German or British propaganda agencies were effectively at work in the United States. At the root of this thinking, he wrote, was a fear of German naval ambitions in the Caribbean and a mistrust of Kaiser Wilhelm and his military advisers. Even more important were Germany's actions immediately before and after the outbreak of hostilities. Failure to submit the Serbian question to arbitration and violation of Belgian neutrality were regarded as defiance of the moral conscience of the world.[45] It was not, Link wrote, British propaganda, atrocity stories and emotionalism which shaped the preponderant American thinking during the first months of the war. Rather, opinion was shaped by a fairly keen analysis of world affairs and an awareness of German actions. This thinking was strengthened by subsequent events, especially submarine warfare. It was easy to overestimate the importance of the Bryce Report, he said, noting that Wilson refused to believe the atrocity stories.[46] These questions then are posed: Was it a gullible America, propelled by British propaganda, that went to war in 1917? Or was it an America pursuing an independent course?

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., p. 148.

CHAPTER VII

DECISION FOR WAR

As late as December 1916, Wilson still hoped that American peace overtures might silence the guns of August and relight the lamps of Europe. In the previous two and one-half years both London and Berlin had strained his diplomacy to the breaking point. England, abandoning the provisions for rights of neutrals set forth in the Declaration of London, laid down her own rules on contraband and search and seizure. Washington protested with regularity, claiming the rules were unduly harsh and often in conflict with international law. London's responses frequently were unsatisfactory. The widening gulf in Anglo-American relations during the summer and fall of 1916 posed complex issues on the lengths to which Wilson and the Congress would go in enforcing rights of neutrality. Confrontations with Britain were tempered in part by U-boat warfare and other bones of contention in German-American relations. It was indeed, a two-front diplomatic struggle for Washington.

The stage for conflict between England and the United States was set when war broke out. A pivotal point was the Declaration of London, drafted on February 26, 1909, but never ratified by any nation. Despite this weakness, it was the only concise statement of neutral trade rights existing in 1914. The agreement allowed great freedom for non-belligerent commerce and specifically exempted from seizure as contraband such important American exports as copper ore and cotton.[1] Washington requested

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[1] Notter, op. cit., p. 321.

that both London and Berlin adhere to the Declaration. Germany made her approval contingent upon British willingness to abide by the pact; England said she would observe the agreement only with severe modifications. She quickly issued a succession of Orders in Council which drastically changed the Declaration's provisions on belligerent rights to interfere with neutral commerce. For example, the 1909 agreement classified balloons, airplanes and their accessory parts as conditional contraband -- subject to capture only if it was shown they were destined for an enemy Government. Britain proclaimed these items absolute contraband -- liable to seizure if they were bound for a foe or to territory the enemy owned or occupied.[2] England's unyielding attitude convinced Lansing that it was futile to press for belligerent adherence to the Declaration. Wilson, adopting the same view, approved Lansing's note to Britain withdrawing Washington insistence on the agreement as the basis for American demands concerning neutral trade rights. The message, sent on October 22, 1914, proclaimed treaties and international law as the criteria for American rights. The United States reserved the right to lodge a protest each time her trade privileges were violated.[3]

London responded on October 29 by expanding the list of prohibited exports. Classified as absolute contraband were motor tires, rubber,

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2 Coleman Phillipson, International Law and the Great War (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1915), pp. 330-331.

3 Ray Stannard Baker, Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters: Neutrality, 1914-1915 (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1935), Vol. V, pp. 217-218.

mineral oils, gasoline and unwrought copper. Placed in the conditional category were hides, pigskins and leather.[4] The British Admiralty on November 2 classified the North Sea as a war area; neutral trading vessels were warned of grave dangers from mines and warships.[5] England on March 11, 1915, began a naval blockade of Germany. British prize courts were empowered to condemn goods sent to the Scandinavian countries and Holland which might have reached Germany by evasion of neutral export boycotts; additionally, the courts also could confiscate goods which might replace other items to be shipped from the neutral stock of Scandinavia or The Netherlands. Raw goods en route to neutral ports were condemned if it was thought they could be manufactured into products which might reach Germany.[6] Wilson's initial response was merely a dispatch asserting his expectation that the blockade would not violate international law.[7] In August, however, London placed cotton on the absolute contraband list, jeopardizing the American South's economy. A furor followed; on October 21, Washington protested in a communication which amounted ". . . to an indictment of the entire British policy. . . ."[8] The dispatch censured England's practice of detaining neutral cargoes without clear

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4 Phillipson, op. cit., p. 331

5 Ibid., p. 381.

6 Borchard and Lage, op. cit., pp. 203-204.

7 May, op. cit., p. 325.

8 Baker, op. cit., p. 384.

proof of destination and announced the United States would not be bound by decisions of British prize courts. Although the protest strongly criticized the blockade, there was no demand to lift it; nor did Washington threaten reprisals.[9] Legality of the blockade was at issue because London did not proclaim it as such. Even so, the effect was the same, because the British fleet closed nearly all water entrances to Germany.[10]

London took some of the hostility out of the contraband lists by making substantial purchases of American cotton, helping stabilize the crop's price.[11] But other grave issues counteracted this gesture. Britain and France on July 7, 1916, formally discontinued all observance of the Declaration of London. Instead, they would be bound by the principles of international law.[12] London fomented another storm on July 18 by blacklisting eighty-five American firms; this prohibited British subjects from doing business with any of these companies. The action was based on the belief that the firms had commercial links with Germany. Particularly, they were suspected of doing business with Germans in South America. Washington protested on July 26, a Wednesday.

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[9] May, op. cit., p. 327.

[10] Ibid., pp. 307-308.

[11] Ibid., p. 344.

[12] Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1916 Supplement, The World War (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1929), p. 408.

A memorandum issued with the formal communication noted the blacklisting had aroused an intense anti-British feeling in the United States. Because of this animosity, the State Department told Britain of plans to inform American newspapers of the protest on Saturday.[13] The complaint accused London of brushing aside neutral trade rights in blacklisting the companies. "It is manifestly out of the question," the protest asserted, "that . . . the United States should acquiesce in such . . . punishment to its citizens."[14] England attempted to mollify the State Department and American public opinion. Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, British Ambassador to the United States, assured Washington that specific grievances would be taken up and, if justified, individual firms removed from the list.[15] Such gestures lacked the substance to calm Washington. Wilson pressed for retaliatory powers; Congress responded, enacting legislation which permitted the President to stop the importation of all goods from the Allies and to deny clearance to ships that would not transport products for the blacklisted firms. In effect, he was armed with the economic weapons to embargo the export of munitions to the Allies.[16] The stage was set and the props at hand for a showdown; the

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13 Ibid., p. 422.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 419.

16 May, op. cit., pp. 330-331.

curtain did not go up. This was due in part to another stage. Alongside Britain stood Germany as a powerful belligerent with which Wilson had to deal in his pursuit of neutrality.

Countering what German statesmen called London's "mockery of all principles of the laws of nations," Germany on February 4, 1915, designated the English Channel as a war zone. Neutral ships were warned to stay clear of those waters. Accidents were bound to occur, the decree said, even though the German Navy had been instructed not to fire on neutral ships.[17] Washington said it would construe any loss of American lives or vessels at German hands as ". . . an indefensible violation of neutral rights. . . ."[18] The American position posed a dilemma for Germany. On the one hand there was Chancellor Theobald Bethmann-Hollweg's determination to keep the United States out of war; this was countered by the German Admiralty's insistence on U-boat warfare.[19] Then came the torpedoing of the Lusitania. Washington told Berlin that expressions of regret and offers of reparation, even if they satisfied international obligations, were not sufficient to justify the use of submarines against neutrals. The communication, emphasizing the right of Americans to travel where they pleased on the high seas, asked

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17 Diplomatic Correspondence Between the United States and Germany, August 1, 1914-April 6, 1917, ed. James Brown Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), pp. 25-27.

18 Ibid., p. 28.

19 Karl E. Birnbaum, Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 1958), p. 26.

Berlin to disavow the acts of its submarine commanders and to make certain that there was no recurrence.[20] Germany's response simply challenged the facts concerning the sinking and invited prolonged debate; she offered little hope for curtailing of U-boat warfare.[21] Wilson had to make a key decision: Whether to go softly as advocated by Bryan or to pursue the aggressive course urged by Lansing and House. The President elected the latter course and Bryan resigned in protest. Washington dispatched a second note to Berlin on June 9, 1915, declaring the United States could not admit the legality of the English Channel as a war zone. To do so, the communication said, would negate the rights of United States shipmasters and American citizens to go where legitimate business took them; this included travel on belligerent ships. Washington viewed these rights as inviolable.[22]

Despite the aggressiveness in stating the American position, little real headway was made in resolving the differences. Although Wilson's attitude toward Germany was described as patient, he refused to retreat from the position that German submarine commanders must spare American lives.[23] Then came another crisis. Two Americans perished when a U-boat

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20 Diplomatic Correspondence Between the United States and Germany, op. cit., p. 44.

21 May, op. cit., p. 161.

22 Diplomatic Correspondence Between the United States and Germany, op. cit., p. 55.

23 May, op. cit., p. 161.

sank the British liner Arabic on August 19, 1915. In the uproar which followed, Bernstorff went the limit -- and perhaps even exceeded his authority -- in trying to soothe the Wilson Administration. He assured the State Department that U-boats henceforth would give due warning and provide for the safety of non-combatants before torpedoing passenger ships.[24] Wilson by now largely was keeping his own counsel in shaping American policy toward Germany. Both House and Lansing advised drastic action after the Arabic was sunk. House wanted to convene an emergency session of Congress; Lansing favored severing relations with Germany. The President rejected both proposals.[25]

The next major confrontation between the two nations did bring a threat from Washington to break off diplomatic ties. The French steamer Sussex, an unarmed vessel used for Channel crossings, was torpedoed without warning by a U-boat on March 24, 1916. Several of the twenty-four Americans aboard were injured. The torpedoing of the steamer was called, to that point in the war, the gravest crisis in German-American diplomacy.[26] Wilson went before Congress to assail Berlin. The German Government, he said, had been unable to put any restraints on submarine warfare. He reiterated the American position: Use of U-boats was

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[24] Millis, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

[25] May, op. cit., p. 161.

[26] Birnbaum, op. cit., p. 328.

incompatible with the principles of humanity and the long-established rights of neutrals.[27] The State Department sent an ultimatum to Berlin on April 18. U-boat attacks, the dispatch said, were flagrant offenses against what the United States considered to be ". . . the sacred and indisputable rights of international and universally recognized dictates of humanity. . . ." If the U-boat raids continued, the communication said, Washington's only recourse would be to sever diplomatic relations.[28] This stance again pitted Bethmann-Hollweg against the Admiralty; again, the Chancellor emerged victorious. He won from the Kaiser and the Admiralty the most far-reaching concessions yet made to the United States. In a dispatch on May 4, Berlin stated it would go to the utmost lengths in order to preserve German-American harmony. Berlin believed that naval warfare should be confined to belligerents, thereby guaranteeing freedom of the seas for neutrals. With this view, the communication said, Germany had instructed her naval forces not to fire on merchant ships without giving warning; additionally, submarine commanders had been ordered to make provision for saving human lives. The only exceptions would be where vessels offered resistance or attempted to escape. Berlin stipulated one important reservation: Washington was expected to undertake negotiations with Britain which would restore freedom of the seas for neutrals. A cutback in submarine warfare, therefore, was contingent

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27 Congressional Record, Sixty-Fourth Congress, First Session, Vol. LIII, Part 7 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 6422.

28 Foreign Relations, 1916 Supplement, op. cit., p. 234.

upon America's ability to end the blockade. If Washington failed in these efforts, then Germany would reserve complete liberty of action regarding future submarine warfare.[29] The United States refused to recognize this condition; an American note informed Bethmann-Hollweg that the submarine policy could not be ". . . contingent upon the course or result of diplomatic relations between the Government of the United States and any other belligerent Government. . . ."[30] Germany did not reply to this dispatch.

With Berlin's modification of U-boat warfare, there appeared in the late fall and winter of 1916 a kind of impasse in American pursuit of neutrality. Wilson attempted to press his case against London, lodging protests and arming himself with weapons to counter what he considered to be British encroachments on American commerce. Yet, he did not resort to economic sanctions which might have crippled the Allied war effort. The influence of House and Lansing may have tempered the President's actions. And whatever the complaints against Britain, the nation's war prosperity was very real. There also was the upcoming election. These were the issues immediately at hand. Beyond all of these -- and perhaps overshadowing them -- was Wilson's fervent wish to see peace restored. Re-elected in November, the President made an effort toward that end. His bid was preceded by a German peace feeler on December 12, 1916. The overture, transmitted through diplomatic channels

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29 Ibid., pp. 259-260.

30 Ibid., p. 263.

of America and other neutrals, renewed the contention that the war had been forced on Germany. Boasting of military and economic strength, the Kaiser's Government pronounced itself ready to fight to the end. Nonetheless, without offering specific details, Berlin declared a willingness to negotiate.[31] Wilson dispatched a communication to belligerents on December 18 suggesting they outline their conditions for peace. This request for disclosure of specific demands placed Germany in an embarrassing position. Both Bethmann-Hollweg and Arthur Zimmermann, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, believed a statement of peace terms would be disadvantageous to their country. Zimmermann also feared a Wilson role in negotiations. Distrusting the American President, the German Foreign Secretary wished at all costs to prevent him from having a hand in a settlement.[32]

Because of this unwillingness to state her terms and the suspicion of Wilson, Germany framed an ambiguous reply. Berlin referred to its own overture of December 12 and asked the warring nations assemble on neutral ground to consider peace. There was no mention of terms.[33] The reply was an important turning point in German policy toward the United States. For one thing, the vagueness made it easier for the Allies to

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31 Diplomatic Correspondence Between the United States and Germany, op. cit., p. 275.

32 Birnbaum, op. cit., p. 332.

33 Diplomatic Correspondence Between the United States and Germany, op. cit., p. 290.

rebuff all peace feelers. More important, it hastened the deterioration of prospects for creating a peace alternative to U-boat warfare. The Berlin communication, and the skepticism toward Wilson which was a factor in its wording, compounded Germany's problems in using submarines while remaining at peace with the United States.[34]

Replying on December 29 to the proposals for talks, the Allies branded the Berlin offer as being without substance. "A suggestion without any conditions for initiating negotiations," Britain and France said, "is not an offer of peace."[35] Wilson kept his hopes alive despite these setbacks. Addressing the Senate on January 17, 1917, the President urged the family of nations to adopt the Monroe Doctrine on an international scope. He suggested that no nation should seek to dominate another; rather, all nations, both great and small, should be free to develop according to their own lights.[36] These idealistic aspirations soon were washed away in the currents of realism. Indeed, although he did not know it, time had run out even before his address to the Senate. On January 9, with the prospect for peace negotiations apparently doomed, Germany decided to renew unrestricted submarine warfare.

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[34] Birnbaum, op. cit., p. 333.

[35] Diplomatic Correspondence Between the United States and Germany, op. cit., p. 277.

[36] Congressional Record, Sixty-Fourth Congress, Second Session, Vol. LIV, Part 3, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), p. 1743.

Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Ludendorff, who had taken over the Supreme High Command in August, 1916, were unrelenting in the quest for total U-boat offensives. Bethmann-Hollweg managed to stay them until the January 9 Crown Council meeting, when the militarists won their case in a presentation before Kaiser Wilhelm. Unlimited submarine attacks would leave England prostrate within six months, well ahead of the time that America's possible entry into the war could be decisive. Ludendorff said the Supreme High Command would not be responsible for the war if U-boat restrictions continued. Bethmann-Hollweg warned that giving the submarines license to kill might bring the United States into the war. Willing to risk conflict with America, the Kaiser approved full revival of submarine action.[37]

The next development came on the very day Wilson proposed a Monroe Doctrine for the world. Britain on January 19 intercepted the Zimmermann Telegram to the German Embassy in Mexico City. By January 24 the telegram had been decoded and the contents transmitted to Washington. Zimmermann revealed Germany's plan to resume unrestricted U-boat warfare on February 1. Berlin hoped the action would not draw America into the struggle. Failing this, Zimmermann proposed a German-Mexican alliance. For Mexico, there was the promise of German financing and the lure of regaining territory in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. The Mexican Government, of course, rejected the proposal.[38] Berlin's official notice to

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[37] Birnbaum, op. cit., p. 322.

[38] Diplomatic Correspondence Between the United States and Germany, op. cit., p. 338.

Washington concerning resumption of a total submarine offensive was delivered on January 31. Accusing the Allies of rejecting peace overtures in favor of a war to crush her, Germany said full U-boat warfare was the only recourse. After February 1, all ships, including neutrals, would be sunk in a war zone around Britain, France and Italy.[39] Washington reaction was immediate; a communication from Lansing to Bernstorff on February 3 announced the severing of German-American relations. The Secretary of State noted the American warning of April, 1916, concerning unrestricted submarine warfare.[40] Going before Congress to announce the diplomatic break, Wilson still sought to fan the embers of his peace aspirations. ". . . I refuse to believe," he said, "that it is the intention of the German authorities to do in fact what they have warned us they will feel at liberty to do."[41]

Only twenty-three days later the President was again before Congress -- this time to seek approval for the arming of American merchantmen. The Germans had sunk two American vessels, the Housatonic and the Lyman M. Law. Shipowners' unwillingness to put their vessels to sea in the face of the U-boat threat was damaging American commerce. Wilson expressed hope of averting war. "The American people do not want it," he declared,

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39 Ibid., p. 301.

40 Ibid., p. 305.

41 Congressional Record, Sixty-Fourth Congress, Second Session, Vol. LIV, Part 3, op. cit., p. 2550.

"and our desire is not different from theirs."[42] Yet, the loss of lives and shipping continued. Germany sank seven American ships during February and March with a loss of thirty-six lives.[43] To Lansing, this prefaced only one course -- war. His certainty of the outcome was expressed in a communication to the President on March 17. Armed conflict was inevitable, the Secretary of State wrote, because of Germany's continuing attacks on American shipping. An incident was bound to arise which would provoke war.[44] Wilson clung to his goals for peace. He was told at a Cabinet meeting on March 20 that public pressure might force his hand on the war issue. "I do not care for public demand," he replied. "I want to do right, whether popular or not."[45] The end was near even as he spoke. That very day he and the Cabinet decided to call an emergency session of Congress and seek a declaration of war against Germany. The nation's lawmakers convened on April 2 to hear the Administration's request. The President decried Berlin's war on non-belligerent shipping, the German sabotage campaign in the United States,

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42 Ibid., Vol. LIV, Part 5, p. 4326.

43 Borchard and Lage, op. cit., p. 359.

44 Seventy-Fourth Congress, Second Session, House Document No. 52, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Lansing Papers 1914-1920 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), Vol. I, pp. 626-627.

45 E. David Cronon (ed.), The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), pp. 117-118.

and the intrigues of the Zimmermann Note. Wilson said that vessels of every kind, including hospital ships bound for Belgium, were being sent to the bottom. "The . . . German submarine warfare against commerce is warfare against mankind," he asserted.[46] Congress concurred; the American decision was a declaration of war against Germany.

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[46] Congressional Record, Special Session of the Senate and Sixty-Fifth Congress, First Session, Vol. LV, Part 1, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), pp. 118-119.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

World War I ushered in numerous new techniques of warfare; these advances were not limited to technology. In a social and political sense, the emergence of propaganda as a force to influence public opinion was perhaps as significant as developments in weaponry. The war was not confined to the battlefield; there was the "other front" where the belligerents fought to win world-wide public favor for themselves. Indeed, so intense was this struggle -- the war of propaganda -- that some scholars held it chiefly responsible for bringing America into the battle against Germany. They proclaimed British publicity as the driving force behind Washington's decision to take up arms.

London began at the war's outset to build a propaganda machine. An operation largely veiled in secrecy, it often was frustrated by departmental friction and duplication of effort. Not until Lloyd George became Prime Minister did the English achieve a semblance of unity in this field. He first established a Department of Information and placed a Cabinet Minister, Lord Carson, in charge of it. Even this did not end the discord. In February, 1918, the Prime Minister took the final step in a long series of realignments. He gave the program Cabinet status by creating a Ministry of Information; to this post he appointed Lord Beaverbrook, who had been active in propaganda work throughout the war. Assisted by Lord Northcliffe, Beaverbrook assembled a propaganda machine which was almost corporatelike in structure and efficiency. While the two publishers reaped much of the credit, another figure was almost solely responsible for British publicity in America. This was

Sir Gilbert Parker; he and his staff mailed pamphlets, articles and other materials to Americans. Distinguished Englishmen wrote articles for American newspapers and went to the United States to espouse the British cause. To reach rural areas, Parker provided 360 small American newspapers with an English weekly which published reviews and comments on the war. There also were films, photographs, cartoons, drawings and diagrams for American consumption. Films, Parker said, enabled Britain to reach the "man in the street." To make contact with American intellectuals, scholars at Oxford University wrote the Oxford Pamphlets. Often grounded in scholarship, these pamphlets nonetheless conveyed the tenor of England's appeal to America.

This plea portrayed Berlin autocracy as satanic, violating all moral standards. Conversely, Britain was projected as the defender of democracy. One of the principal tools in London's play on American emotions was atrocity propaganda. Reports of German savagery ranged from stories about brutality in Belgium to the sinking of the Lusitania and the execution of Edith Cavell. These stories sought to ignite an America which, in the Anglo view, was already sympathetic toward England by ties of history and culture. The British words did not go unchallenged. Germany, too, sought American favor. Like London, Berlin faced severe problems in trying to set up a workable program. There was very little departmental cooperation, a difficulty which was compounded by jealousy and the militarists' lack of understanding about propaganda. Ambassador Bernstorff emerged as the main figure in Berlin's publicity campaign. Articulate and public-relations minded, he set up press offices in both

New York City and Washington where American journalists could interview him and get the German viewpoint.

In their attempts to influence Americans, the Germans tried to foster mistrust of England and France and sought to nourish a pacifist movement./ Berlin dwelled on the theme that it was the injured party; surrounded by powerful foes, Germany had been forced to go to war. She was actually a peace-loving nation. This theme was marred in large measure by reports of sabotage in war plants and aboard munitions ships bound for Allied ports. Documents captured in both Britain and the United States gave an air of credibility to German intrigues. At post-war hearings, the Germans said their propaganda in America failed because of the image left by these conspiracies and the implications of brutality in such incidents as the sinking of the Lusitania. Americans did not accept Berlin's publicity, the Germans concluded, because it was contrary to the realism of political and military actions.

Whatever the overtures of British and German propaganda, President Wilson admonished Americans to be neutral in fact as well as in name. On a lesser scale, this course proved almost as difficult on the home front as abroad. There were substantial profits to be had in war goods production and munitions trade. The question was whether the nation could reap these economic gains and still be truly non-belligerent. The State Department ruled that while the Federal Government could not engage in this traffic, there was nothing to bar private citizens from manufacturing and selling arms and munitions to the warring nations. Likewise, the Administration permitted private sources to grant war

credits to the belligerents. These two measures cleared the way for the nation to thrive on wartime trade. Not so easily resolved, however, was the rift between the pacifists and the preparationists. The preparationists considered themselves victorious when Wilson signed a $600 million naval construction bill.

Abroad, the nation's neutrality was put to rigid tests by both England and Germany. Britain's enforcement of the blockade and policies regarding blacklisting and contraband provided continuing friction in Anglo-American relations. Washington, after concluding it was futile to press for British adherence to the Declaration of London as the yardstick for neutral trade rights, protested with regularity what were viewed as infringements on American commerce. Indeed, the denunciations challenged the principles of London's blockade and rules on contraband. The protests represented an indictment of the entire British policy. American hostility reached a peak in the summer and fall of 1916 when Congress enacted legislation empowering Wilson to effect an arms embargo. This was the aftermath of the British blacklisting of eighty-five American firms which London suspected of having links or dealing with Germany.

Whatever the resentment against England, Wilson never used the economic weapons at his command. In part, this was attributable to the strain which Germany placed on Washington. The sinking of the Lusitania, the torpedoing of the Sussex, and reports of German intrigues and sabotage in the United States provided a sore point which brought an American threat to sever relations in the spring of 1916. Berlin responded by

ordering its submarine commanders not to fire on merchant ships without giving warning; additionally, provisions were to be made for the saving of human lives. By winning these concessions from the German Admiralty, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg managed to avert a break with Washington. And Wilson, in spite of the hostility toward Britain, was able to turn his attention to peacemaking in the winter of 1916. Preceding his proposal was a Berlin offer which, while acclaiming Germany's strength and certainty of victory, announced a readiness to discuss peace. There was no mention of terms. Wilson then asked the belligerents to get forth their conditions for ending the war. Neither Bethmann-Hollweg nor Zimmermann wanted to do this, believing it would be to Germany's disadvantage. Additionally, Zimmermann mistrusted the American President and feared he might have a role in negotiations.

Against this background, the German response to Wilson was simply a reiteration of Berlin's previous offer and a suggestion that belligerents assemble on neutral ground to discuss the issues. This reply represented an important turning point in German-American relations; it made the Allies' task easier in rebuffing the overtures. More important, the reply hastened the deterioration of prospects for creating a peace alternative to U-boat warfare. Britain and France spurned Berlin's bid for talks, largely on the premise that terms were not declared. Amid these setbacks, Kaiser Wilhelm elected to take the advice of his militarists who demanded renewal of total submarine offensives. Bethmann-Hollweg warned of the perils this course held in provoking America. For Wilson, peace aspirations still lived. He went before the Senate on

January 22 to outline his peace aims, suggesting the family of nations adopt the Monroe Doctrine as a world-wide yardstick in keeping the peace. Unfortunately, time had run out on him. Britain intercepted the Zimmermann Note, which revealed plans to resume unrestricted submarine warfare and proposed a German-Mexican alliance if the United States entered the war. Then, on January 31, Berlin notified Washington of the return to all-out U-boat attacks, including raids on neutral shipping. This brought an immediate break in relations, just as Washington had warned in the spring of 1916. After first resorting to the arming of American merchantmen, Wilson sent before Congress on April 2 to ask for a declaration of war against Germany. In his request, he cited the continuing loss of American lives and ships to U-boats, the Zimmermann Note and German sabotage. Submarine warfare against commerce, he asserted, was ". . . warfare against mankind." This was the background against which America took up arms.

Some students of neutrality concluded in post-war studies that it was British propaganda which drove the United States into the war. In the view of these scholars, London publicity played upon American sentiment and made a mockery of Wilsonian neutrality. They accused House, Lansing -- and even the President -- of strong pro-Ally feelings despite the nation's hands-off diplomacy. These students contended that the nation, greedy for war profits and eager for an Anglo victory, actually practiced a double standard of neutrality. The United States, they charged, closed its eyes to English violations of international law. For Germany, on the other hand, there was an on-guard stance and the

speedy dispatch of ultimatums at the slightest provocation. This pro-Ally attitude prevented finding solutions to issues which might have been resolved in 1915 and 1916. Finally, in the spring of 1917, America had played out its hand; there was no alternative to war. In all of this -- according to such scholars of neutrality as Peterson, Barnes, Millis, Borchard, and Squires -- the role of British propaganda was overpowering.

The validity of these charges must be weighed against the course of events in America's relations with both England and Germany. Whatever the impact of London's publicity, the controversies involving Britain's blockade, blacklisting and contraband cannot be ignored. They were serious enough that both Congress and Wilson favored economic measures which, if executed, could have seriously hampered the Allied war effort. While the Administration did not utilize the available powers of economic boycott, Washington was sufficiently provoked in the summer and fall of 1916 to have these weapons ready. The issues behind this move were substantive in nature. Regardless of the British sympathies which the highest leaders in the Administration may have held, they did lodge severe protests with London. Whether Parker's publicity helped soften the stands which might have been taken -- including an embargo -- cannot be determined. It can be said, however, that munitions trade and granting of war credits served the nation's economic interests. Instituting a boycott would have ended the war profits. These factors must be weighed in assessing American policy toward Britain. Perhaps

it amounted to greed; by any definition, the trade was legitimate. Even the Germans did not question it until after the Battle of the Marne.

On the other side of the coin, the confrontations between the United States and Germany ran a two-year course and more before war was declared. In the interim between the sinking of the Lusitania and the decision to take up arms, there were serious provocations -- losses of American ships and lives to German torpedoes. In these situations Wilson largely kept his own counsel; he did not yield to the severe demands made by Lansing and House. Indeed, the statement that the President was both firm and patient with Germany seems to be a fair assessment. The figure of Wilson looms large, overshadowing those of his key advisers, in analyzing German-American relations. He rejected the go-softly policy which Bryan advocated in dealing with Berlin; by the same token, the President ruled out the harsh measures favored by Lansing and House. American neutrality and a desire for peace surely were Wilson's two principal motivations. He still was actively bidding for peace in January, 1917. His was not a war policy; he bowed to war only when the nation's interests were directly at stake and it became clear that Germany meant what she said about total U-boat warfare. The loss of American ships and lives proved it. Washington severed relations with Berlin on February 3; two more months elapsed before the decision was made to take up arms. With these grave issues widening the gulf between Washington and Berlin, it is questionable whether British propaganda somehow drove the nation to war. Perhaps it is more likely that Kaiser Wilhelm flung the door wide open to American entry

into the conflict when he accepted the advice of his militarists over that of Bethmann-Hollweg. Of course, it can never be known what would have been the case, as far as American neutrality and ultimate entrance into the war is concerned, had British propaganda not been present.

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