Anti-German Hysteria In Wisconsin

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Letter

"Correspondence from Pastor Krenke to Governor Phillip Emanuel L. Phillips Papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society"



Enclosed. Philip to Headles. Ver 24, 1918

LUTHERAN PARSONAGE REV. R. KRENKE WASHBURN, WISCONSIN

Washburn, Wisconsin

October 21st,1918.

Governor Em. L. Philipp,

Madison, Wisconsin.

My dear Governor: -

Permit me to again trouble you with a case similar to that I wrote you about October 7th; the only difference is, that the first case was caused by the Knights of Liberty, and the second by the County Council of Defense, -- the first attacking our german school only, the second our german school and divine services in the german language. Following is a true copy of the notification of the Bayfield County Council of Defense addressed to me personally and to the Trustees of our congregation;

"To Rev.R.Krenke and the Trustees of the German Lutheran Church, Washburn, Wisconsin,

The following resolution was unanimously adopted by the County Council of Defense, at its regular meeting held on Friday evening, October 18th,1918.:

"Whereas, a great many complaints have been made to the County Council of Defense, regarding the conduct of the German Lutheran Church in Washburn and Bayfield County, in that German School is being conducted on Saturdays and German Church services are being held on Sundays.

This Council believes that the teaching of the German language at this time should not be permitted under any condition. Our country is at war with Germany, and any attempt either to teach the german language to the children or to encourage the speaking of it is giving aid and comfort to the enemy, we believe further that the holding of services at which the German language is spoken exclusively tends to engender hate and enmity in the hearts and minds of true loyal Americans.

This Council therefore demands that that German School be

immediately discontinued, and that church services be henseforth conducted in the English language or not at all.

Resolved further that a copy of this resolution be sent to the proper authorities of the said German Lutheran Church, and that in the event of a refusal to comply therewith, that such steps be taken as may be deemed necessary.

Dated October 18th, 1918

BAYFIELD COUNTY COUNCIL OF DEFENSE

By Wels M. Oscar, Secretary "

See more classroom materials and lesson plans on the Wisconsin Historical Society website.

LUTHERAN PARSONAGE REV. R. KRENKE WASHBURN, WISCONSIN

Permit me to call the attention of your Honor to the fact, that no assertion is made by the "Council" that either I or my congregation were not loyal, or that we favored German Propaganda, or that we used our school and services for such damnable purposes. In fact, I do not believe that such assertion could be made, by even our enemies, if we have such, with even a mere show of right and justice. We aim to do our full duty towards our government and to uphold same in all its undertakings, and to thus show our loyalty to our government. Our people very liberally bought Liberty Bonds, W.S.S., contributed to the Red Cross etc.—We are yet small in numbers, consisting of 32 communicant members,—members over 14 years of age. Most of these people are common laborers; but nevertheless they have subscribed more then \$1350.00 to the Third Liberty Loan. Concerning the Fourth Liberty Loan I have no complete figures yet, but the prospects are, that our people have exceeded their subscriptions to the 3rd Liberty Loan. And the younger children have nearly all bought and are still buying W.S.S., Thrift Stamps etc., the tatal amounting to more than \$300%.

Concerning the demand of the "Council" I would state, that by complying with such demand nearly one half of the older people of my congregation would be deprived of their constitutional right to serve their God according to the dictates of their conscience and in such language as they are capable to understand, -- several being entirely unable to understand an english sermon, and others would have but a very

REV. R. KRENKE WASHBURN, WISCONSIN

-3-

limited benefit and blessing of an english sermon on account of their deficiency in the english language. For this reason it certainly does not appear just and right to deprive them of their services and spiritual edification, and undoubtedly it is contrary to the word and spirit of the laws of our state and the constitution of our country. I will endeavor to obtain a hearing before the "Council", and will there particularly Emphaxx emphasize this point.

Now, my dear Governor, what procedure would you advise me further to take? Woult / De asking too much of your Honor, in asking you, to call the attention of the State Council of Defense to this matter? Or would it

not be advisable to do so?

In conclusion permit me to state that on September 29th my congregation passed a resolution to introduce monthly english services, and October 6th it passed a resolution to discontinue entirely our school for the present.

Thanking you in advance for an early reply, permit me to remain

Yours very truly

Washburn, Wis.

October 24. 1918.

Reverend R. Krenke. Washburn, Wiseonsin.

My dear Pastor Krenke:

I have your communication of the Elst inst.

The Council of Defense of Washburn County is entirely outside of its sphere when it attempts to dictate to you in what language you shall preach. There is no law either federal or state which forbids you to conduct your religious services in German; also your religious instructions and no person has a right to molest or in any way interfere with you in this matter.

I have stated many times from the public platform and in the press that I would tolerate no interference with religious services so long as the same are not used as a propaganda for our enemy. I have laid down this principle that in Wisconsin he who worships his Diety may do so in the language of his own choice and we shall adhere to that principle so long as I am governor of the state of Wisconsin.

stood to mean that I would tolerate for a moment either in church or elsewhere the use of a foreign language for the purpose of promoting the interest of our enemy or in any way discouraging the co-operation of our people during the war. That, of course, is an entirely different matter.

I shall submit your letter to the State Council of Defense for its action. Yours truly.

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October 24, 1918.

Mr. W. S. Heddles, Chairman, State Council of Defense, Capitol, C i t y

My dear Mr. Heddles:

Please note the enclosed which indicates an action by the Washburn County/Council of Defense which is entirely outside the province of that organization. Councils of Defense were organized as war aid institutions to create propagands for the war and to promote such work as it is necessary to do in order to properly support the army and navy of the United States.

I regret that some councils have taken it upon themselves to run politics and have gone into other fields far from the intention of the law. It seems to me that there should be a general circular letter issued to the councils of the state calling the attention of the members to the fact that the law under which this institution was created confers no powers upon them except to carry on necessary war work and whenever the councils exceed the authority conferred upon them by statute them not only are acting unlawfully but they are injuring the cause for which they were created.

Political interests must be left with the people. Any council that attempts to become political loses the cooperation of all who are opposed to its political policy and

W. S. Heddles -2-

it immediately drops to the level of a political organization.

The enforcement of the espionage act is the business of the United States government and rests with the United States District Atterney. All the councils should attempt to do in that connection is to give the United States District Attorney any information that it may have concerning the violation of the law. Any interference on the part of the councils with the constitutional right of freedom of religion is in violation of the organic law under which we live and cannot be tolerated for a moment, nor would such action be sustained by the courts.

I also note that in some cases councils of defanse have undertaken the bond sales and are guilty of injudicious acts in connection with the same. Again I call attention to the fact that strong-arm methods, of any other form of force if attempted, are in violation of the law and are contrary to the policy of the government.

I trust that the central organization will keep the county councils within their proper sphere. I ask this in the interest of the better service which the councils may render.

Yours truly.

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