

Fear of Infectious Dissent: First World War Military Intelligence, Labor, and the Conscientious Objection of Erling Lunde

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ABSTRACT

When the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, the military had to drastically expand to meet the requirements of a modern industrial war. Congress passed the Selective Service Act a month later with very few provisions for conscientious objectors. Erling H. Lunde was a pacifist who sought to avoid military service. With his stated objection to war and marriage to Laura Hughes, a well-known and outspoken pacifist, after the American declaration of war, Lunde came under investigation by the US Army's Military Intelligence Division. Military personnel conducting surveillance of American civilians was a new concept in the United States. Intelligence officers were often citizen-soldiers themselves with inadequate training to conduct surveillance. Thus, they were guided by the prevalent political paranoia of the middle and upper classes that feared socialism, dissent, and the influence pacifism could have on the overall war effort.

KEYWORDS

Conscientious objectors, Erling Lunde, surveillance, Military Intelligence, Selective Service, US Home Front

About a month after the United States entered the First World War in April 1917, Congress agreed that the nation would raise a large American army through conscription. For the first time in US history, the nation would utilize conscription without bounties or other ways for citizens to purchase their way out. There

were also very few exemptions. In fact, the only clear exemption was for divinity students. The drafters of the Selective Service Act neglected to address what many peace activists at the turn of the century already knew, that individuals could genuinely abhor violence without the necessity of religious tenets supporting their belief.

Erling Hjorthoj Lunde was one those Americans caught up in Selective Service, but conscientiously objected to war. Born in April 13, 1891, Lunde grew up in Chicago, Illinois. He earned a Bachelor's of Philosophy from the University of Chicago in 1914. Lunde has a prominent legacy as an absolute conscientious objector because the National Civil Liberties Bureau published a pamphlet on his court-martial in October 1918 and he married a well-known activist – Laura Hughes. Yet, very little else about his case and the investigation into him prior to his court-martial is known. His case is not simply of interest to scholars of conscientious objection, pacifism, and dissent in America during the First World War, but also as an example of the role military intelligence played in such cases. Their investigation of him highlights Lunde's conscientious objection, but also how there is another side to this narrative. Intelligence records hold a treasure trove of documentation into the investigations and intelligence agents' perceptions, as well as documents they obtained through surveillance. Additionally, they offer insights into the case, such as how they uncovered Lunde's willingness to work as a civilian in an industry important to the war effort – the railroads – contrary to his later arguments against supporting the war effort in any form.

Though Lunde, like many others, struggled with what it meant to be an objector, military intelligence officers did not struggle with defining him as a dissenter. For these investigators, anyone who spoke out against the war or whom they perceived as impeding the war effort was a threat. They understood that words could have a powerful inspiration on people's decisions. Erling Lunde's investigation portrays the influences on intelligence officers' decisions to target objectors like Lunde. Through their investigation they displayed political paranoid tendencies that were exemplary of the majority of the Military Intelligence Division's wartime domestic surveillance. Intelligence officers were suspicious of Lunde's sincerity as a conscientious objector, and, more importantly, they perceived his associations, especially his wife and father, with radical elements at odds with his stated beliefs and subversive to the war effort. Ultimately, intelligence officers influenced decision makers in the exemption process against him.¹

The First World War created “a world pacifist movement.” Though, Congress declared war on Germany in 1917, not all Americans had given up on the debate whether the US should join in the deadly combat in Europe. However, pacifist objection could vary immensely among different religious or sectarian pacifist groups. Americans altered the connotation of the term pacifism in the First World War. Prior to the war, it referred to someone working toward international peace. Pacifism was a noble endeavor. During the war, patriotic pressures altered its meaning, identifying pacifists with draft evaders,

¹ This article utilizes the concept of political paranoia described by Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). A little further on this will be appear in more detail.

socialists, Bolsheviks, and radicals. In the aftermath of American participation in the Great War, the word encompassed much of its prewar meaning again, but for parts of society, it never lost its vile connotations. Thus, those who adhered to a strict definition of pacifism during the war, i.e. refused to participate under any circumstances, the word gained a new narrower definition. Some American pacifists “combined vigorous social action with absolute rejection of violence.” Whereas in the prewar years intellectuals led the pacifist—or peace—movement, during the war, “it acquired a socialist base.” Hence, it incorporated, and some government agents perceived it as embodying, a more radical element. The movement stopped short of revolutionary support. Since patriotism and violence bombarded them from all sides, members of the peace movement associated physical aggression with an authoritarian state and social conformity. Thus, they opted to link their ideals for social equality with peace. The intellectual peace movement did not ponder conscientious objection prior to the war. They focused their energies more on the decision making process which led to war, emphasizing arbitration and rationality.²

Additionally, between 1914 and 1917, the peace movement splintered. Many of the older peace societies, such as the American Peace Society, joined in the nationalistic aim of peace along American ideals. This also meant that they supported an American peace through force, since their rhetoric joined that of the war hawks by arguing that Prussianism prevented peace. Those left in the movement in 1917 were “a progressive coalition, to which antiwar Socialists were added.” They created organizations such as the People’s Council of America for Peace and Democracy, a group that military intelligence officers perceived as infested with socialists and whose aim was to stop conscription and the war effort at all costs.³

Thus, the concept of individual conscience as a legitimate justification for an exemption from conscription was especially problematic for military planners. The US army had to rapidly expand. The military drastically needed enlisted men and officers, a task that called for nothing short of inducting as many eligible men as possible into the ranks. However, swift expansion was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, from the military’s perspective, the “dissenting rabble,” those socialists, anarchists, and others that the upper echelons of society viewed as harmful to the American way of life, would be caught up in the net of inductees. On the other hand, the Army’s need for manpower overrode any and all concerns. For officers of the Military Intelligence Division (MID), vigilance was of the utmost importance. However, MID grew slowly. Neither the men who joined the intelligence ranks nor the commanders of the training camps and infantry divisions understood what the primary aim of garnering domestic or negative intelligence

² Charles Chatfield, *For Peace and Justice: Pacifism in America, 1914-1941* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 4; Charles Chatfield, “World War I and the Liberal Pacifist in the United States,” In *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 7 (Dec., 1970), 1921-2; Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 471; Peter Brock, *Pacifism in the United States: From the Colonial Era to the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 18, 866, 918-9.

³ Chatfield, *For Peace and Justice*, 10-1, 15.

was. Plus, the MID leadership did not establish a coherent training program for their officers until near the war's end.⁴

In lieu of a comprehensive training program, intelligence officers were left relying on their own perceptions of what qualified as a threat and how to deal with it. Additionally, though intelligence officers were convinced that a nefarious German spy ring was working in America, but could not find evidence of it. They convinced themselves that anyone who did not support the war must be under German influence, or at the very least naively supporting them. The evidence never proved that a masterminded spy network existed. They, of course, could not be one-hundred percent certain of that. However, they were confident that pre-war undesirables, such as socialists, with prominent emigrated German and German-Americans, and now including pacifists whose dissent could infect other Americans were undermining the war effort due to German propaganda, at German direction, or because they were simply naïve. Intelligence officers portrayed political paranoid tendencies throughout their investigations. They applied “top-down reasoning,” instead of listening to the evidence at hand. Even though many of their targets were sincere in their conscientious objection and pacifism, and did not want to intentionally interfere with the war effort but simply be left alone, the intelligence officers convinced themselves, as did many draft boards, that this was not the case. Thus, instead of following the evidence, the lack of evidence convinced them that their targets were simply that good at hiding the truth. Additionally, another aspect of political paranoia that intelligence officers exhibited was centrality. They believed without a doubt that disrupting the war effort, specifically the draft, was at the central goal of dissenters to the war. Intelligence officers were also certain that if dissention was allowed to ferment then the government, and especially the organizations working toward a successful war effort, would lose their autonomy. The Bolshevik Revolution began in early 1917, and there were large segments of the middle and upper class in the United States could face a similar threat. Lastly, intelligence officers projected these fears onto the individuals and groups they investigated, regardless of whether the evidence supported it.⁵

The Wilson administration and more powerful socio-economic groups took advantage of the war-induced anxieties to eliminate major socialist and radical groups, such as the Wobblies. Thus, without the political paranoia that was pervasive among American elites and the middle-class those extreme actions may not have been successful. As historian John Whiteclay Chambers wrote, repression “was entwined with the fabric of American society as well as with wartime nationalism and mobilization which encouraged it.” The class and status derived paranoia was so pervasive that it affected important sections of the government, including the federal courts, Congress, and the military. This is evident from Congress members’ overwhelming passage of the Espionage Act of 1917, along

⁴ MID History, 497-501, 517, 1162-6; Bidwell, 122-3, 125.

⁵ Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 8-12. For more on the class assumptions presented here see Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); and *Who We Are: A History of Popular Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Robert H. Zeiger, *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

with the harsher provisions of the Sedition Act of 1918. Federal judges upheld the strictest interpretations of these Acts, as did the military intelligence agents conducting the investigations. They deemed any interpretation other than their own as disloyal and evidence of a “nefarious” plot.⁶

Yet intelligence officers had to investigate everything brought to their attention--from the anonymous tip that one of the soldiers in “X” unit was a German spy to the auxiliary female chauffeurs who drove convalescing soldiers around the embarkation points. Ralph Van Deman, Chief of MID, and his staff organized both positive and negative intelligence sections. They defined positive intelligence as “the study of the military, political, economic, and social situation abroad.” Negative intelligence referred to enemy activities on the home front. They described the importance of negative intelligence as:

The man or woman of foreign sympathy in the United States, who prevented the enlistment of one soldier, impaired his loyalty, prevented or delayed his arrival in France, hampered the supplies he required, or in any other of a thousand ways canceled that one man’s usefulness to this nation, did as much for the Kaiser as the German soldier who killed an American in battle.⁷

Intelligence officers worried about the “ruthlessness” of Germany and that nation’s mastery of espionage. Due to the diverse ethnic composition of American society and the nation’s geographic vastness, MID officers feared that the United States was an easy target for German subterfuge. In addition, they charged that German agents were sabotaging the American people long before the neutral nation entertained thoughts of war. These alleged covert agents tainted American opinion of preparedness. They instituted a propaganda campaign of peacefulness “to persuade the country to inaction.” Such accusations portray intelligence officers’ perceptions of pacifism. They saw German subterfuge in citizens’ opposition to conscription, in lenient exemption boards, and in pacifist or anti-war organizations. They thought that rumors and actions which affected productivity or morale at home had the same effect as a “defeat on the battlefield.” Thus, “the activities of many elements in the pacifist movements, the extremists among the socialists and the IWW, were as proper subjects for investigation and repression as mutinous soldiers, deserters or traitors in the ranks;” by extension, MID officers included conscientious objectors in this list. Similar to a large proportion of society, military

⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 50, 55, 68, 79-83; John Whiteclay Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 208. Ronald Schaffer’s book, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) is another influential work that utilizes war hysteria, and so too does the more recent work by Christopher Cappozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷ “History of Military Intelligence Division,” Unpublished Manuscript, In RG 319, Entry 270, Box 21A (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II), 9. Hereafter referred to as MID History.

officers viewed conscientious objectors as slackers, men who were purposefully avoiding their duty to the nation. In addition, objectors could negatively influence other soldiers.⁸

Erling Lunde was one of those pacifists and draft dissenters. He sought an exemption from conscription based on his status as a married man and a conscientious objector. However, Lunde ran into problems. First, military authorities were already aware of him and his father, Theodore Lunde, who they thought of as “rabid” pacifists. Second, Erling Lunde’s wife was Laura Hughes, an outspoken Canadian pacifist. After Europe went to war, Hughes traveled around Canada speaking out against conscription laws. When the United States joined the war, she came south and did the same with organizations such as the American Liberty Defense League and People’s Peace Council—groups MID considered disloyal. Third, Lunde did not claim an exemption on religious grounds. He was not a member of one of the recognized pacifist religious denominations prior to passage of the Selective Service Act. Draft boards did not recognize other forms of conscientious objection. Lastly, his marriage occurred in December 1917, six months after the Selective Service Act went into effect.⁹

The Selective Service Act had several provisions regarding marriage as a justification for exemption. Legislators were clear that they did not intend the law to interfere with citizens’ right to marry. However, the law stated:

Boards should scrutinize marriages since May 18, 1917, and especially those hastily effected since that time, to determine whether the marriage relation was entered into with a primary view of evading military service, and unless such is found not to be the case boards are hereby authorized to disregard the relationship so established as a condition of dependency requiring deferred classification under these regulations.¹⁰

Lunde argued that his marriage was sincere and not an attempt to escape military obligation. He related how he met Laura Hughes in July, 1917. They got engaged in August, made a public announcement in September, and married on December 29, 1917. In February, 1918, the local draft board sent Lunde notice that they had placed him in Class 1, denying his claim for exemption as a conscientious objector. He appealed,

⁸ Ibid, 3, 9, 13.

⁹ Marlborough Churchill, “Subject Erling H. Lunde”, 1 August 1918, In RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, Folder 10110-242 58-108 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II). For more on Laura Hughes see: Frances H. Early, *A World Without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge, the Unknown Reformer* (UBC Press, 1992); Janice Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900-1918* (McGill-Queen’s Press, 1995); Barbara Roberts, “Women Against War, 1914-1918: Francis Benyon and Laura Hughes,” in *Up and Doing: Canadian Women and Peace*, ed. Janice Williamson and Deborah Gorham (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1989): 48-65;

¹⁰ *Selective Service Regulations: Prescribed by the President Under the Authority Vested in Him by the Terms of the Selective Service Law* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 36.

providing three affidavits from friends familiar with his long-standing commitment to pacifism. The appeals board denied his reclassification.¹¹

He changed tack in late May. According to Lunde, the piano manufacturing company he worked for sent him to take classes in mechanical engineering due to a slump in business. During a class at the Armour Institute in Chicago, the professor asked for volunteers on behalf of H. B. MacFarland to become inspectors for the U.S. Railway Administration. Lunde immediately volunteered. That same day, he received his military notice to entrain for a training camp between May 29 and June 2. Two days later, MacFarland offered Lunde a position as a material inspector of cars and locomotives. Lunde immediately contacted his local draft board to reconsider his case as an industrial exemption. McFarland wrote on Lunde's behalf to the District Exemption board. He explained that the work involved required men with the proper technical training, which Lunde possessed. Such men were very hard to find. In addition, McFarland had learned at a meeting in Washington that men in this field would be exempt from the draft. Therefore, he argued that the board should reclassify Lunde. The exemption board and military authorities did not agree.¹²

Lunde also attempted to convince the draft board that his wife was dependent upon him because she suffered from a nervous disorder. He explained that Hughes's brother died in 1915 while serving the Canadian Army in France; consequently, she suffered a nervous breakdown. In addition, Hughes was pregnant. If the exemption board did not reclassify him, Lunde feared that Hughes's mental health would fail and endanger their unborn child. As with his other attempts, however, this one also failed.¹³

Why Lunde's renewed attempt for an exemption failed appears to lie with MID officers' concerns about his and his wife's loyalties. Though Hughes was not publicly speaking against the draft in 1918, she did so throughout the majority of 1917 as well as across Canada prior to that. During meetings of the American Liberty Defense League in 1917, undercover agents overheard her disparaging the military. According to Hughes, military men were brutes and war was obsolete. If fighting were the answer, then there was no need for the mass shedding of blood. "If we believed that we could settle all our civil wrongs by fighting we would take our prize fighters and put them in the ring to settle our disputes, but we have Judges on the bench for that." She urged pacifists and conscientious objectors to continue resisting participation in the war. Eventually, she believed, the militaristic ideology would waiver and the higher ideal of peace would triumph. Such a struggle, however, would be long and hard. Many advocates of peace would die by militarists' hands, but "it is better for you to die for your ideals than to submit." Hughes was outspoken against what she termed the military machine and overtly supportive of pacifist resistance. For MID officers, she posed a dire threat. They described her as "a

¹¹ Erling H. Lunde, Letter to Newton D. Baker, 1 June 1918, In RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, Folder 10110-242 58-108 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II).

¹² Ibid; H. B. MacFarland, Letter to District Exemption Board, 28 May 1918, In RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, Folder 10110-242 58-108 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II).

¹³ Ibid.

radical pacifist and member of the People's Peace Council." They feared she would undermine American men's fighting spirit while further corrupting and strengthening those who were unsupportive, i.e. disloyal. In this scenario, cultural ideas of coverture, that a husband and wife shared the same ideals, may have reinforced intelligence officers' views of Lunde.¹⁴

Hughes was not Erling Lunde's only connection to overt pacifism. His father, Theodore Lunde, was a former treasurer of the People's Peace Council. He resided in Chicago and was a purchasing agent or had some sort of business relation with the Norwegian government. In the middle of 1918, the elder Lunde contacted MID regarding why they were blocking a passport for Helen Sheehy-Skeffington, an Irishwoman who was known to the authorities. Skeffington was the widow of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, a participant in the Easter Rebellion in 1916. British authorities executed him. Helen Skeffington was a member of Sinn Fein, a movement that MID considered extremely radical and obviously anti-British. They deduced that Theodore Lunde's interest in Mrs. Skeffington clearly indicated his political leanings.¹⁵

In addition to the influence of his questionable relations, MID officers did not believe the younger Lunde was a sincere pacifist. "It is the opinion of this office," one officer stated, "that neither son nor father are conscientious objectors at heart, and that it is merely a cloak, for Theodore Lunde has too often shown symptoms of belligerency." They projected the father's belligerence onto the son, disbelieving either man's sincere commitment to pacifism. Captain Charles Daniel Frey, the National Director of the American Protective League, discovered the elder Lunde was out on \$25,000 bail awaiting an appearance before a grand jury to answer charges under the Espionage Act. Needless to say, these reports did not endear Theodore or Erling Lunde to MID.¹⁶

In October 1917, Erling Lunde attended a meeting of the American Liberty Defense League chaired by a candidate for county judge in Chicago who was running on the Socialist ticket. Intelligence officers convinced themselves even before U.S. entry into the war that pacifists and socialists were in bed together and influenced by German subterfuge. Officers perceived meetings like this as proof of that connection. They determined that radicals and socialists were threats to the government's autonomy. Interestingly, though, anarchists did not top this list of menaces. Military officers admitted that though anarchists were "theoretically the most radical element in our midst, and from a local police point of view the most dangerous, it has been of minor importance to Military Intelligence." Apparently, MID officers concluded that anarchist propaganda

¹⁴ Hinton G. Clabaugh, report on American Defense League, 30 July 1917, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242-19 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II); W. R. Benham, "Earling Lunde: Conscientious Objector," 14 June 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 36-57 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II).

¹⁵ Ibid; Carl Reichmann, "Conscientious Objectors," 9 September 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 58-108 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II) Charles Daniel Frey, Letter to Marlborough Churchill, 26 June 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 36-57 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II).

¹⁶ Ibid.

had little to no influence on Americans; anarchists were a “very small group,” which was never pro-German nor a target for German influences. In addition, the movement’s leadership in the United States, specifically Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, went to prison in mid-June 1917. This left other “radicals,” especially what MID officers defined as “right wing,” or “German socialism” as the top concern. The official, unpublished history of MID states that “in itself socialism is not subversive of the interests of the State and a political party endeavoring by ballot to bring it about may be just as loyal as any other political party either in or out of power.” Thus, intelligence officers begrudgingly acknowledged that even socialism, if it sought change through the ballot, was a legitimate political system. However, they feared that ethnic Germans dominated the Socialist Party in America. In addition, at its core, they feared the Socialist Party was not a political apparatus, but “rather a protest party which gathered unto itself all the discontented.” Lastly, American socialists professed to be international, and thus “anti-national” and against patriotism. Their anti-capitalist stance meant that socialists blamed individualistic Wall Street interests for pushing the United States to war. Therefore, intelligence officers argued that socialists disseminated propaganda against the war. By expressing their opinion, socialists bolstered the dissatisfied in the nation. “The baneful effect of this propaganda among persons inclined to be discontented, or averse for any reason to serve in the war, was soon apparent.” Regardless of how unlikely it would be to redeem people who were already reluctant to support the war in any way; MID officers saw this anti-capitalist line of reasoning as a threat. Intelligence records list anti-draft, registration propaganda, and violating the Espionage Act as the primary reasons for imprisonment in all of the important socialist cases.¹⁷

Yet, intelligence officers displayed a discerning understanding of certain aspects of the socialist movement while simultaneously exhibiting political paranoid tendencies. On the one hand, they appeared to recognize the Socialist Party’s right to exist in America as another political entity as long as it worked within the prevailing political system. On the other hand, they condemned the socialists for “mustering the forces of discontent at the polls.” They feared evidence of a “slight increase” in votes for socialists in the ethnic German population; though, they admitted, “it was hardly enough to affect the war time elections.” MID officers even recognized that the infamous Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies), failed on several occasions to create enough support for nation-wide strikes, even when utilizing popular appeals such as the trials of Eugene V. Debs and Thomas Mooney. Thus, there was no real threat that the Wobblies, or socialists, could succeed in halting the country’s day-to-day business on a local level, let alone a national one. However, this rationalization in no way appeared to have halted intelligence officers’ fears that socialists could influence Americans, especially draft-age men who were vital to the war effort.¹⁸

¹⁷ Charles Daniel Frey, “Theodore Lunde,” 5 October 1917, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 1-35 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II). W. H. Jones, “Lincoln Steffens Meeting,” 5 October 1917, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 1-35 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II); MID History, 1984-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 1986, 1990.

To have a man like Erling Lunde in uniform, whom intelligence officers were extremely suspicious of, was hardly appealing. Intelligence officers did not trust his sincerity as a conscientious objector. More important, a man such as Lunde, active in organizations MID suspected of disloyalty, with a wife and father playing prominent roles in those organizations, might well prove a negative influence among other men in uniform. On June 1, 1918, Lunde wrote to the Secretary of War promising that he would not propagandize in the training camp if his appeals were denied. However, his father and wife continued to send him pamphlets, bulletins, newsletters, etc. from the suspected organizations. Other soldiers could easily happen upon this literature and thereby—MID argued—convert them to the pacifist cause. It would seem that the military should do its best to keep a man such as Lunde out of uniform; on the other hand, that would reward those who held un-American views. The Army inducted Lunde on June 2, 1918. He went to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri, where he refused to don a uniform or otherwise cooperate with authorities. He also declined to accept non-combatant service, claiming he did not want to do any work that aided the military. He maintained this position even while he sought an exemption to work as an inspector on the railroads that would, by the nature of the work, support the war effort. Interrogated by an officer, Lunde explained he believed wars were unchristian, as was all killing. War did “not accomplish the ends that it was supposed to,” meaning that those who took part in wars sowed death and violence instead of peace. He thought international disputes should be settled diplomatically and without violence. Therefore, he would not help the military machine do its horrible work. Lunde stated that he did not belong to any church and based his objection to war upon his conscience alone. The officer asked the question authorities always posed to conscientious objectors: whether they would do anything if their loved one, specifically their female companion, was threatened. Lunde answered that he would adhere to his principles and do nothing. He subsequently answered the same question before the exemption board with his wife, Laura Hughes, standing beside him.¹⁹

Theodore Lunde and H. B. MacFarland continued to try to get Lunde released from military service. The elder Lunde went to Washington, D.C. to speak with a War Department representative about his son’s situation. He also met with Congressman Niel Juul, the Representative from Erling Lunde’s district. Juul agreed to see what he could do and contacted the Adjutant General Henry Pinckney McCain. The Congressman told McCain that Lunde would benefit the government more as a rail equipment inspector than as a draftee. McCain replied that if General Director William McAdoo of the Railroad Administration asked to have Lunde indefinitely furloughed for work in that field, he would consider the request, but emphasized that it had to go through the proper bureaucratic channels. Privately however, McCain told one of his aides, Captain Daniel Frey, to discover whether McAdoo was contemplating granting Lunde’s request. Frey should convey what sort of man MID believed Lunde was; and to “convince him (McAdoo) that Lunde should not be transferred, and that he (The Adjutant General) would then refuse the transfer, but that he did not want to make any move that could

¹⁹ K. B. Edmunds, “Interrogation of Erling Lunde,” 5 June 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 58-108 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II).

conflict with the Railway Administration, without our first straightening the matter out.” McAdoo’s response was that he would first have to discuss the matter with MID.²⁰

Meanwhile, H. B. MacFarland sent a request to William G. McAdoo to have Lunde furloughed. Although Erling Lunde had made it clear that he would not accept any work under military authority, he desperately sought a position as an inspector for the U.S. Railroad Administration, which was an extremely vital industry for prosecuting the war. Anything having to do with the rails in the U.S. was of interest to the military. In fact, in March 1918, President Wilson nationalized the railroads, establishing McAdoo as the Director General to unravel the enormous log-jam preventing materiel from being transported and unloaded rapidly for shipment to Europe. Over the winter of 1917- 1918, a national railroad crisis led to a paralysis of rail movement. A critical result was that coal went undelivered to the majority of Americans, leaving them shivering in their homes. Therefore, MacFarland argued that it was too difficult to find men who were qualified to do this type of work. He needed Lunde and the only way to get him was for McAdoo to approve the request. Lunde stated that the work related to reliving the coal shortage during the winter was consistent with his pacifist beliefs. Yet, MacFarland’s plea had no effect. A letter from the office of the Adjutant General sent on July 3 stated: “Under no circumstances will an indefinite furlough be granted in the case of this soldier, for the purpose of engaging in industry essential to the prosecution of the war.”²¹

Both the military establishment and patriotic citizens argued that every American should do their part to support the war. This obligation included conscientious objectors. In Lunde’s case, he did not start out as an absolute conscientious objector. He was willing to accept work with the U.S. Railroad Administration, though under civilian—rather than military—leadership. High ranking officers, as well as the local draft board, rejected his appeals. Ironically, agencies such as MID were doing all they could to assign Lunde to some form of military service, despite worries that he could prove a negative influence upon other soldiers. Lunde was honest about his conscientious objection to war in general and to U.S. involvement in this conflict in particular, however, military officers ignored him.

Following a doctor’s examination that determined Lunde was mentally healthy, he was inducted into the Army. Three weeks later, the military sent him to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the place where--at the behest of the Adjutant General of the Army—they sent all conscientious objectors. At some point in July, military authorities transferred Lunde

²⁰ Charles Daniel Frey, “Earling Lunde: Conscientious Objector”, 15 June 1918. In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 36-57 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II).

²¹ H. B. MacFarland, Letter to William McAdoo, 15 June 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 36-57 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II); J. A. Barry, “Indefinite furlough for Erling H. Lunde,” 3 July 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 58-108 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II); Erling H. Lunde, *Defense of Erling H. Lunde: Conscientious Objector to War: Made Before a Court Martial at Camp Funston, Kansas, October 15, 1918* (Chicago: American Industrial Co., 1918), 7-8; Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 37-8.

and the other objectors to Fort Riley, Kansas. In a letter to Hughes, Lunde explained that at first he was willing to do some kitchen duty and at least make a show of cooperating. Lunde and some others believed that if they did not overtly resist they would still get a square deal from the government. They were waiting to see what reforms the Wilson administration would enact. Lunde did the aforementioned work before arriving at Fort Riley, “merely as a good fellow to allow time for a definite policy to crystallize.” However, he acknowledged that his earlier assumptions were naïve and proved false.

As this is military service, and since I have refused to all commitees (sic) that have quizzed me, to take any part in the military machine either non-combatant or combatant, I must now take my stand absolutely, and take the consequences. I harbor no ill feelings toward the officers or the government. They are merely going at this systematically to weed out men who claim to be C.O.’s, and can’t differentiate between military and civil service.²²

The officers called upon the conscientious objectors to dig latrines for themselves, do kitchen duty, clean up the camp grounds, and perform other demeaning tasks Lunde’s understanding of President Wilson’s policy was that they were responsible for keeping themselves and their quarters clean, as well as preparing their own food, and nothing more. He felt that he and the others were at the military camp involuntarily and the least the government could do was provide cooked food and basic sanitary conditions. He did not think poorly of the soldiers—mostly non-commissioned officers—who watched over them. He felt he got along amicably with the military men with whom he came into contact. In fact, they were friendly to him because of his disposition and the fact that he had some influence among the other conscientious objectors. Intelligence officers perceived his influence and charisma as evidence that he posed a threat to the army and national security.²³

The Adjutant General had decided that he would never authorize an indefinite furlough for Lunde. In late August, 1918, Lunde went on a twelve day hunger strike in protest. On October 15, a military tribunal court-martialed him. Lunde explained that this situation came about when, on September 17, military authorities sent Colonel J. C. Waterman to order Lunde and the others to do “camp police” work, which was non-combatant in nature. As Lunde described it, he made explicit his position about any combatant or non-combatant work. After meeting with the Board of Inquiry—that interviewed objectors around the nation to review their cases and determine their sincerity—while at Fort Leavenworth, the board proclaimed Lunde to be a legitimate conscientious objector. Even so, the military did not discharge him. Lunde continued to refuse any non-combatant work, even a job with the Corps of Engineers that was similar to the one he sought with the U.S. Railroad Administration.²⁴

²² Erling H. Lunde, Letter to Laura Hughes Lunde, 28 July 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 58-108 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Barry, 3 July 1918; Lunde, *Defense of Erling H. Lunde*, 5.

Upon his arrival, Colonel Waterman offered Lunde and other “absolute” objectors various non-combatant positions. When they refused, he ordered them to do “camp police” work, which would have entailed cutting the grass around the camp and picking up trash. When Lunde refused, Waterman ordered him solitary confinement and fed only bread and water for three days. Soon after, he was court-martialed. Erling Lunde’s case provides an example of an absolute conscientious objector whose rejection of draftee status posed a threat to the military establishment and, because he was influential among his peers and had associated with “radical pacifists,” intelligence officers deemed him a national threat as a civilian, as well.²⁵

MID officers’ obsessive and contradictory attitudes led them to be deeply concerned about uniformed soldiers attending meetings with civilians who they considered to be less than loyal. In September 1918, Sergeant B. F. Hargrove infiltrated the Young People’s Socialist League in St. Louis. He became convinced that the League was “not one percent loyal” and that the Socialist Party platform represented a repudiation of true American values. “They have indorsed (sic) the Bolsheviki form of government, up-hold the IWW, oppose conscription, advocate a revolution and are otherwise anti-war in their activities.” Hargrove listed at least seven soldiers and sailors he had discovered were members of the organization. In addition, he learned that one of these individuals “is actively engaged in spreading Socialist Propaganda in his respective camp and has been successful in interesting about 25 fellow men. If his line of propaganda is similar to that preached at the meetings of the league, which is revolutionary in character,” he warned that, “it may have some influence on other soldiers.”²⁶

The military needed manpower and their chief source was obviously the working class. But the view persisted that many among the working class had a different agenda than loyally serving the United States. Their allegiance was in question. There had been several financial panics in the preceding decades that influenced hiring rates, wages, and cost of living. According to Carroll D. Wright, the United States Commissioner of Labor, 1880 marked a significant shift in labor unrest from all previous years in American history. In that year, there were 618 strikes, whereas the largest number of strikes recorded prior to then was 51 in 1879. Between 1881 and 1900, there were approximately 22,793 recorded strikes. Considering that 1880 had witnessed the largest number of strikes up to that year, the explosion of strikes in the following decade clearly indicated massive labor unrest. In addition, there were major strike waves in 1910, 1912, and 1913, as well as an increase in labor disputes in 1916 and 1917. Unemployment peaked in 1900 at 1,420,000, then again in 1904 at 1,490,000. In 1906, the economy was more stable, with only 280,000 unemployed; just two years—and another recession—later, those figures jumped to 2,960,000. Over the next five years, unemployment hovered around 2 million; then, in 1914, increased to 3,110,000 and jumped another 730,000 in 1915. During this volatile

²⁵ Ibid; Theodore Lunde, Letter to J. J. Manning, 24 August 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2763, 10110-242 58-108 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II); Carl Reichmann, 23 August 1918.

²⁶ B. F. Hargrove, “Young People’s Socialist League,” 25 September 1918, In Record Group RG165, Entry 65, Box 2756 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Research Administration II).

period for workers, membership in unions and the Socialist Party rose. Eugene Debs, running on the Socialist ticket, received 900,000 votes in the Presidential election of 1912. He gained six percent of the overall vote. In 1914, there were 1,200 socialist incumbents in municipal positions. Fourteen states elected thirty-three legislators from the Socialist Party. Some called it the “golden age of American socialism.” In addition, the more radical Industrial Workers of the World had a membership of about 100,000 by 1914 and probably gained another 50,000 before 1917.²⁷

While the labor unrest and pro-labor organizations grew, the business community stigmatized strikers and unions as disloyal. Addressing a crowd in New York City on Columbus Day 1915, Theodore Roosevelt emphasized 100 percent Americanism and that “labor troubles are not American.” He announced that even though the United States was neutral, German agents were stirring up labor discontent in munitions factories. Even worse, though, were “the labor troubles here not caused by foreign agents. These must cease if we were to have the true American spirit.” William C. Durant, President of General Motors, likened the labor unrest in the United States to a volcano. He told Colonel Edward House, President Wilson’s adviser, that America’s entrance into the Great War could “cause an eruption.” Historian David Kennedy explains in *Over Here* that the Wilson administration feared the pacifistic appeal of the Socialist Party could derail the American war effort. Businessmen, he stated, reveled at the opportunity to legitimately brand all labor unrest as disloyal, something they did not shy away from doing before.²⁸

Military intelligence officers feared socialist or labor unrest would disrupt governmental authority in war time. They only had to look at recent history, such as the Lawrence, Massachusetts strike of 1912, to see how the IWW and socialists worked together toward a common goal—disrupting capitalism. Intelligence officers were watching men in uniform very closely for fear that some were themselves “seditious propagandists” and others were being overly influenced by them. Their political paranoid tendencies led them to block exemptions for men they considered subversive, like Erling Lunde. At the same time that they were making examples of “slackers,” they were also concerned about their dissident influences within the military. During Lunde’s defense in the court martial

²⁷ Melvyn Dubofsky, “Labor Unrest in the United States, 1906-90,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Labor Unrest in the World Economy, 1870-1990 (Winter, 1995), 126; Carroll D. Wright, “Strikes in the United States,” *The North American Review*, Vol. 174, No. 547 (Jun., 1902), 763; Universities-National Bureau Committee for Economic Research, *The Measurement and Behavior of Unemployment: A Conference of the Universities-National Bureau Committee for Economic Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 215; Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 264; Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, *Working-class Formation: Nineteenth-century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 398, 427; William Preston, Jr, *Aliens & Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 38.

²⁸ Melvyn Dubofsky argues that businesses and business friendly presses labeled strikers as “un-American’, seditious, even criminal organizations.” Melvyn Dubofsky, “The Radicalism of the Dispossessed: William Haywood and the IWW,” In *Dissent: History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (Dekalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 1968), 186; “Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated,” 13 October 1915, *New York Times (1857-1922)*, <http://www.proquest.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048> (accessed 19 March 2012); David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 69-71.

hearing, he explained that he had always had a history of pacifism, teaching universal respect and avoiding militarism. His father, Theodore, kept poor company as far as military intelligence officers were concerned. Laura Hughes, especially, was of concern. She was very outspoken in Canada prior to American entrance in the war. During 1917, she was seditious in the US, as well, speaking at socialist, anti-war gatherings. Therefore, intelligence officers deemed Erling Lunde a clear threat and an insincere conscientious objector. The way they saw it, they had to do everything in their power to block not only his exemption from the draft, but also any possibility of him gaining access to vital national security-related work, such as with the railroads. The evidence against Lunde was scant, at best. The Board of Inquiry—established by the Secretary of War in 1918 to review objector cases—determined Lunde was sincere. Yet, military officers’ political paranoid tendencies influenced their decision to ignore such information and instead engineer grounds for a court martial. Erling Lunde’s case highlights larger societal, political paranoid tendencies toward socialism and pacifism, as well as the murky waters that American citizens had to navigate between expected obligations to the state and their conscience.²⁹

²⁹ Lunde, *Defense of Erling H. Lunde*, 6.