

**“THE GERMANS WOULD COURT-**



*A St. Paul Loyalty Day parade—with onlooker, 1918*



**"MARTIAL ME, TOO"**

## ST. PAUL'S WORLD WAR I SOCIALIST DRAFT RESISTERS

**S**weeping the streets of Camp Dodge, Iowa, in the subzero temperatures of February 1918 and surrounded by armed guards, eight St. Paul draft resisters had ample opportunity to reflect on their actions. Refusing warm army uniforms, for which they would shortly be court-martialed (or freeze to death in this coldest winter in 25 years), they donned the thin civilian clothes worn when military police brought them to this World War I training base from Fort Snelling's guardhouse. Being a draft resister was "no snap," the *Des Moines Register*

**WILLIAM R. DOUGLAS**



Minneapolis's Socialist weekly strongly opposed U.S. entry into World War I, 1917

grudgingly admitted; even the ultra-patriotic *Des Moines Capital* conceded that their “civilian clothing is decidedly less comfortable.”<sup>1</sup>

Exposure to cold temperatures capped a year of frenetic antiwar activities for Socialist Party lecturer Allen Strong-Broms and his seven comrades, Morris Kammen, William Treseler, Richard A. Carlson, Axel Carlson, Carl W. Johnson, Gunnard Johnson, and Nicholas Unger. Socialist leadership of groups opposing U.S. participation in the war has led some historians to underestimate the breadth and strength of

that resistance, if not the intense local and national response it provoked, historian James Weinstein has pointed out.<sup>2</sup>

Among America's political parties and organizations, the Socialist Party took the strongest position against conscription, stronger even than the feared Industrial Workers of the World. The IWW, in fact, had no official stance on the draft because it considered the war in Europe a diversion from its central goal of worker control of the means of production. Consequently, evasion, not public challenge, tended to characterize its posture toward the draft. “The average IWW member does not stop long enough in one place so there would be any danger of him being caught,” one member boasted to an undercover agent in Flood's saloon, a Minneapolis Wobbly “hang-out” at 508 Hennepin Avenue. IWW-led draft resistance by

*William R. Douglas is currently working on a larger study of objectors to war who were sent to Camp Dodge during World War I.*

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Weather Bureau, *Climatological Data: Iowa Section*, Feb. 1918, p. 15, 19, 20; *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 21, p. 12, Mar. 13, p. 6, both 1918; *Des Moines Capital*, Feb. 21, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *New Times* (Minneapolis), Apr. 7, 1917, p. 1, 4; James Weinstein, “Anti-War Sentiment and the Socialist Party, 1917–1918,” *Political Science Quarterly* 74 (June 1959): 215.

immigrant Finns on Minnesota's Iron Ranges and by Swedes in Rockford, Illinois, sometimes resulted in prison, but as noncitizen aliens, their ineligibility for the draft was usually respected.<sup>3</sup>

Minnesota's Socialist Party strongly supported the national organization's antiwar stance, formally taken at an emergency convention in St. Louis just after the Good Friday declaration of war on April 6, 1917, and Strong-Broms had introduced the St. Paul Peace League's antiwar resolution. Socialist newspapers cited sources from Daniel Webster to President Woodrow Wilson—re-elected five months earlier on the slogan "He kept us out of war"—to support the group's position that the draft was unconstitutional and antidemocratic. While some Socialists did reluctantly register—as conscientious objectors they would never be drafted, the *Two Harbors Socialist* naively ventured in May and June 1917—St. Paul became a national center of public resistance to draft registration. Twenty-nine young men were prosecuted in federal court in St. Paul for refusing to register in 1917; all but two cases resulted in conviction, with sentences ranging from 24 hours to one year. Most eight-month or longer sentences were given to

identified Socialists. Both civilian and military court proceedings against them produced actions of questionable legality.<sup>4</sup>

Historians have yet to focus on the stories of urban draft resisters during World War I, partly because these cases were overshadowed by more far-reaching Espionage Act prosecutions that meted out 20-year prison sentences and \$10,000 fines for inciting rebellion within the military and obstructing recruitment. Certainly the public record of the St. Paul resisters is difficult to trace because of scattered sources. We know that at least 15 St. Paul Socialists steadfastly declined to register for the draft in 1917: 10 of them (the eight who went to Camp Dodge together in February plus two others) refused to cooperate with military authorities after being forcibly inducted; three others served time as civilians in the prison at St. Cloud; and two more had to be released by civil authorities only after being found physically unfit to serve in the army. While these Socialists failed to spark mass opposition to the war, as they had hoped, their actions, part of the American tradition of draft refusal, offer one of the war's most principled examples of resistance.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Earl Bruce White, "The *U.S. v C. W. Anderson et al.*: The Wichita Case of 1917–1919," in *At the Point of Production: The Local History of the I.W.W.*, ed. Joseph R. Conlin (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 143; "CH" folder, June 12, 1917, Agents' Reports, Minnesota Commission of Public Safety Papers (hereafter MCPS), Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul; David C. List, "'We Never Forget': IWW Support for Finnish Draft Resisters on the Minnesota Iron Range during World War I" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1988), 7, 15–16, 236–37; James O'Brien, "Wobblies and Draftees," *Radical America* 1 (1967): 12–14. Drafted aliens included Sander Maki and Verner Siro, Iron Range Finns who served civilian time for draft resistance and then were drafted to Camp Dodge; Lily Iverson to National Civil Liberties Board (NCLB), Aug. 26, 1918, 6:517, 545, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Papers, Princeton University.

<sup>4</sup> Wilbur S. Broms Papers, "1917–18, 1920, 1924" folder, MHS; *New Times*, June 2, p. 1, June 16, p. 1, both 1917; *Two Harbors Socialist*, May 25, p. 3, June 1, p. 1, June 29, p. 2—all 1917. The Socialist Labor Party also opposed conscription; see *Referendum* (Faribault), Apr. 21, p. 1, May 5, p. 1, May 19, p. 3, June 2, p. 3—all 1917. A June 2, 1917, statement that led to Espionage Act convictions of the *Referendum's* editor and owners observed, "No man has to register if he don't want to, but he will probably go to jail 90 days, even if he don't want to." Federal Court Records, St. Paul, 1917, cases 317–459, in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Regional Center, Kansas City, Mo.

<sup>5</sup> On the Espionage Act, see Horace C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968). On the Sedition Act, which closed a loophole in the 1918 Espionage Act, see Richard Polenberg, *Fighting Faiths: The Abrams Case, the Supreme Court, and Free Speech* (New York: Viking Press, 1987). On rural and backwoods resistance—Iron Range Finns, Oklahoma tenant farmers, and armed Jehovah's Witnesses in north-central Arkansas—see List, "We Never Forget"; James R. Green, *Grassroots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895–1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 360–70; James F. Willis, "The Cleburne County Draft War," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 26 (Spring 1967): 24–39; Robert W. Dubay, "The Opposition to Selective Service, 1916–1918," *Southern Quarterly* 7 (April 1969): 301–22. Except for writing that the St. Paul resisters were from Minneapolis, the best overall account remains Norman Thomas, *The Conscientious Objector in America* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1923).

On the debate about who was responsible for overzealous prosecution of draft resisters, see John W. Chambers Jr., *To Raise An Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 341–42; Arthur S. Link, "That Cobb Interview," *Journal Of American History* 72 (June 1985): 7–17. Carl H. Chrislock, *Watchdog of Loyalty: The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety during World War I* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991) tells the story of local repression.

**O**n May 18, 1917, Congress passed the Selective Service Act and set June 5 as draft-registration day for all male citizens and resident aliens between the ages of 21 and 31. While editorial writers were fulsome in their praise for the registration turnout, two postwar local historians suggested, “One suspects that a more truly characteristic remark is that made by a man who is reported to have said to the registrar upon receiving a card, ‘We won’t kick, captain, although we know it is a ticket to the graveyard.’” Antiwar activists were confident that they were having an effect; A. L. Sugarman, state secretary of the Socialist Party and soon to be arrested for obstructing the draft, enthusiastically reported to a national journal, “It is practically admitted that 9,000 failed to register in St. Paul and more than that number in Minneapolis.” While this number seems high, newspaper guesses that only 90 per-

cent of Minnesota’s eligibles registered, even when couched as a successful turnout, suggest that registration in the Twin Cities was much lower than nationwide.<sup>6</sup>

The roundup of “slackers” in St. Paul began on June 6. Easiest to catch must have been the Socialists who had publicly proclaimed their refusal to register. As Morris Kammen later recalled, “If I did try to dodge this military service . . . I would not have stayed at home as I did, for the entire neighborhood knew that I did not register.” If that did not make the hunt easy enough, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported, “A roster of the Socialist Party is in the hands of Federal officials and is being compared with the registration list.”<sup>7</sup>

Also on June 6, Otto Wangerin, a clerk in the Northern Pacific railway office, was the first nonregistrant arrested. His brother Walter, Alfred Grahl, and Joseph Arver, education director for the Young People’s Socialist League and an employee in Socialist J. F. Emme’s machine shop, were arrested the next day while Otto was being released on \$1,000 bail. Also caught in the net was George Skourtis, who denied being a Socialist (and consequently would get no legal aid from that source). Because Skourtis’s case file ends with his indictment, he was probably persuaded to register, as was the case for most of those caught.<sup>8</sup>

As suggested by the names of some of the St. Paul resisters—Richard Carlson, Axel Carlson, Carl W. Johnson, Gunnard Johnson, Frank Enoch Carlson—Swedes were disproportionately represented among the Socialist resisters. Several local papers observed that the five men “lived in one house” at 375 Iglehart and that they all hailed from Småland, a province in southeastern Sweden with a tradi-

tion of opposition to militarism. The men also



*St. Paul’s draft board processing men under the new Selective Service Act, June 5, 1917*

<sup>6</sup> Franklin H. Holbrook and Livia Appel, *Minnesota in the War with Germany* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1932), 1: 138; *New Times*, Aug. 11, 1917, p. 1; *International Socialist Review*, July 1917, p. 10; *Minneapolis Journal*, Jan. 9, 1918, p. 9. Sugarman himself apparently registered, because when arrested on June 7 he produced his card; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 8, 1917, p. 11. Once faced with legal proceedings, “slackers” often registered; the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 15, 1917, p. 12, reported that 51 out of 67 registered after being jailed in Duluth.

<sup>7</sup> *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 7, p. 1, June 9, p. 8, June 21, p. 11—all 1917; *New Times*, Mar. 30, 1918, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 7, p. 1, June 9, p. 8, June 11, p. 10, June 21, p. 11—all 1917; “ETO” folder, June 22, 1917, Agents’ Reports, MCPS; Federal Court Records, case 319, NARA.

claimed that resistance to compulsory military training in Sweden was the reason they emigrated to the United States. Only Richard Carlson was a U.S. citizen, although the other four had applied for citizenship.<sup>9</sup>

Another resister, Morris Kammen (Kammenetski), a Russian-born University of Minnesota student probably in his early twenties, had opposed war since his childhood:

I remember well, in 1905, during the Russian Japanese War, the regiments of Cossacks marching through our little village. . . . We knew they were going forth to kill and be killed, not because they wanted to kill, but because the czar forced them . . . In my childish mind the question arose, "Why should these men go and kill and be killed . . . for the czar who has oppressed them?"

William Treseler, chief clerk for Wells Fargo and secretary of the Ramsey County Socialist Party, was defiant during his arrest. "He said that he deliberately refrained from registering, and that he would not register in any event." Another St. Paul resister, Nicholaus Unger, the *New Times* wrote, was "one of the liveliest of the German comrades," although he was really Hungarian.<sup>10</sup>

Allen Strong-Broms was the last arrested of the St. Paul Socialist resisters sent to Camp Dodge, turning himself in on June 20. The most prominent of the group, he was 28, married with two children, and a lecturer for the state party. He and his wife, Clara, used a hyphenated last name, a feminist practice unusual for the time. (The Socialist press managed to get the hyphen right only for a short



*Draftees from St. Paul's 11th ward going to Camp Dodge*

<sup>9</sup> *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Jan. 15, 1918, p. 1; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Jan. 15, p. 1, June 9, p. 1, both 1918; Federal Court Records, cases 329, 332, 338, 352, NARA; *New Times*, June 16, 1917, p. 1, Jan. 26, 1918, p. 3, Mar. 16, 1918, p. 1. The *New Times*, July 21, 1917, p. 1, refers to 18 St. Paul Socialists arrested for refusing to register.

Probably because of clerical errors, both Axel Carlson and Axel W. Carlson are listed as convicted (of differing sentences) in federal files, and Attorney General Mitchell Palmer's testimony lists two Axel Carlsons and one Axel W. Carlson; Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Amnesty and Pardon for Political Prisoners: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee of the United States Senate on S. J. Res. 171*, 66th Cong., 3d sess., 1919, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> *New Times*, Jan. 26, p. 3, Mar. 30, p. 1, 3, both 1918; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 19, 1917, p. 5.



*Recruits await their first meal at Fort Snelling before transfer to Camp Dodge, July 1917*

time, during January and February of 1918.) Of Swedish-German extraction, he worked as a railroad draftsman until the party hired him as an organizer in June 1917. Clara Strong-Broms was also a Socialist activist, frequently making speeches against the war. Raised in a poor Irish family, she rebelled against Catholicism's otherworldly promises of reward. Their son Wilbur Broms said later that his father saw World War I as "an imperialist war from which Socialists and workers, people generally, could not gain anything." His mother, he recalled, "inveighed against the Catholic Church, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and *Dispatch*, and British imperialism, in that order, every morning with her morning coffee."<sup>11</sup>

Once registration day had passed, the policies of draft boards and the military aimed at encouraging maximum participation, even by

"slackers," resisters, and objectors. Ralph Van Lear, son of the Socialist mayor of Minneapolis, for example, claimed conscientious-objector status and got the local Socialist Party secretary to sign his form. Officers at Fort Snelling, however, treated his application as "a joke," and the appeal board turned down his request for exemption. Van Lear then entered combatant army service at Camp Dodge, perhaps to avoid endangering his father's precarious political position of critically supporting the war while attempting to salvage wartime civil liberties. Overall, the policy of drafting objectors and pressuring them to cooperate with the military as much as possible increased citizen participation while also increasing hardships for those who refused.<sup>12</sup>

On July 2, 1917, the first four of St. Paul's Socialists arrested—Arver, Grahl, and the two

<sup>11</sup> *New Times*, Jan. 16, 1915, p. 3, and Nov. 10, p. 1, Dec. 15, p. 4, both 1917; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 21, 1917, p. 11, Jan. 16, 1918, p. 12; "B" folder, unidentified clippings, and "CH" folder, June 16, 1917, Agents' Reports, MCPS; Wilbur S. Broms, interview by Carl Ross, St. Paul, Oct. 7, 15, 1987, Jan. 14, 23, 1988, transcript, p. 1, 15, 18, 19, Twentieth Century Radicalism in Minnesota Project, MHS.

<sup>12</sup> *Des Moines Register*, Sept. 24, 1917, p. 2.

Wangerin brothers—were convicted of resisting the draft. Three days later, they were sentenced to one-year imprisonment each, the maximum sentence for a federal misdemeanor offense. Their lawyers, Thomas E. Latimer, Herbert Dunn, and Frank Healy, then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, challenging the constitutionality of the Selective Service Act. As a result, theirs and other draft-resister cases were put on hold pending the Court's decision.<sup>13</sup>

On December 12 and 13, 1917, the Supreme Court heard arguments that combined several appeals into what it termed “Selective Draft Law Cases.” Along with the four Minnesota resisters were an arrested draft resister from Georgia, a Kansas draftee who challenged the right of the government to send him abroad in a war not designed to quell invasion, two New York plaintiffs convicted of refusing to register, and several Espionage Act violators—Charles Ruthenberg and other Ohio Socialists and famed New York anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman—who appealed their convictions for counseling draft resistance on the basis that the draft law itself was unconstitutional. Attorney Walter Nelles of the National Civil Liberties Bureau (wartime predecessor to the American Civil Liberties Union) also presented to the court *amicus* briefs claiming that recognition of only religious reasons for conscientious objection violated the First Amendment. The combined cases were the first to challenge the constitutionality of conscription since the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment outlawing slavery and involuntary servitude (except for prisoners).<sup>14</sup>

On January 7, 1918, the Supreme Court rejected the plaintiffs' arguments out of hand, with Chief Justice Edward White writing the unanimous opinion:

Finally, as we are unable to conceive upon what theory the exaction by government from the citizen of the performance of his supreme and noble duty of contributing to the defense of the rights and honor of the nation, as the result of a war declared by the great representative body of the people, can be said to be the

imposition of involuntary servitude in violation of the Thirteenth Amendment, we are constrained to the conclusion that the contention to that effect is refuted by its mere statement.

The Court's decision shattered the confidence with which the antidraft movement had proclaimed the unconstitutionality of conscription the previous spring. Its curt dismissal of the argument that a draft violated the Thirteenth Amendment did not even acknowledge the other part of the argument—that sending conscripts overseas violated the expressly defensive purposes for which the framers of the Constitution gave Congress the right to raise an army.

**B**efore the Court rendered its January 1918 decision, however, vigilant St. Paul draft officials had already decided that refusal to register was insufficient grounds for not being registered. Thus, as a condition of the Socialists' release while appealing the federal civilian misdemeanors, Arver, Grahl, and the Wangerins were brought before the board and registered involuntarily. Only Otto Wangerin's draft number, however, made him immediately eligible. After the Supreme Court validated the draft, the other three appellants began serving their maximum one-year civilian sentences on February 9, 1918, sitting out the duration of the war in prison.<sup>15</sup>

Otto Wangerin's saga, however, was just beginning. Having received the “greeting” of his impending draft in the first call in August, he joined a small group for a “secret meeting” on September 18 at the defense committee's Rice Street office to help decide what to do next. Included in the group were Latimer, his attorney, a Miss Sullen, and C. N. Swanson, a government spy who left a detailed account of the meeting. If Wangerin skipped bail to avoid being drafted, he wondered, when would the bail come due? Not until after the Supreme Court rendered a decision on the legality of the draft itself, Latimer thought. Since a postal worker had been fired for putting up the bail money, Wangerin was concerned about repay-

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<sup>13</sup> *Arver v U.S., Grahl v same*, 245 US 366–78 (1918); United States Supreme Court briefs, docket 663, Fall Term, 1917.

<sup>14</sup> Here and below, *Arver v U.S., Grahl v same*, 245 US 371 (1918). The decision has been much discussed; see, for example, *Michigan Law Review* 67 (1969): 1493–1552.

<sup>15</sup> *New Times*, Feb. 9, 1918, p. 3; Roger Baldwin to F. B. Keppel, June 29, 1918, ACLU papers, 78: 151; Wangerin court-martial file, 107087, Judge Advocate General Records, Record Group (RG) 153, NARA, Washington, D.C.

ing the man if he jumped bail. Sullen noted Wangerin would be easier to visit in jail than at Camp Dodge in Iowa, where Minnesota draftees were sent. By the end of the meeting, Wangerin had still not made up his mind whether to answer the first draft call and then resist the war from within the military. The decision was made for him, however, when Agent Swanson phoned his boss in the Justice Department and had Wangerin arrested, thus assuring the Socialist's presence on the troop train to Camp Dodge. Wangerin found himself in the first wave of conscripts descending on the newly created camp-city in late September 1917. Few other draftees, however, had a military-police escort.<sup>16</sup>

**C**amp Dodge, built rapidly over the summer near Des Moines, was designed to hold more than 40,000 draftees from Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, and central Illinois. Des Moines boosters had beaten out Fort Snelling for the camp site not because of Iowa's relative sunniness but because Iowa was "dry," and the war department was concerned about soldiers' ready access to liquor in St. Paul.<sup>17</sup>

On arriving at Camp Dodge on September 24, Wangerin refused to wear an army uniform, for him a symbol of militarism and killing. This stand made him the first person court-martialed at Camp Dodge and among the first war objectors in the country to face military justice. Attorney Latimer, a Socialist candidate for Congress in 1914 and 1916 and future Farmer-Labor mayor of Minneapolis, wrote the National Civil Liberties Bureau that "the attitude of the officers . . . is extremely hostile to the conscientious objector, especially if he happens to be a Socialist." The *New Times*, after accusing authorities of postponing the proceedings so that Latimer could not attend the trial, proclaimed that Wangerin had "STOOD BY HIS CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES AGAINST TAKING HUMAN LIFE. . . . Wangerin was no quitter."<sup>18</sup>



On November 7 Wangerin received a stiff 15-year court-martial sentence to be served at the federal prison at Leavenworth, Kansas. (Because incarceration of a military prisoner in a civilian prison was unlawful, he was eventually moved to the nearby military disciplinary barracks at Fort Leavenworth.) In his sentencing statement, Wangerin "claimed to be an internationalist and a follower of Thomas Paine," probably quoting Paine's credo, "My country is the world" (as Socialist Eugene V. Debs would in his trial a year later for delivering an antiwar speech). Wangerin was a "consistent and loyal member of the party, always doing all within his power to further what he considered the best interests of the working class," the Socialist Duluth *Truth* lamented to its readers. Taken to Leavenworth a few days later—"an impressive sight," said a local paper without elaborating—Wangerin learned the negative outcome of his Supreme Court appeal in January. Even at the

<sup>16</sup> A. L. Sugarman to Civil Liberties Bureau, Aug. 1, 1917, 33: 1404, and H. M. Harter to Roger Baldwin, July 10, 1917, 33: 1416, both ACLU papers; *New Times*, Aug. 11, 1917, p. 1; Agent C. N. Swanson, report, Sept. 18, 1917, Military Intelligence files, 10110-160, War Dept. General and Special Staffs Records, RG165, NARA, Washington, D.C.; Federal Court Records, case 320, NARA; *Minneapolis Journal*, Sept. 18, 1917, p. 1; *Des Moines Register*, Sept. 25, 1917, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *National Geographic* 32 (Nov.–Dec. 1917): 461; Holbrook and Appel, *Minnesota In the War*, 1: 309, 310, 317. Camp Dodge soon took in African-American soldiers from Alabama because the War Department did not want to train southern whites and blacks together.

<sup>18</sup> Latimer, quoted in Edward S. Allen, *Freedom in Iowa: The Role of the Iowa Civil Liberties Union* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977), 8; *New Times*, Nov. 10, 1917, p. 1.



*Camp Dodge, built almost overnight to house 40,000 draftees from Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois*

*First drill of Minnesota recruits at Camp Dodge, 1917*



time, some observers recognized that his case demonstrated the problem created when local courts and draft boards forced principled conscientious objectors into the military, where

authorities believed a sentence must “show no mercy for flagrant disobedience.”<sup>19</sup>

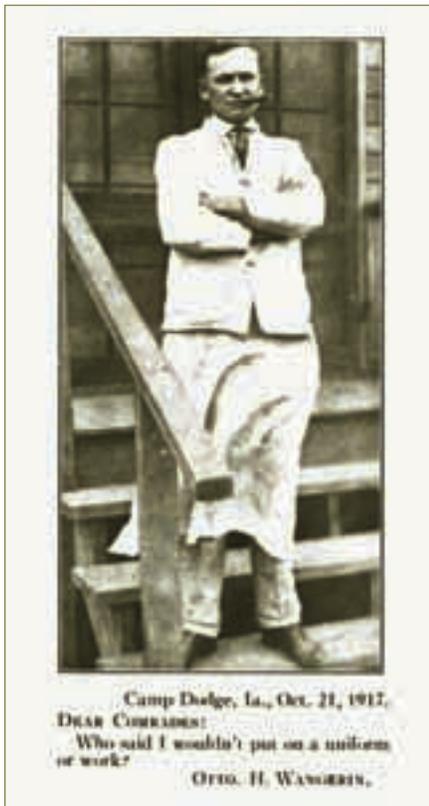
This harsh sentence prompted creation of a fundraising defense committee in the Twin

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<sup>19</sup> *Des Moines Evening Tribune*, Nov. 7, p. 1, Nov. 10, p. 1, both 1917; Federal Court Records, case 320, NARA; *New Times*, Feb. 23, 1918, p. 3; Wangerin court-martial file, 107087; *Des Moines Capital*, Nov. 7, 1917, p. 1; *Truth* (Duluth), Nov. 9, 1917, p. 1; *Chicago Daily News*, Nov. 8, 1917, ACLU papers, 6: 588.

Cities. Member Fred Miller was reported to a federal grand jury for selling 25¢ picture postcards that showed soldier Wangerin wearing what appears to be a kitchen apron and jacket over his civilian clothes with the caption, “Dear Comrades: Who said I wouldn’t put on a uniform or work?” “The card’s real purpose,” intoned the federal attorney, “was to convey the impression that the said Otto Wangerin had successfully defied and disobeyed the military authorities at Camp Dodge.”<sup>20</sup>

*Photo card produced by Wangerin’s defense committee, showing him in civilian clothes at Camp Dodge, October 1917*



Wangerin’s case received national attention. National Civil Liberties Bureau (NCLB) secretary Roger Baldwin optimistically wrote: “I think there will be an almost immediate reversal in judgment in that case.” More cautiously, NCLB chair Oscar Villard noted in a one-sentence memo to Baldwin: “Here’s a case worth watching and seeing if WW [Woodrow Wilson] approves—and [Secretary of War Newton] Baker, too.” While Baldwin’s optimism in hindsight seems naive, the judge advocate

general’s office was concerned about the implications of drafting conscientious objectors, but it decided not to intervene until the War Department clarified its position. By the time that finally happened in late March 1918, however, Wangerin’s case had apparently been forgotten, and he remained imprisoned at Leavenworth.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, back in St. Paul, Strong-Broms had been keeping busy while his comrades’ Supreme Court case pended. Frequently arrested for speaking out against the war, he later confessed to his son that he “had seen the inside of twenty-two jails.” The *New Times* gave this account of one of his speeches at Meeker County’s Lake Manuella on August 16:

“We are not making any mistake in fighting for the rights of American people,” Allen S. Broms said. “They say my middle name is ‘sass.’ Maybe that is true. No, I didn’t register. That is also true and I will tell you why I didn’t register and a lot of others didn’t register . . . According to the 13th amendment to the constitution the draft law passed by the Congress of the United States is in violation of the National Constitution.”

At this juncture sheriff Kouslak stepped up and arrested Broms. He said, “You fellows are not going to talk about our government. I told you in a gentlemanly way that you could speak but that you could not talk about our government. You come with me.” (Grabs by coat.)

Broms replied, “You needn’t handle me so roughly. I am ready to go with you but I just want to say that in spite of the fact that according to the Constitution we have the right to free speech, an officer of the law refuses me that right.”<sup>22</sup>

In September Strong-Broms was arrested again by military police while quoting President Wilson. A Minneapolis judge ruled that the Socialist was guilty of disorderly conduct “whether Broms said the things he is charged with or not.” By October 19 Duluth’s Socialist paper reported that Strong-Broms was again out of the workhouse and “still filling lecture dates.” On New Year’s Day 1918, he introduced a visiting speaker at a substitute lecture hall after Governor Joseph A. A. Burnquist successfully dissuaded the first hall owners from honoring their commitment. (Resister Joseph Arver and Clara Strong-Broms were also active Socialist speakers, and Otto Wangerin assisted by leafleting and selling literature, reported gov-

<sup>20</sup> Federal Court Records, case 363, NARA.

<sup>21</sup> Roger Baldwin to F. Keppel, Nov. 13, 16, 1917; Baldwin to Latimer, Nov. 14, 1917; Villard to Baldwin, n.d.; Baldwin to Villard, Nov. 20, 1917, ACLU papers, 6: 584, 591, 603, 605; Wangerin court-martial file, 107087.

<sup>22</sup> Wilbur Broms, interview, 48; *New Times*, Aug. 23, 1918; “B” folder, newspaper clippings, fliers, Agents’ Reports, MCPS; Military Intelligence files, 10110-101. Strong-Broms’s entire July 3 speech in Almelund, Minnesota, was faithfully recorded in a 42-page transcript; Military Intelligence files, 10110-547.

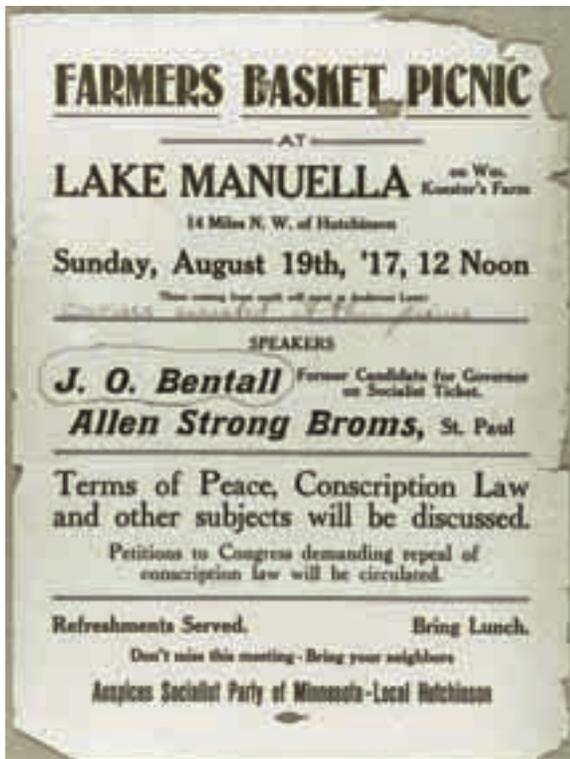
ernment spies who carefully monitored these antiwar gatherings).<sup>23</sup>

On January 7 the U.S. Supreme Court's affirming of the legality of the draft triggered St. Paul federal court actions against the remaining resisters. Selective Service regulations had already been modified to permit draft boards to give nonregistrants "half numbers" that ensured immediate conscription. Only Richard Carlson (or possibly Frank Carlson) among the St. Paul Socialists was reportedly will-

ing to sign his registration card to avoid being assigned a half number. According to one newspaper account, Strong-Broms hesitated and seemed about to sign but "changed his mind when his wife advised him to stand firm in his opposition to war."<sup>24</sup>

On January 28, eleven nonregistrant "slackers"—Strong-Broms, Richard Carlson, Frank Carlson, Unger, Kammen, Axel Carlson, Carl Johnson, Treseler, Gunnard Johnson, Robert Cohen, and Frederick Sollwold—had their civilian-misdemeanor sentences for failing to register reduced to time already served, thereby allowing their immediate conscription. A local paper reported that they "will leave [jail] for Fort Snelling tomorrow." In recalling the case months later, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* noted an altercation between the guards and three women who tried to prevent the men from being taken into military custody. The *Des Moines Register* reported that Clara Strong-Broms and her children "refused to be parted" from Allen and were eventually permitted to accompany the men to the fort. Of the 11 in the stockade, Frank Carlson was sent to Camp Dodge separately and given a 10-year sentence, and Cohen and Sollwold were found to be physically unfit for military duty. Since their sentences had been reduced to make them eligible for the draft, it is probable that these two escaped further civilian criminal penalties, although this was not always the case. (One Pentecostal draft resister who indicated he would be willing to serve was sent back to jail when found physically unfit.)<sup>25</sup>

The *New Times* later analyzed the striking legal irregularities of the courts-martial. According to draft regulations, five of the St. Paul eight should have been deferred: Strong-Broms was married with children, Unger



*Flier with agent's penciled notation,  
"Broms arrested at this picnic," 1917*

<sup>23</sup> *New Times*, Sept. 15, p. 1, Sept. 22, p. 1, 2, both 1917; *Minneapolis Journal*, Sept. 18, 1917, p. 1; *Truth*, Oct. 19, 1917, p. 1; *Two Harbors Socialist*, Sept. 21, 1917, p. 1; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Jan. 2, 1918, p. 8; "ETO" folder, June 3, 21, 1917, "Avery" folder, Aug. 26, 1917, "O. R. Hatfield" folder, Aug. 2, 1917, "CNW" folder, June 21, 1917, Agents' Reports, MCPS; Military Intelligence files, 10110-101.

<sup>24</sup> *Selective Service Regulations* (Washington, D.C., 1918), sec. 65, p. 36; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Jan. 15, 1918, p. 1; *Minneapolis Journal*, Jan. 14, 1918, p. 1; *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 18, 1918, p. 8; *New Times*, Feb. 9, 1918, p. 3; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Jan. 16, 1918, p. 12.

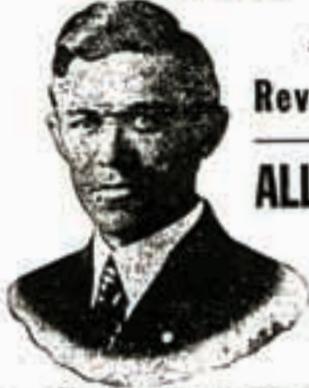
<sup>25</sup> *St. Paul Dispatch*, Jan. 28, 1918, p. 1; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 9, 1918, p. 1; *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 18, 1918, p. 8; *St. Paul Daily News*, Jan. 28, 1918, p. 1. Alone among the Socialists to get less than eight months was Sollwold, who was sentenced on Dec. 9, 1917, instead of Jan. 9, 1918. The *New Times*, Feb. 9, 1918, p. 3, refers to 13 Socialists in the guardhouse at Fort Snelling; the other two may have decided to register and serve in the military. Flight was also an option; Edward Harty hid out on a farm, according to infiltrator Swanson's report, Military Intelligence files, 10110-160.

Pentecostal resister Elmer Lathrop of Minneapolis was sentenced to 10 months in jail in Knoxville, Iowa, and returned to jail there after being rejected by the army; *Des Moines Capital*, Jan. 29, 1918, p. 8.

**Shubert Theatre**  
**Sunday, January 13**  
 AT 10:00 A. M. SHARP

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF  
 Grave-Digging**

A Lecture of Today's  
**Revolution in Democracy**  
 BY  
**ALLAN STRONG BROMS**



Well Known Lectures on SOCIAL and  
 SCIENTIFIC SUBJECTS

An Artist at  
**"PUTTING IT ACROSS"**

*"What the Capitalist Class Produces are its Own Grave-Diggers,"*  
*suggests this Socialist newspaper announcement for a Sunday-*  
*morning lecture by Strong-Brome, 1918*

Admission 15c      Socialist Party Hennepin County Central Committee

*"What the Capitalist Class Produces are its Own Grave-Diggers," suggests this Socialist newspaper announcement for a Sunday-morning lecture by Strong-Brome, 1918*

was an enemy alien (noncitizen from a country at war with United States), and three of the Swedes were unnaturalized neutral aliens. More than that, the federal courts had not yet decided the legality of the draft board's involuntary registration of the eight when they had been transferred from civilian to military authority.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, Clara Strong-Brome busily advocated for the resisters and organized complaints to Congress and the War Department about unsanitary conditions at the Fort Snelling guardhouse. Her agitation continued after the eight arrived at Camp Dodge when it seemed

possible they would be given a court-martial sentence of death, an idea the camp officials denied was under consideration. A crowd of more than 200 at the St. Paul depot, reported the *New Times*, protested the removal of the objectors to Camp Dodge.<sup>27</sup>

Most conscientious objectors during World War I were religious objectors. The majority at Camp Dodge were Mennonites, but some were from other historic "peace churches" such as the Society of Friends and the Church of the Brethren, as well as Pentecostal and millennial groups. Many pacifist groups did not object to draft registration, and provision had been made in the draft law for adherents of recognized pacifist churches to serve as noncombatants. This provision was not always respected, however, and even noncombatant status was not acceptable to some dissenters. In addition, many denominations appealing to lower economic classes had no official recognition as pacifist by the government. For all of these reasons, the February arrival of the political objectors spelled problems for camp officers already saddled with Mennonite absolutists who refused to wear uniforms or cooperate with the military. The *New Times* reported, "We don't know what to do with fellows like these," said one officer. "I told one of them he would get ten years [for refusal to obey orders], but he only laughed and said, 'Why, I thought we were to be shot.' . . . What can you do with a fellow like that, anyhow?"<sup>28</sup>

George L. Siegel, a Twin Cities attorney and Socialist state legislator, defended the eight St. Paul resisters at their March 11, 1918, courts-martial. Unaccountably, given the military's belief that Strong-Brome was "the leader of seven members of the young socialists party," he received a lighter sentence than his comrades—20 years rather than 25. Perhaps this was because he was married. Perhaps his antiwar internationalism seemed moderate compared to the absolute pacifism of some of his comrades. Or perhaps his education level was closer

<sup>26</sup> *New Times*, Feb. 23, p. 3, Mar. 16, p. 1, both 1918. On July 9, 1918, Congress authorized the draft of resident aliens from neutral countries, but diplomatic problems remained throughout the war. *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 1918, vol. 40, pt. 1, p. 884-85.

<sup>27</sup> *New Times*, Feb. 9, p. 3, Feb. 23, p. 3, both 1918; "1917-18, 1920, 1924" folder, Brome papers; *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 18, 1918, p. 8. Clara's agitation was adjudged serious enough that a letter was sent to the secretary of war; Allen Strong-Brome file, notecards, Agents' Reports, MCPS. The letter, which expressed regret that the death penalty was not being considered for Allen, is in Military Intelligence files, 10110-547, item 2.

<sup>28</sup> *New Times*, Mar. 16, 1918, p. 1. Early in the war, International Bible Students (Jehovah's Witnesses) refused to entrain, and two were court-martialed at Camp Dodge; *Fenton Reporter* (Iowa), Aug. 18, 1918, [8]; *Watchtower*, May 15, 1967, p. 315-19.

to that of the sentencing officers. Whatever the reason, another articulate, self-educated activist would receive no such favors from a panel of Camp Dodge officers that summer: provocative single-taxer and Roman Catholic Ben Salmon was court-martialed with a death sentence, almost immediately modified to 25 years by the War Department.<sup>29</sup>

Morris Kammen's sentencing statement, reported in Minnesota's Socialist press, spoke of the hardships he experienced and the continued necessity of resistance to the draft:

My mother, before registration day, with tears in her eyes, begged me to register, but not because she believed in the justice of the war. But I told her, "My manhood, every fibre in my body, my soul, tells me, you must fight against militarism; that it is your duty, even though it may mean prison." . . . Would you want a soldier who had donned the uniform and signed the enlistment card because of fear of punishment?

I am standing for my convictions, and those convictions are, that war is an unnecessary evil and the only way to end war and get a lasting peace, bring about a real democracy, is to stand up and say, "I don't want to kill my fellowmen; I don't want to be a murderer." Do as you please to me; I cannot be a murderer.

When questioned by the court how he thought he would fare if Germany won the war being fought, Kammen candidly replied, "Why, about the same, sir. I suppose the Germans would court-martial me, too, sir. That is what they are doing to German comrades."<sup>30</sup>

**A**fter the severe March 1918 sentences, there was a short flurry of activity for appeal and for *habeas corpus* proceedings to challenge the legality of the inductions. "Send your last dollar if need be" to state headquarters, pleaded the Duluth *Truth*. "Your liber-

ty is in danger." The Des Moines local of the Socialist Party also sought to be supportive. In Washington, D.C., however, by June 14, 1918, the War Department in a routine review upheld all the sentences given St. Paul's draft resisters, and the last of the eight were sent on their way to Leavenworth.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, the Socialist Party was undergoing a shift in its own thinking. The St. Paul party's outspoken position against the war throughout 1917 and early 1918 apparently had not hurt it electorally, for in March, St. Paul Socialist mayoral candidate J. F. Emme stunned



*Socialist Party certificate acknowledging financial support, 1918*

pundits by finishing second in the primary and entering the general election. Yet, as historians have pointed out, the party's position on the war evolved though government repression made it impossible to change its stance publicly. This national shift, which found hope in President Wilson's internationalist statement of war aims, is also evident in the pages of the *New Times*, where in January 1918 references to "slackers," instead of "conscientious objectors," appeared for the first time. Not until February 1919 did Minnesota's executive board of the Socialist Party vote to support financially "the steps already taken by Mrs. Broms for the imme-

<sup>29</sup> *Camp Dodger*, Mar. 15, Apr. 12, 26, June 15—all 1918; *Des Moines Evening Tribune*, Mar. 11, p. 3, Apr. 25, p. 14, both 1918; *Des Moines Register*, Mar. 13, 1918, p. 6; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 9, 1918, p. 1. Ben Salmon's story as one of the first Roman Catholic war resisters is well told by Torin R. T. Finney, *Unsung Hero of the Great War* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> *New Times*, Mar. 16, p. 1, Mar. 30, p. 1, 3, both 1918; *Truth*, Apr. 5, 1918, p. 1, 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Truth*, Mar. 14, 1918, p. 4; *Camp Dodger*, June 14, 1918; *New York Times*, May 7, 1918, p. 8. Des Moines Socialist Party financial secretary Carl Moll wrote the national office: "Shall we adhere to the 'conscientious objector' plea or make an open class-conscious fight all along the line?" On that crucial question, national secretary Adolph Germer passed the buck, sending the letter on to the Civil Liberties Bureau for an answer; Moll to Germer, Mar. 7, 1918, ACLU papers, 6: 579.

diate release of Comrade Broms” (and, one assumes, for the other imprisoned comrades).<sup>32</sup>

Unlike the shorter federal civilian-misdemeanor convictions, the long military sentences would be greatly reduced after the Armistice on November 11, 1918, lessened the perceived need to make examples of resisters. Carl Johnson had been released shortly before the end of the war; Treseler got out May 6, 1919, as did Strong-Broms two weeks later. Otto Wangerin, already transferred to Alcatraz, was paroled on August 10. Richard Carlson, apparently the last, was released on the recommendation of the War Department 10 days later. As it turned out, there was no correlation between length of sentence and time actually served; the vagaries of differing courts-martial were mitigated, and occasionally complicated, by War Department amnesty recommendations. Leadership in a

*Lady Liberty, formed by 18,000 soldiers at Camp Dodge to help sell war bonds, 1918*



February 1919 work strike at Fort Leavenworth decreased the likelihood of a reduced sentence, while letters from the outside sent on a prisoner's behalf generally increased his chances.<sup>33</sup>

**I**f all St. Paul's Socialist draft resisters, only Allen Strong-Broms and Otto Wangerin seem to have continued their notoriety after the war. In late August 1919, Strong-Broms was a member of the constitution committee at the state convention that led to a three-way split in the Socialist Party; he would begin organizing for the majority faction, which formed the Communist Party. (Clara Strong-Broms was a delegate to the founding national convention of the Communist Party.) In September 1919 ex-soldiers dragged Allen from a soapbox at St. Paul's Seventh and Cedar Streets when he made "uncomplimentary remarks about the United States government and soldiers." A special agent of the Justice Department took credit when Allen Strong-Broms moved to Chicago in 1920, citing the hostile "greeting" from the American Legion and government surveillance, but personal reasons may have been paramount; Allen and Clara were divorced in the early 1920s.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Michael Bassett, "The American Socialist Party and the War, 1917–18," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 11 (1969): 280–83, 289; *New Times*, Jan. 26, 1918, p. 3; *Minnesota Bulletin*, Mar. 1919, p. 1, in *Truth*, Mar. 14, 1919, p. 1; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Mar. 20, p. 1, Mar. 21, p. 1, both 1918.

<sup>33</sup> War Dept. memo, Aug. 19, 20, 1919, microfilm, Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kans.; Franklin H. Holbrook, *St. Paul and Ramsey County in the War of 1917–18* (St. Paul: Ramsey County War Records Commission, 1929), 192, roster, 359; Federal Court Records, case 320, St. Paul, 1918, NARA. Gunnard Johnson was also transferred to Alcatraz; Roger Baldwin to Theron Cooper, June 23, 1919, ACLU papers, 80: 227. Apparently, Strong-Broms's release in May was due to a clerical error that the War Department declined to correct, much to the outrage of the Minnesota American Legion and local newspapers; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Dec. 8, 1919, p. 1; *St. Paul Herald*, Dec. 14, 1919; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Nov. 19, 1919, p. 12; Military Intelligence files, 10110-547.

<sup>34</sup> *Truth*, Aug. 29, 1919, p. 2; Broms, interview, 19, 20; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Sept. 19, 1919, p. 11; "1917–18, 1920, 1924" folder, Broms papers. The Duluth paper was critical of the move to join the Communist Party without rank-and-file discussion, and *Truth* soon became the organ of the Communist Labor Party.

As for Otto Wangerin, punishments for resisting the war did not end when he was formally discharged from the army on January 10, 1920. His one-year civilian federal sentence for refusing to register still stood. Although Attorney General Palmer testified before a Senate subcommittee in January 1921 that he doubted that any draft cases were still pending, Wangerin in fact was between petitions for stays of his sentence. President Warren G. Harding commuted Wangerin's sentence to six months, which he finally served in St. Paul's Ramsey County Jail in 1921 after several stays by an indulgent court. Allowing Wangerin to serve his time locally rather than in St. Cloud meant that he could continue his work for unions ("not . . . political or so-called radical organizations," his attorney assured the court) as a stenographer and researcher and his mother's sole support. Wangerin probably holds the distinction of being both the first World War I draft resister arrested and the last one to serve a prison sentence for following his conscience.<sup>35</sup>

Political differences among St. Paul's resisters ranged from the pacifism of Otto Wangerin (at least as reported by the *New Times*) to the proletarian internationalism of

Allen Strong-Broms. Their linking of individual action with mass action seems remarkably similar to the antidraft movement in the 1960s and perhaps even closer to the smaller draft-registration resistance of the early 1980s, also unsuccessful in igniting a larger movement.<sup>36</sup>

Philosopher Bertrand Russell, reflecting on his own opposition to World War I, observed that the most difficult time to oppose a war is at its beginning.<sup>37</sup> St. Paul's Socialist draft-registration resisters left a consistent record of opposition from the war's start through the postwar Red Scare. Whatever one's views, we can be grateful that they were willing to ask questions about waging war, for their sacrifices eventually helped enlarge tolerance for dissent in the United States.

The legal questions that the St. Paul draft resisters raised continued to concern the courts in decades to come. Future drafts avoided the duplication of jurisdictions by not treating draft resisters as deserters. In 1970 the Supreme Court decided that induction could not be used to punish nonregistrants, but 15 years later it ruled that singling out public nonregistrants for prosecution did not constitute a form of illegal selective prosecution.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Senate Judiciary Subcommittee, *Amnesty and Pardon for Political Prisoners*, 66th Cong., 3d sess., 1921, p. 73; petitions for stay, Oct. 2, 1920, May 4, 1921, Federal Court Records, St. Paul, 1918, case 320, NARA. He continued his union activism at least until the 1930s. All-seeing files report Wangerin signing a call for a Communist-led conference on behalf of the Railroad Brotherhood Unity Movement in 1933; Military Intelligence files, 10110-2666 (58).

<sup>36</sup> Allen Strong-Broms supported his son Wilbur's military service during World War II, which they both saw as necessary for the defeat of fascism; Wilbur Broms, interview. See also Jerry Elmer, "Nonregistration As a Political Tool," *WIN* [Workshop in Nonviolence Institute], Jan. 1, 1981, p. 15-17.

<sup>37</sup> Bertrand Russell, "Some Psychological Difficulties of Pacifism in Wartime," in *Reminiscences of War Resisters during World War I*, ed. Julian Bell (New York: Garland, 1972), 329-35.

<sup>38</sup> Courts during the World War I era had ruled this duplication legal; see *Franke v Murray*, 248 Fed 865-69 (8th Cir Appeals 1918); *Ex parte Dunn*, *Ex parte Hiller*, *Ex parte Yanyar*, 250 Fed 871-73 (Dist. Court, Dist. Mass., 1918); *Yale Law Journal* 50 (1940-41):257. Regarding the 1970 ruling, see *Gutknecht v U.S.*, described in Donald L. Simons, *I Refuse: Memories of a Vietnam War Objector* (Trenton: Broken Rifle Press, 1992), 13; George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 250-51, 340-41. On the 1985 ruling, see Russell F. Ford, "Declaration of a Draft Registration Resister," in *Swords into Plowshares: Nonviolent Direct Action for Disarmament*, ed. Arthur J. Laffin and Anne Montgomery (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 126.

*Lady Liberty and the Camp Dodge panorama are courtesy the Iowa Gold Star Museum, Camp Dodge, Johnston, Ia.; the postcard is from the Wangerin court-martial file, 107087, RG153, NARA. The other photographs, certificate, Lake Manuella flier ("B" folder, Agents' Reports, MCPS), lecture announcement (New Times, Jan. 12, 1918, p. 3), newspaper page (New Times, Feb. 2, 1917, p. 1), and newspaper clipping (Minneapolis Journal, Nov. 11, 1919, p. 2) are in the MHS collections.*



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