

**THE GREEN CORN REBELLION:
A CASE STUDY IN NEWSPAPER SELF-CENSORSHIP**

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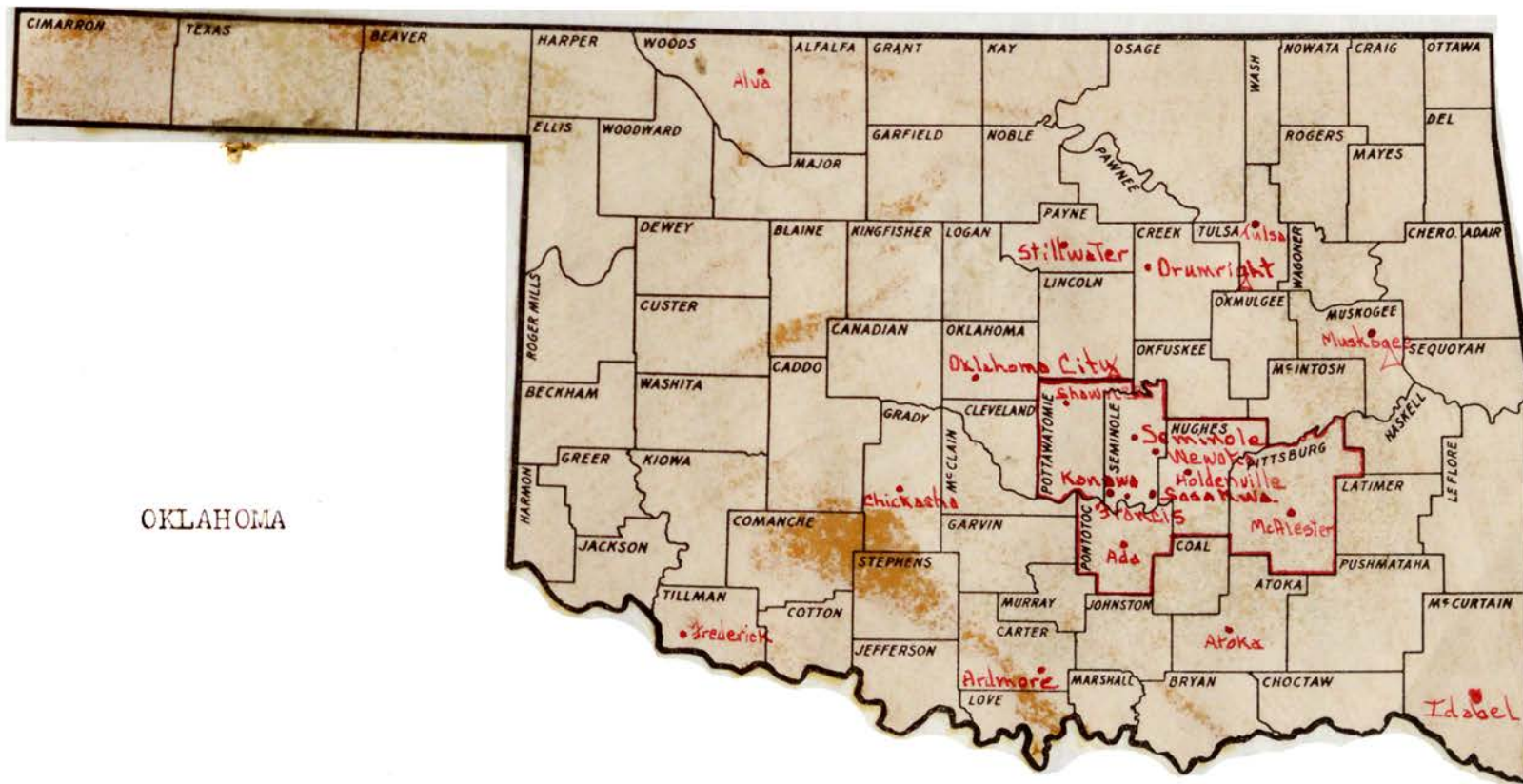
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OKLAHOMA

Showing: The five counties in which the Green Corn Rebellion occurred; and those towns in the state where newspapers, quoted in this study, are located.

I

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

The Green Corn Rebellion, the name given the draft resistance riots in Seminole, Hughes, Pontotoc, Pittsburg, and Pottawatomie counties of Oklahoma in 1917, presents a concrete instance in which may be studied the self-censorship imposed on themselves by American newspapers during the World War. It provides the student of history an opportunity to study the working of a section of the American mind during wartime, and makes possible a study of the press's role in relation to public opinion during such a crisis.

This problem is a case study of the treatment by the press of a specific instance during the first few months after America entered the World War. This is an attempt to place the newspaper in its proper perspective as one of the means for the control of public opinion. This elusive commodity, public opinion, together with the news reports on which public opinion is based, is the stock-in-trade of the newspapers, which have come to represent, in money invested and in the number of persons employed, one of America's greatest industries. This industry was recognized by the government, in 1917, as the chief medium for the development of the psychology so necessary to the service and sacrifice which the war activities of the nation were demanding and were to demand from every citizen of the United States.¹ During this era,

¹George Creel, How We Advertised America, 60.

the government's propaganda activities included the "systematic attempt... to control the attitudes of groups of individuals through the use of suggestion, and, consequently to control their actions".² More than that, however, these activities included the censorship (suppression) of certain information.³

There was a constitutional guarantee of freedom of the press in the United States. There was also, however, a constitutional concept of presidential power, by which, in wartime, the chief executive was empowered to propose "such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient". Many persons in authoritative positions believed that censorship of the press was "necessary and expedient". Newspapermen, however, felt that a censorship branded the Fourth Estate as an unloyal agency; they resented the implication that they were

²Leonard W. Doob, Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique, 89. This is Doob's definition of intentional propaganda. Peter H. Odegard, The American Public Mind, 178. He describes the effect of propaganda as change in attitude.

³Both the positive control of attitudes through suggestion and the negative control through censorship are hereafter, in this study, usually included under the one term "propaganda." This is not common usage among students of propaganda, but to the layman who is vaguely conscious of pressures which control the formation of opinion, and to the person who makes a practical application of propaganda for a definite end, these two---propaganda and censorship---are embraced in the one term, "propaganda". This is felt to be justifiable because there are many definitions of propaganda, each one being formulated in accordance with the particular study made. Doob, Ibid., says that he has examined more than one hundred definitions, fn. 73.

possible enemies of their country.⁴

The government and key representatives of the press entered into at least a tacit agreement by which newspapermen in the United States agreed to "kill" any piece of news believed to be useful to the enemy and to publish reports of the governmental activities, many of which were aimed to influence the reader to give his life, his time, or his money to his nation.

The problem becomes, then, to determine to what extent the reaction of Oklahoma editors to the Green Corn Rebellion was due to the influence of the Committee of Public Information and how much to other influences.

To furnish a background, the incident of the anti-draft resistance riots is discussed briefly, with a longer and detailed discussion devoted to the group which participated. The nature of the people in this group is presented as a contrast to the group represented by the newspaper editor. From the contrast in the mores of the two groups arose a conflict situation which is the subject of this study. In the study, an attempt is made to judge the influences which affected each group and to arrive at probable conclusions as to the repetition of the historical incident and to the manner in which it will be treated by the press. In other words, the goal of the study is to examine the role of the press in a specific incident and thereby to place it in a perspective wherein one can judge its possible influence on the formation of public opinion.

⁴Jesse Frederick Essary, Covering Washington: Government Reflected to the Public in the Press 1822-1926, 120.

II

THE PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATED

As a major event in Oklahoma history, the Green Corn Rebellion may be of debatable importance; but the incident does furnish a case wherein may be studied those factors which influence the formation of public opinion in times of crisis.

The draft resistance riots in Oklahoma, of which many Oklahomans today are totally unaware, occurred in August 1917, in an area in the southeastern part of Oklahoma. This area included, roughly, the counties of Seminole, Hughes, Pontotoc, Pittsburg, and Pottawatomie.¹

For the story of the draft resistance riots, the writer is indebted largely to Charles Bush, whose master's thesis "The Green Corn Rebellion"² was written at the University of Oklahoma. This information is supplemented with the newspaper stories which the writer collected. Bush says,

The general text of the ultimate plan, with some local variations, seems to have been, to assemble at some central point on a given date, force all farmers into their ranks, march to Washington, overthrow the Government and stop the war. Similar columns were to come up from Texas, from Arkansas and other southern states, and a great force was to come out of the Northwest and merge with them somewhere on the road to the Capital City. The "army" was to gain recruits from the disaffected farmers and laborers, until by the time it reached Capital Hill it would be irresistible.

¹There were some other disturbances in Oklahoma, such as those in Payne County and those among the oil field workers near Drumright, but they were by no means so important as this, if one is to judge from newspaper reports.

²University of Oklahoma Library, 1933.

The geographical ignorance of these people was pitiful. Few knew exactly where Washington City is, and certainly they entertained the most nebulous ideas as to the distance. The agitators had failed to mention this aspect of the plan and the credulous farmers believed that the Capital City was only a few hundred miles away. They were to subsist on green corn and on an occasional barbecued steer, taken from the country as they went along. No more definite plan for feeding the great horde had been made.³

No definite date was ever set by the leaders in the revolt, chief among whom were H. H. "Rube" Munson, an I. W. W. leader, who came to Oklahoma from Chicago;⁴ Homer Spence, who was the state secretary of the Working Class Union; and W. L. Benefield of the Lone Dove community near Sasawka, who was a local "captain" in the W. C. U.⁵ On Thursday, August 2, however, the red flag was run up in "Old Man" Spears' yard; at this signal, farmers left their work, turned the stock into the fields, and began to congregate in small groups.

There were two large groups of farmers, well armed and, at first, ready to resist any interference. Approximately one hundred persons were concentrated at Spears' Bluff near Sasakwa and as many at a point in the Lone Dove community near Konawa. Both, however, because there was no leader to give the command, were dispersed as soon as the posses appeared. The principal activities of these groups included the burning of several bridges, chief among which was the Frisco bridge near the small village of Francis, the cutting of telephone wires, and the rounding up of farmers who were not members of

³It was from the plan for feeding the group that the revolt takes its name.

⁴The McAlester News-Capital, October 20, 1917. Trial evidence.

⁵Bush cites The Daily Ardmoreite, October 31, 1917. The Oklahoma News, July 20, 1917.

the union and who were oftentimes not sympathetic with the insurrectionary plans which their neighbors had evolved.

There were sporadic revolts throughout the counties on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday but little real damage was done. Four hundred and fifty farmers were arrested by civilian posses who zealously scoured the countryside; wherever three or four farmers were gathered together, the group was arrested and taken to jails which were soon overflowing.⁶

Three casualties occurred during the days of rioting, and several persons were injured. On the whole, however, the farmers' courage failed as they realized that they had been betrayed by a group of leaders who were not present when the actual trouble occurred.⁷ The first casualty reported was that in which one negro shot another; the defense of the negro was that he was being forced to join in the revolt. W. T. Cargill was shot and fatally wounded when he attempted to resist arrest. The third casualty was that of an Okfuskee county school teacher, who was shot by the patrols on the road to Holdenville. The schoolteacher evidently misunderstood the order to stop his car, or believed that he was to be robbed.⁸

⁶At Holdenville a fence was erected around the county jail and the arrested men were placed in this improvised "bull pen". The Holdenville Democrat, August 10, 1917.

⁷W. L. Benefield took part in the battle at Spears' Bluff which consisted of a "hasty retreat" on the part of farmers. He was the only one of the local leaders, or the agitators, however, who was with any group during the days of rioting.

⁸The Holdenville Democrat, August 10, 1917. The Ada Weekly News, August 9, 1917 reported the teacher as a rebel but the Holdenville Democrat pointed out that he had applied for an appointment to the officers training school and was enroute to McAlester to take his examinations. The Oklahoma News, August 6, 1917 said that the schoolteacher was the son of a former Arkansas judge and that he was a visitor in the state.

There were no state troops sent into the area to assist the civilian force, but Governor Robert L. Williams did send four representatives of the militia to Wewoka⁹ to investigate. Approximately four hundred and fifty prisoners were held in the state penitentiary at McAlester, and scores were held in county jails.¹⁰ Many of these were released, however, for lack of sufficient evidence; and only eighty-five received prison sentences. Twenty-eight were sent to Leavenworth, twenty-three to the federal jail at Vinita, one to the jail in Muskogee, and thirty-four were sentenced to short terms in the state penitentiary at McAlester.¹¹

* There is a story behind the rebellion, which, for the purposes of this study, is more important than the revolt itself. Why was it that the tenant farmer in southeastern Oklahoma resented the draft law? In the urban centers a spirit of patriotism was manifest on every hand. The rural population of these counties, however, was limited by certain factors which made it impossible for the same social pressures and for the same propaganda which affected the urban population to control the actions of the group. What was the nature of these people?

It will be remembered that November 16, 1917, marked only the tenth year of Oklahoma's statehood. A comparatively short time before the World War, these people had lived in Indian territory, where until 1904 they were forced to rent land from the Indian or to lease it illegally.¹² When land became available

⁹Letter to the writer from Luther Harrison, dated May 11, 1939

¹⁰The Ada Weekly News, August 16, 1917.

¹¹The Muskogee Times-Democrat, November 30, 1917.

¹²James Shannon Buchanon and Edward Everett Dale, A History of Oklahoma, 260.

for sale with the division of the land from tribal into individual holdings in that year, by the Dawes Committee:

...it all too frequently fell into the hands of speculators who could afford to accept a very nominal rate of interest on their investment while waiting for mineral development. Naturally, since their chief interest was not farming, they were little inclined... to take any interest in the land except to see that it was planted to some staple... crop, usually cotton.¹³

Thus, tenancy was a condition well-established in this section, and the system of one-crop farming, cotton, only aggravated the economic condition of the farmer; he was dependent on the conditions of weather, prices, and insect pests and their effect on this one crop, for the support of himself and his family. Tenancy figures in the five counties---Hughes, Pittsburg, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, and Seminole--for 1917, were 63.4 percent of the farms in the district.¹⁴

The people of southeastern Oklahoma are very familiar to the writer.¹⁵ There was a distinct class consciousness here; the persons of the urban districts did not mix socially with the tenant farmer. The Indians and whites were social equals,

¹³Labor History of Oklahoma, Compiled and written by Federal Writers' project of Oklahoma, Works Projects Administration, 33.

¹⁴These figures were secured by interpolation from the percentages of farms operated by tenants in Oklahoma in 1910 and 1920. Quoted by John Southern, Farm Tenancy in Oklahoma, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Exp. Sta. Bul. No. 239, 9. Percentages in Seminole county in 1910 were 82.6 and in 1920, 64.5; in Hughes county in 1910, 80.0 and in 1920, 61.2; Pottawatomie in 1910, 52.5 and in 1920, 47.2; Pittsburg county in 1910, 74.2 and in 1920, 54.3; Pontotoc county in 1910, 78.5 and in 1920, 60.0. This is based on a straight line curve, even though Southern points out that there was a marked decrease during the decade of the World War due to a "prosperous agricultural situation, making possible the purchase of farms by operators, and the movement of farm population to urban centers."

¹⁵The writer was born in Bryan county and lived in Atoka

and the educated Indian lived in a home which was tastefully furnished and he was admitted, by the banker and merchant, to the circles which met for parties and to discuss the government. These circles were closed to the farmer.

Politically, the urban class was largely Democratic, as was the whole section of the state at the time of the first election. With the development of class consciousness, partially induced by politicians who were desirous of securing the farm vote, the "farmer" turned more and more toward the teachings of Socialism.¹⁶ The conservative element scorned

until 11 years old. Since that time, relatives who still live there, have been the cause of frequent visits to this section of the state. The writer's father came to Indian Territory from Texas before statehood. Relatives and close friends have been active in organization activities and leaders in political circles in local and state politics.

¹⁶Directory of the State of Oklahoma, 1939, issued by the State Election Board, Compiled by J. Wm. Cordell, Secretary.

		Hughes County		
Total Vote		Dem.	Rep.	Soc.
1907--	3310	1965	1256	89
1916--	4206	2187	1219	791
		Pittsburg County		
1907--	6200	3366	2602	232
1916--	6209	3441	1879	866
		Pontotoc County		
1907--	3427	2328	855	244
1916--	4288	2418	913	936
		Pottawatomie County		
1907--	7353	4210	2911	232
1916--	6473	3276	2042	1119
		Seminole County		
1907--	2689	1396	1101	192
1916--	3251	1444	872	921

The 1914 election figures show a much larger number of Socialist votes cast than do the 1916 figures.

the Socialist and, in at least one instance, the writer knows that party politics was an issue in considering persons for such positions as schoolteachers.¹⁷

The "best people" joined the Ku Klux Klan and belonged to the Methodist, Baptist, Christian, or Presbyterian churches. These denominations, however, were usually of the type known as the "shouting" Methodist and the "hard-shell" Baptist, and members of the Christian church were often referred to as Campbellites. There were few Catholic churches, and the writer, in at least one instance, has heard Catholicism publicly acclaimed as one of the world's evils.¹⁸ The extremists in religion were residents of the rural areas; these people were ordinarily affiliated with the "Holy Rollers" and held long "protracted" meetings in brush arbors or in the country schoolhouses.

The system of education embraced the one-room school house in the country district and the rather progressive schools in the towns; country schools were usually closed during the cotton picking season but urban schools operated on the nine months basis. Illiteracy for the entire state in 1920 showed that in the urban centers the percentage was 1.9 for those persons ten years of age and over and that it was 2.4 for those persons twenty-one years of age and over. In the rural areas these figures were 4.5 for those ten years old and over, and 5.8 for

¹⁷The writer's fourth grade teacher was criticized because she supported Eugene V. Debs for the presidency in the election of 1920.

¹⁸Ku Klux Klan meeting of several southeastern Oklahoma counties at Atoka in 1919.

for those twenty-one years and over.¹⁹ Figures for the specific counties were not available until after the 1930 census; in Pontotoc, Hughes, and Pittsburg counties, illiteracy ranged from 4 to 5.9 percent and in Seminole and Pottawatomie counties from 2 to 3.9.²⁰ These figures do not tell the whole story, however, because there are shades of illiteracy. The following letter from W. L. Benefield, a leader in the resistance disturbances, to his wife, was written in the county jail at Holdenville. It shows, more graphically than any figures, the relative illiteracy of the participants in the revolt.

dear wife

i will rite you a few lines this leaves me well
 i heard you was bad off i hope to god you are better.
 i give up at calvin they air going to take a lot of
 us to McAlester i dont know what they air going to do
 with us i do hope i will get out if i do god being
 my helper i will never get into nothing else no bunch
 will ever git me in nothing else so i will close
 hoping you air better when i get to where i am going.

(Signed) W. L. Benefield²¹

'Politically, socially, religiously, and educationally there was a class distinction; these factors were caused chiefly by economic distinctions. Cotton was literally king in

¹⁹Fourteenth Census of the United States (1920), Population, II, Table 22, 1243. "Illiteracy as defined by the Census Bureau, signified inability to write in any language, not necessarily English, regardless of the ability to read", 1212.

^{20A}Compendium of Maps & Charts Pertaining to State Planning in Oklahoma, Oklahoma State Planning Board (April 1936), 112. "These figures were not in the volumes of the Fifteenth Census of the United States, but the maps indicate that the percentages were obtained from this census. In the Vol. II, "Population," illiteracy is defined at this time as "any person 10 years of age or over who is not able to read or write either in English or in some other language", 1217.

²⁰Shawnee Daily News-Herald, August 10, 1917.

the area; the prosperity of the merchant in the town depended on the cotton crop just as much as the prosperity of the farmer depended on it. The farmer was financed from season to season, in much the same way that he is today, by the merchant or the banker who lent money or goods with the crop as collateral. If the crop were good and the boll weevil inactive, the farmer was able to market his crop, pay his debts, and enjoy a brief period of prosperity. The farmers, however, were anxious to rise above this economic dependence, and early joined in organizations which promised to better their economic condition. Locals of the Farmers' Alliance, a mutual marketing association organized in Texas, were established in Indian Territory in 1885; in 1903 the Farmers' Union, which also had its inception in Texas, had organizations in the territory and a convention was held at Durant in 1904. The latter organization established cooperative gins, warehouses, grain elevators, and retail merchandise stores. While membership in the Farmers' Alliance and the Farmers' Union was democratic, it was composed of those persons "who had or could borrow money", so a third association of farmers known as the Oklahoma Renters' Union was organized in 1909.²² In 1914, an organization known as the Working Class Union, sponsored by the International Workers of the World, sprang up. The Working Class Union was ostensibly originated in Arkansas by Dr. Wells LeFevre of Van Buren, on August 25, 1914 in a place known as "Hobo Hollow." The membership in Oklahoma, however, far outnumbered that in Arkansas,

²²Labor History of Oklahoma, 39.

and there is doubt as to the strength of the group in the home state. It was a militant, secret organization which advocated the "abolition of rent, interest and profit-taking; Government ownership of public utilities; and free schools---and proposed revolution as the means to the end."²³ The very fact that it was a secret organization in which the oath, in some instances, was taken on the Bible and a six-shooter, appealed to these farmers. In no local were premanent records kept and there were no membership lists. Membership is quoted in figures ranging from 18,000 to 35,000 and leadership in the groups devolved upon the more active members who were known as "secretaries" or "captains" rather than upon any formally elected officers.²⁴ Many farmers who joined the W. C. U. sincerely believed that it was a benevolent organization. According to one participant, C. A. Eberle, who lives near Konowa, there was at least one occasion on which each member contributed twenty-five cents to raise \$260 to pay off the mortgage of another.²⁵

When the United States entered the World War, and the conscription lists began to appear, resentment against the government became the immediate object for revolt among these members of the W. C. U. They did not want to go to war; they only wished to be left alone to harvest their crops. Farm products

²³Ibid., 41.

²⁴Ibid., 40-42. The Oklahoma News, July 20, 1917. The Daily Oklahoman, August 11, 1917, lists members of the group at 18,000 while the Shawnee Daily News-Herald, September 25, 1917, lists it at 35,000.

²⁵Joseph Howell, story in The Tulsa Tribune, October 1, 1939.

were bringing high prices,²⁶ and the government was asking that there be increased production; it appeared that a measure of prosperity was in store for the tenant farmer. And, now, the government said that the farmer must join the army to fight an enemy across the ocean.²⁷ Hadn't they voted the year before to keep out of war?²⁸ To crystallize this sentiment against supposed oppression by the "master class", the I. W. W. sent more agitators into the country.²⁹ Resentment against the rich, the war, and even against the local regulation concerning stock dipping was fanned until "every law became a tyranny".³⁰ The draft was selected as the specific cause for uprising.

²⁶Trimble R. Hedges and K. D. Blood, Oklahoma Farm Price Statistics, 1910-38, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Exp. Sta. Bul. No. 238, Table 7, 24. The price for cotton lint in July 1917 was 22.8 cents per pound as compared with 12.0 cents per pound in the same month of 1916.

²⁷Ora Almon Hilton, The Control of Public Opinion in the United States During the World War, (MS). He says, "In the opinion of the East, robed in the virtuous cloak of patriotism, the Middle West must be educated to an appreciation of what was involved. Letter to the writer from Bart B. Howard, St. Louis Post-Dispatch editorial writer and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for the best editorial of 1939, says, "Public opinion may, of course, be accelerated towards a conviction. That, I think, was the case in the Middle West, in which Oklahoma may be temperamentally included, during the first World War." Howard was an editorial writer on The Daily Oklahoman from 1916 to 1919.

²⁸In 1916, William H. Murray had been retired as congressman from the Fourth Congressional District supposedly because of a speech in which he had stated that war was inevitable, and Tom D. McKeown had been elected on a platform of "peace at any price"; quoted in the Shawnee Daily News-Herald, August 7, 1917.

²⁹McAlester News-Capital, October 20, 1917.

³⁰Editorial, in Wewoka Capital-Democrat, August 19, 1917.

It is interesting to follow the story of the Friendship community, near Konawa, and one of the chief centers of discontent, from the time of the declaration of war to the time of the rebellion. In this column of news, published each week in the Konawa Chief-Leader, one can follow the development of the sentiment for revolt from such items as the following:

We had a nice rain about a week ago but since then have had hard winds from the south and north. People are well up with their farming.³¹

There will be a meeting of the Agriculture Club next Friday night with talks on the following subjects: "How to raise fall potatoes" by W. T. Cargill; and "Why we cultivate," by J. J. Webb.³²

The announced public meeting of farmers Monday night was held with a large attendance, but no city or town man enlisted in its discussion. It was a farmers meeting. The subject ways and means as how best to meet the present condition of food shortage was discussed and ideas and views exchanged as to what to plant and grow and how to market and care for it when matured by a number of those present. One man's idea was to ask Mr. Banker and Mr. Landlord to build the farmers a place to store what was raised. Another advanced the idea that the banker's interest in advocating increased farm production was to secure a mortgage on what might be produced and in the fall take it and sell to the speculator at high prices. Others took the view that the crisis now confronting the people would benefit the farmers in many ways and eventually be the means of bringing the farmer into his own, bring about a back-to-the-farm movement and stimulate greater production, utilize all available ground and cause many to labor who never have worked much before.³³

The Baptist protracted meeting began Saturday and closed Sunday night. The reasons for the meeting being stopped were that some said they were not done work, some afraid to leave their homes for fear something would be taken and some said it was an improper

³¹April 20, 1917.

³²May 25, 1917. Cargill was one of the three casualties in the rebellion.

³³June 29, 1917.

time on account of unsettled conditions of people's minds.³⁴

The local newspapers, since the beginning of the war, had carried the President's Message and had run stories of the part of the United States in the war. Even the atrocity stories of the Huns had been published in some of the newspapers, but this written word failed to excite these farmers. They more readily grasped the propoganda of the I. W. W. leader Munson and the other agitators, many of whom were local men instructed by Munson. Personal experience made these farmers believe that the war was a "capitalist's" war; they could readily believe the speeches of the radicals because they had long been conscious of distinction between classes. Newspapers were not readily accessible³⁵ to many persons in the group, and, it has been pointed out, that the percentage of illiteracy was high. The printed word did not carry the force nor the weight with the southeastern Oklahoma farmers that the spoken word did. There was practically no form of communication outside the group except with these radicals who had been sent into the area. Physically they were a part of the peoples of the five counties, but psychologically there was a barrier created by social, political, religious, and educational distinctions which did not permit the free interchange of expressions of opinion between the urban class and the rural class.

³⁴July 27, 1917.

³⁵American Newspaper Annual and Directory, 778-82.

Although it is hard to prove, it is believed that these people did not read many newspapers. Circulation figures for newspapers in the area show that in 1915 The Wewoka Capital-Democrat had 950; The Holdenville Democrat, 1,450; Konowa Chief-Leader, 700; Francis Wigwam, 480.

III

NEWSPAPER TREATMENT

Four hundred ignorant, tenant farmers in five Oklahoma counties furnished headlines for state and national newspapers during the first week of August 1917. Editors in the immediate vicinity of The Green Corn Rebellion were confronted with the problem of furnishing news to their readers concerning what was believed to be the safety of the readers' own homes.

Other newspapers published accounts of the rebellion in accordance with the editor's concept of its interest and its value to the reader in helping to form an opinion. So long as the newspaper accounts were handled by newspapers in the state, it was characterized as a revolt in which the participants were denounced as anarchists, traitors, and "nitwits". In every instance, where the rebellion was discussed editorially, the opinion was expressed that the rioters should be dealt with promptly and harshly. On second thought, however, the editors became more lenient in their editorial condemnation and branded the rioters as ignorant farmers who had been misled; this treatment was the same as that of judges who first fixed bonds so high that only three persons were able to gain temporary freedom,¹ but these judges soon sorted "the grain from the

¹Bush, The Green Corn Rebellion. Bonds for leaders were placed at \$10,000; for minor leaders from \$5,000 to \$7,500 and for others from \$500 to \$3,000. "For the first few weeks after the rebellion a bond of \$500 was generally as effective as one for \$5,000."

chaff" and those who were believed to be innocent were released. Newspapers outside the state reported the rioting in headlines which were aimed to increase street sales; the presentation was one in which the "deplorable" economic conditions were emphasized by one newspaper, a warning for pacifists was pointed out by another, and others saw in it similarities to that particular newspaper community's own industrial disturbances, others emphasized that such revolts were of help to German propagandists.²

The Oklahoma press at that time consisted of about fifty daily, four semi-weekly, one tri-weekly, and five hundred and eleven weekly newspapers.³

Perhaps one should follow first the presentation of the rebellion by the newspapers in the state's capital city. The Daily Oklahoman, with a circulation more than three times larger than that of any other newspaper in the state,⁴ carried detailed accounts longer than any other newspaper in the state. The registers of the draft, it will be remembered, began to meet at Spear's Bluff on Thursday, August 2, but it was on Friday before much conflict between the farmer-rioters and the citizen-possemen took place. This was too late for The Daily Oklahoman of August 3, so the first story of the rebellion in

²The Daily Oklahoman, August 19, 1917.

³American Newspaper Annual and Directory, 776.

⁴Ibid. The circulation figures of The Daily Oklahoman were listed at 41,268 and of The Tulsa Daily World at 13,075.

Oklahoma City was carried by the afternoon paper, The Okla-homa News.⁵ It told the story under a streamer headline which read, "Revolt Near Ada" in type an inch high. In a flaming⁶ headline across the issue of The Daily Oklahoman on August 4, however was the message that "1,000 POSSEMEN PLAN DAYBREAK DRIVE ON DODGERS". In this two-column right hand corner layout on page one, the second, third and fourth decks of the headline read: "400 Draft-Defiers Form Mob Near Ada; State Rushes Help---Arms of National Guardsmen to be Used in Chase; Squad From Many Towns to Quell Rioters---Ten of Gang Have Been Captured".⁷ More red ink was used on the August 5 issue, and the national news concerning persons who resisted the selective draft law, was tied in with the state news to form an interesting layout. To present this picture, the accompanying dummy of the three columns in the upper right-hand corner of the newspaper has been reconstructed. On the same day, an editorial writer commented:

Down With The Mob

The mob in Pontotoc and Seminole Counties that raised the red flag must be dealt with promptly and sternly. It is immaterial whether they call themselves the "Working Class Union," the "Jones Family," or I. W. W.'s. They are anarchists. They have challenged law and order. Their challenge must be met.

⁵This paper is the only known syndicate paper in Oklahoma at that time; it was a member of the Scripps-Howard chain.

⁶Red ink was used for many special headlines in The Daily Oklahoman at that time.

⁷To explain a few of these terms used, briefly: The upper right-hand corner of the page is used by newspapermen, as a rule, for the position of the story of first importance

Their weapons and methods---guns and sabotage--- are the weapons and methods of anarchy. It is in this murderous and destructive violence that the philosophy of anarchy comes to logical fruition.

The most important story, from the point of position in the newspaper, on August 6 was headlined "Three Shot When Posse Traps Gang---Ed Blaylock,⁸ Draft Resister, Killed by Posse in Brush Twelve Miles Southeast of Holdenville---Okema⁹ Man Killed Running Past Guard". Page three of the same issue carried the story of resistance to the selective draft law in three different parts of Georgia. The story in the headlines continued on August 7; these read: "Two National Organizers of W. C. U. Face Federal Charge of Treason; First Dodger Trials Begin Today---Penalty, If Convicted, Will Be Death; Hearing Before U. S. Court Will be Set for October Term---Two Hundred Fifty Prisoners Captured---Prohibited Bonds Fixed; Important Letters and Records Are Taken by Federal Officers". The story which followed this two-column headline was sent out from Wewoka, where the editor of the newspaper was Luther Harrison, who was also a member of the Seminole County unit of the State Council of Defense.¹⁰

Perhaps Oklahoma editors by this date were realizing that the publicity of the rebellion was not the type desired,¹¹ at

and the left-hand side for the story second in importance; a deck is the term to distinguish the various parts of the headline, and to indicate the decks the writer has used--- between each.

⁸This is an error; the man killed was W. T. Cargill.

⁹This spelling was used not only in the headline, but also in the body of the story.

¹⁰Alva Daily Pioneer, August 12, 1937.

¹¹The Daily Oklahoman, August 19, 1917.

OFFICERS CAPTURE 102 RIOTERS; ONE OUTLAW KILLED BY POSSES; DODGERS CLASS AS DESERTERS

"Demonstrations are futile", Crowd Says in Warning to Dodgers

IMMEDIATE DRAFT, THEN COURT-MARTIAL

Whole strength of Military is Available to Apprehend Lawbreakers

Washington, Aug. 4 -- Registered men who resist the selective draft law face military court-martial for desertion and possibility of execution ---

Summary -



Jails of Three Counties are Filled with Captured Draft Resisters

DISPERSEMENT OF OUTLAWS IS SEEN

Sheriffs and Civilians Believe they have Situation Well in Hand

- BULLETIN -

Saskawa, Okla., Aug. 5 --- A special train carrying a detachment of national guardsmen arrived here shortly before 8 o'clock this morning ---

NO TROOPS NEEDED TO QUELL REBELS

Civilian Poses Are Able To Handle Situation Says Major Scott

any rate, an editorial entitled "The Real Oklahoma" was carried on August 8; it reads, in part:

Oklahoma has gotten a lot of unenviable publicity the last few days because a fringe of half-wits attempted to resist the draft law. The caliber of the mob's intelligence is shown in the fact that for the most part it was made up of men long past the draft age. It was quickly subdued and dispersed and the leaders are now in jail facing a capital sentence, according to the United States district attorney's plan of prosecution.

Informed public opinion will judge this incident for what it is---a bizarre mixture of the lamentable and ludicrous.

...In no state in the union has the press buried its politics so completely and stood so unanimously back of the administration.

...If you come to Oklahoma you will find a garden in every back yard, our clock ticks "Hail Columbia" and the winds that sweep our prairies whistle Marse Henry Watterson's national anthem---"To Hell With the Hohenzollerns and Hapsburgs."

There are two millions of us, pro-American to the marrow of our bones, and we march with Uncle Samuel through whatever red days and ways, to the triumphant finale. That's Oklahoma.

Big headlines in The Daily Oklahoman did not leave the front page until after August 9. The story on August 8 was "W. C. U. Organizer Denies Rioting---LeFevre Brands Agitators as Fools; Anarchy Not Countenanced---Born in Hobo Hollow---Many Members Are Out of Work; All Records of Meetings Destroyed." The story which followed was from Fort Smith, Arkansas and quoted Dr. Wells LeFevre as saying that the Working Class Union was being wrongfully accused of being responsible for the anti-draft riots. The headlines of August 9 tell the story that "Home Guards Are to Be Organized Throughout State---Men Outside Draft Age to Be Armed With Discarded Springfields---Earp is to Head Citizen Police---Plan Result of Anti-Draft Riots; Each County to Have a Unit." On page two of this issue

there was the story headed "Resisters to Be Tried in Groups--- Separation of 'Wheat From Chaff' Is Begun by District Attorney". The August 10 issue carried on page three the following headlines: "Bridges Burned to Stop Troops---Draft Resisters Then Hoped to Terrorize the Country Without Hindrance--- Thirty-two Confess---Many of Those Forced Into Mob Probably Will Not Be Prosecuted". This story originated in McAlester where the majority of the prisoners had been taken and where the preliminary trials were held. August 12 headlines on page two were "W. C. U. Told To Stand By Draft Laws---Arkansas Members of the Union Say Germans Instigated Trouble". This story carried the dateline of August 11 from Van Buren, Arkansas. In the same issue on page one of section two was the story "Home Guard to Become Permanent---Citizens of Riot-Infested Districts Are Taking No Chances Now".

The Oklahoma News sent a cartoonist into the area; his art work appeared in a four-column layout on the front page of the issue of August 9; on page three a humorous letter, which the cartoonist wrote, characterized the people as those whom he should rather hear about than contact. The News had tried to inform its readers of the sacrifices involved in wartime, when it announced on July 6, 7, and 8 in a streamer at the very top of the front page and over the nameplate that "'The Day of Wrath'" by Louis Tracy would be published serially. In a box on the front page was the explanation:

The News offers "The Day of Wrath" in six installments next week in the hope that every reader will let this great novel drive home the conviction that no sacrifice is too great if only it will aid in warding off the German peril from American shores.

The telephone as an instrument for the transference of news was evidently not common at this time, since The Chickasha Daily Express commented for two days, August 4 and 6 that the information came direct to the paper from the area "by long distance telephone." The makeup of the front page of the paper on August 4 included three streamer headlines; these read: "Backbone Of Ada Riot Now Believed To Be Broken", "23,000 National Guardsmen From Missouri and Kansas for Fort Sill", and "Germany Warns Neutrals Closed Doors Means War". Each of these headlines, of course, told a different story. The account of the revolt, although leading in the amount of space, was carried in the left hand columns with the following subordinate headlines: "Six Hundred Armed Men Headed by Sheriffs Will Put Down Seminole Riot---Posses Scour River Bottom for Men Who Have Broken Up Into Small Bands In Hiding". The same makeup was followed on the August 6 issue with the first streamer reading "Reinforcements for Armed Posses Rushed to Scene" and the other decks of the headline reading, "Three Members of Anti-Draft Mob Die As Result of Oklahoma Man Hunt---Jails Are Filled When Posses Gather 300 Prisoners; Members of Posse Shot By Trapped Fugitives". Commenting editorially on that same date under a head "Deluded Draft Resisters", the ignorance of the farmers was deplored and the agitators condemned. August 7 headlines read: "Death Sentence Asked For Captives in Anti-Draft Riots in S. E. Okla.---At Least Two National Leaders and Important Records Captured in War on Working Class Union". The story was an account sent out by the

United Press and bore the McAlester dateline.

The western part of Oklahoma presumably had little interest in the anti-draft riots of the eastern Oklahoma counties. The Frederick Semi-Weekly Star, on August 7, carried only a small story in the third column from the right hand side, with the headline, "Draft Resisters Under Control". Commenting editorially on this same date, however, in an article headed "Reaping the Fruits", the editor said:

The action of those who resisted service for their country cannot be too strongly condemned, but in doing so, let some of the censure be measured out to the bunch of grafters, crooked office holders, and the more intelligent citizenship who have debauched the people of that section.

The only instance in which the rebellion story was used in the Alva Daily Pioneer was on August 4. In this paper, it was one of only two stories on the front page; the rest of the page was devoted to advertising.¹² The headlines read: "400 Resist Draft in Seminole County---Actuated By Advice From 'The Working Class' Union, Drafted Men Resist Examination". The lead on the story which followed was:

While the examination of those called for draft in Woods county was moving along quietly and serenely, all was not serene in at least one county in the state. Actuated by the spirit of the "Working Class" union to which many belong, an organized attempt was made by about four hundred men who were subject to draft in Seminole county, to resist the order to appear for examination.

Under an Ada dateline of August 3, the story continued. This Ada story is so similar to the story published on August 4 by

¹²Nearly all the weekly papers examined, and many of the dailies, carried advertising on the front page.

The Daily Oklahoman and The Tulsa Daily World, that the writer assumes this to be the first story concerning the rioting which the Associated Press used on its wires.¹³

There was also little written about the revolt in the papers of southeastern Oklahoma. This omission, it is believed, was for an entirely different reason; "there were too many Socialists in that community".¹⁴ On August 2, the Indian Citizen-Democrat of Atoka, a weekly paper, had given its lead position on page one to the news of the hanging of an I. W. W. leader in Butte, Montana. A four-line, single deck head was used. But the more local news of rioting was almost "buried" among the stories on the front page of August 9; the head read: "Charged With Rebellion". The story had a McAlester dateline, although Ada and Wewoka, which are approximately the same distance from Atoka as McAlester, had sent out hundreds of words on the rioting activities. In Idabel, the weekly newspaper, The McCurtain Gazette, never told its readers the story.

Northeastern Oklahoma, on August 10, as represented by

¹³This story reads, in part: "One thousand armed possemen, collected from Seminole, Hughes, Okmulgee, Creek, Pottawatomie, Okfuskee, and Pittsburg counties plan to begin a drive at daybreak Saturday morning upon the mob of 400 draft resisters who are now scattered through the hills of northern Pontotoc and southern Seminole counties."

¹⁴Quoting from Paul Norrell, editor of the Wapanucka Press in August 1917. Mr. Norrell's brother was editor of the Ada Weekly News. To the question: "Did you run any stories about the Green Corn Rebellion?", the former editor replied: "Goodness, no! There were too many Socialists in that community." The Socialist vote in McCurtain county for 1914 was 1,244 as compared with the total vote of 3,420; in Atoka county it was 954 and the total vote was 2,996.

The Muskogee Daily Phoenix emphasized the fate of those who had rebelled against the draft. The headline used was "Draft Resisters Held in Silence of Death Chamber".¹⁴ The Tulsa Daily World, which claims northeastern Oklahoma as its trade territory,¹⁵ on August 4, carried the story from Muskogee and Oklahoma City with the streamer head and four other decks; these read: "Daylight Attack Will Be Made on Defiant Draft Resisters---One Thousand Possemen Prepare To Round Up 400 Heavily Armed Rioters Camped Near Sasakwa---Seminole, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Hughes Counties Terrorized By Draft Rebellion---Deputy Sheriff Shot From Ambush---Indians, Negroes, I. W. W., Working Class Union Members Make Up Outlaw Mobs". This upper, right-hand position on page one was supplemented with a story from Ada headed "Ada Prepares To Go Get Slackers---Two Thousand Organize for Battle; Sheriff Duncan Arrests Conspirators". On August 5 a four column streamer in the upper right-hand corner of page one said, "Backbone of Draft Rebellion Believed Broken---Ringleader Shot; Others Captured; Bands Scattered---Bullet Thru Stomach Lays Low Cargill, Veteran Mob Leader---Konawa Threatened---Three Hundred Reported to Be Marching to Fire and Plunder". Next to the lead story, on August 9, a special feature on agitators was published. In an editorial, on the

¹⁴This probably refers to the incident of the jailing of Homer Spence, who was placed in a cell in death row at the state penitentiary because of the crowded conditions or because the officers wished to obtain a confession quickly.

¹⁵The "Magic Empire" created by The Tulsa Daily World claims the northeastern section of the state as Tulsa's trade territory.

same date, entitled "The Jones Family" the following comments were made:

While we are talking about I. W. W. meanness, recent developments in the southern part of the state move us to include in the same damnable list with the "wobblies" and German agents the no less despicable "Jones Family" and the "Working Class" Union. The whole bunch of them have turned out to be nothing less than emissaries of the enemy seeking to cripple the energies of the nation by an attack from behind.

The most interesting of the papers examined, from the point of view that the editors, by their treatment of the event, were attempting to influence their readers, was the Drumright Evening Derrick. The oil field workers near Drumright were discussing the draft law and a revolt appeared to be imminent; this opposition was crystallized when notices of a mass meeting went out to "socialist and I. W. W. members...challenging the authority of the federal government to enforce the draft law".¹⁶ It is believed that the editor, through his choice of words was attempting to influence his readers against opposition to the draft; the fate of the rioters in southeastern Oklahoma was emphasized, as can be seen from the streamer head, "Anti-Draft Belligerents Now In Hands of Law". This August 6 story, used two-columns in the right-hand position also had the following heads: "193 Resisters Are Captured and Being Held by Posses---To Be Tried for Treason and Death Penalty Asked---60 Are Taken to the McAlester State Prison". Continuing to emphasize that revolt was punishable, the August 7 story, with a similar streamer head and in the same position, bore

¹⁶The Daily Oklahoman, August 15, 1917.

the headlines, "U. S. Charge of Treason for Oklahoma Resisters---Two Hundred and Fifty Prisoners Have Been Taken---Selective Draft Only An Excuse for Insurrection---Unamerican Leaders Incited Oklahoma Rebellion".

Opposition was also being expressed in Payne county, and The Stillwater Gazette implied that resistance was comparable with lawlessness. On August 10, this newspaper carried a story of the riots in a single-column left-hand side position. The headline read, "Draft Resisters---More Than Two Hundred Oklahoma Rebels Now in the Penitentiary---Are Held Pending Trial---United States Officials Mean to Bring Ringleaders to Bar First." The lead story of that issue, however, was headed, "Is Rarin' To Go---One Man Out of First Sixty-three Doesn't Claim Exemption---Examination For Draft---Surgeons Expect to Complete Task Tonight; 27 Per Cent Disqualified". By contrast, the editor was thus able to condemn, on the one hand, those who were branded as violators of law, and to commend the man who was willing and anxious to participate with the government in fighting to "preserve Democracy".

But what of newspaper treatment of the rioting in the five counties involved? There was at Francis, near where, it will be remembered, the Frisco railroad bridge had been damaged, a small handset weekly paper, The Wigwam. The issue of August 2, carried, along with advertising and a group of locals without heads, the following item, also without a headline:

Four Francis men arrested yesterday charged with promoting a movement for resistance to the Draft Law. Other arrests are expected to follow, charged with same offense.

The paper was not published on August 2, however; it didn't "get out on time", because one finds, at the bottom of the first column on the left hand side of the page, the following story:

Canadian Bridge
Burned by Mob

Wires Down and Trains Are Tied
Up In Francis

As we go to press, we learn that the Canadian bridge was burned last night, telephone wire [sic] cut and trains tied up here. Men came through here this morning enroute to Ada to give up to officials, saying they were forced by mob of men to do the work. Excitement and suspense prevails here as we cannot get in communication with the outside world.

On August 9, the five-column, four-page weekly carried a story under the headline "Rioters Dispersed", and that was the last of the revolt to be reported by the paper.

In the Ada Weekly News, the rebellion story began on August 2. The story headed "To Resist Draft Law---Organization Thought to Exist in Several Counties in Oklahoma" was one of six appearing in the same size headline type at the top of the page in the fourth column from the right-hand side of the page. The entire front page and most of the entire paper on August 9, was devoted to an account of the rebellion. In an unusual makeup on page one the three-line head was carried across the top of the page; this head read: "Believe Trouble Is About Over But No Chances Will Be Taken". The lead on the story read:

Anarchy reared its head in the Southern part of Seminole county Thursday afternoon and night and part of that section is under control of a mob of anti-draft men of various ages.

The headlines on August 16 told that many of the participants were eager to tell of the plan of revolt and were anxious to escape punishment. On August 23, the story was that Spence would quit the organization of which he had been state secretary.

The Wewoka Capital-Democrat on August 2 used as its most important story of the week one from the "British Headquarters in France and Belgium"; the headlines were "Allies in War's Greatest Drive---180,000 Huns Cut to Pieces by Combined English and French Offensive". This was a six-column paper in which the two center columns were used for the lead story. These two-columns were headed, on August 9, "'War Breaks Out in Seminole County---W. C. U.'s Get Naughty and Take To War-path; But They are Wiser Now". Other stories on the front page of this issue were headed, "Many Slackers in Draft List", "Fifty Men in First Call Fail to Appear for Their Examination", "Spence Captured?", and "Maud Marshal Shot by Possemen". On August 16, the lead story was "Seminole County Is Quiet Again---No More Trouble Expected From the Scattered Malcontents"; other stories were headlined, "Gunmen in County Jail---Three of the Gang Who Shot Will Cross Now in Custody in County Jug", "More Kumrids From Seminole---Deputy Taylor Takes Five to Shawnee Last Sunday Afternoon". August 23, the headlines read: "Leaders of Draft Riots Are Held---113 Altogether Now Face The Federal Grand Jury; Spence Bond \$15,000". It is also interesting that, on August 30, there was a small front-page story headed, "Konowa Citizens Denounce Gore---Adopt Resolutions

Declaring That Senator Inspired Recent Uprising". While the editor, Luther Harrison, was coining words for his front page headlines, he was also writing on the editorial page. He wrote, on August 9,

It is...unthinkable that three hundred men should take up arms, raise the red flag, engage in wholesale arson and assassination, terrorize three counties and then be permitted to continue their campaign of preparation for another day of discord and trial of strength. Every man who followed John Speer and Wallace Cargill in the present insurrection should ascend a Federal scaffold or spend the remainder of his days in a Federal prison.

This posseman-editor also wrote on the same date,

The Boy Scouts of Wewoka could have routed the bunch who fight just like they farm. But no one knew how yellow the outfit was and for two days it looked as if a lot of help was really needed.

The Holdenville Democrat, also a six column weekly paper, carried a lead story, on August 10, headed, "Shattered Are Their Dreams of Conquest---A Few Hundred Misguided Malcontents After a Few Days of Revel in Terrorism and Bluster---Rounded Up By the Outraged Citizens of Seminole Hughes and Surrounding Counties after Three Fatalities and Are Now in Prison Facing Prosecution for Treason and Other Offenses---Organized Disorder Is Thought to Be Safely Broken Up in This Section of the State".

The Seminole County News headed its story of the rebellion, on August 9, "The End". This was one of two stories used on the front page; the other was headed "Not Exempted".

The story of the rebellion read

It is a pity, to say the least of it, that wild

eyed men with families, would come out boldy, defy the government, because it wants them to fight to protect their own homes and freedom, to arm themselves with guns and ammunition and fight their own neighbors. Inconsistent and absurd. We are proud that we are in such good shape around Seminole.

Throughout the nation, newspapers adapted the news of the revolt to what the editors believed to be important to their readers.¹⁷ Street sales in the big cities were important and "it was natural that the draft troubles were overplayed to the limit in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and many other big 'street sales' centers".¹⁸ For the specific treatment of the Green Corn Rebellion, by out-of-state newspapers, the writer has relied on a story published in The Daily Oklahoman, of August 17, 1917. This story, in part, follows:

The assortment of plain and fancy hand set box car type used as a head for this story is only a suspicion of the total number of scare heads used throughout the world in the last two weeks.¹⁹

...
The Boston Globe observes that the grievance of the resisters appears to be more industrial than political. ... "What they do indicate, however, is something of which it behooves us to take notice and action, and that is an unwholesome remark with engaging candor that they gain their converts 'where the industrial soil is rotten'".

In a lead editorial, The Chicago Tribune says: "The point overlooked by the protestants, who are of seeming good character, and disregarded by the

¹⁷This, of course, is newspaper practice in presenting news. The editor makes his selection, and his presentation upon the basis of reader interest.

¹⁸The Daily Oklahoman, August 16, 1917.

¹⁹Some of these heads which were used were "Draft Rioters to Face Death", "War in Oklahoma Won by Uncle Sam", "Draft Revolution Nipped", "Oklahoma Officers to Ask Death Penalty for Rioters".

radicals who care nothing about character is that ignorance and selfishness, excited by the work of scheming men, may be set in action against the necessary processes of government in a reasonable fashion. ...

...The St. Louis Post-Dispatch comments as follows: "They resemble the disturbances which in some other less happily situated counties are called agrarian disorders. The men responsible for them are not conscientious objectors to conscription nor to other forms of military service. They are against law, against government, against any organization society may adopt for its own protection, against clean linen, against the industrious, against the well disposed. The Working Class unionists, as they call themselves, are the Industrial Workers of the World with something added in the way of absurdities which perhaps even the I. W. W. would avoid. They are trouble makers who make the draft law an excuse for raising Cain."

The Washington Star thinks there has been wonderfully little resistance, and analyzing the Oklahoma situation, says:

"Probably when all the cases of draft resistance are analyzed it will be found that many of them are the result of economic stress and misguidance rather than actual disloyalty. Many of the Oklahoma farmers have been suffering for two years or more from lack of markets for their products and have acquired the peculiar notion that inasmuch as the war gave them their first bad setback they should on principle be opposed to the American entrance into the war now.

"Everyone who stands out in opposition to the draft law is under direct and justified suspicion of being a German agent. Drastic punishments are necessarily right at this stage to demonstrate to the country that the draft law must be obeyed else the spy law will be enforced."

After referring to Oklahoma as a "loosely organized community", the Washington Herald strikes an interesting theme when it shows how the "playing up" of these slacker stories by the newspapers of the United States is playing into the hands of German propagandists. This from the Herald:

"Perhaps the armed resistance to the draft in certain loosely organized sections of the nation may be accepted as proof of the effectiveness of German propaganda there. As a sensation it will quickly die out. It should not be dignified with any real significance. It is on a par with the manufacture of 'moonshine whisky' and the defiance of the federal law in Tennessee and Kentucky. It is the result more of ignorant provincialism than anything else.

"There is a certain demoralizing effect about 'playing up' these stories of slackerism. They embolden the German propagandists to redouble their efforts. They give comfort to the enemy and serve to make the course of obstruction easier in Washington. It must not be forgotten that thousands of busybodies are always awaiting the 'cue' to prove that the war is unpopular with the people. They should not be given this added opportunity to keep pounding away in their antagonism to the policy of the nation."

And, finally, for an opinion of the treatment of the rebellion in newspapers outside Oklahoma, Luther Harrison says:

I remember something of the treatment given the uprising by the press of other states. Some of it was grossly exaggerative. I remember in particular a picture representing an attack on the resisters by militiamen armed with machine guns. There were no machine guns and no militia in the troubled area.²⁰

The study of newspapers in Oklahoma reveals that the rebellion was treated as a revolt against the established law and order and against the government which at that moment needed the support of every individual for the preservation of those ideals upon which the nation was founded. Some newspapers were openly denunciatory of the revolting farmers, others avoided bringing criticism upon themselves by publishing no accounts of the rebellion, others felt that it would be of no interest to their readers, and there were still others who used it as a "horrible example" for persons in their own community who might be contemplating draft resistance.

²⁰Letter to the writer, dated May 11, 1939.

IV

INFLUENCES AFFECTING THE NEWSPAPERS

Why did the Oklahoma editors react to the Green Corn Rebellion in the manner disclosed by the accounts which they published? It has been seen that there was a class distinction, definitely developed, between the urban class and the rural class. Editors belonged to the literate, urban group; the draft resisters were members of the illiterate, or at least partly illiterate, rural group. There was definitely a conflict between the inherent ideas of the two.

The newspaper editor, it must be remembered, is an ordinary citizen in a community. He holds a position comparable to the teacher and the preacher and the doctor and the lawyer; he is anxious to maintain the respect of his group. If he is to be financially successful, he must conform to the opinions current in his community. Furthermore, the editor has a code of ethics which demands that he support law and order. He wishes to maintain the respect of his fellow newspapermen. Thus, one is led to agree with William Allen White:

"It is my feeling that the only pressure to which editors as a whole yield, is the pressure of the mores of time, the pressure of the generally accepted stereotyped conceptions in all fields of thought."¹

The anti-draft revolts represented an attempt to overthrow established authority; and, in the immediate area, the merchant

¹Peter Odegard, The American Public Mind, 121.

and the banker, who were advertisers, were indignant at the loss of crops on which they held mortgages. The editor was imbued with the war spirit; he had had ready access to all the propaganda which had been flooding the nation for three years. During the months preceding entrance of the United States into the European conflict, newspapers, particularly those in the extreme eastern states,² had carried the story of the allies so effectively that a strong bond of sympathy had been created. In contrast, the role of Germany had been presented in such a manner that that nation had assumed the aspect of a violator of inherent ideals.³ "World War I was popular," says Jim Biggerstaff, editor of The Wagoner Record-Democrat and The Wagoner Tribune.⁴ It was impossible for Oklahoma newspaper editors to treat the Green Corn Rebellion in any other manner than as a revolt of a mob which should promptly be punished. The advertising for the newspaper was dependent on the support of local merchants. These same local merchants were wholeheartedly supporting the war and were anxious that all persons should participate. In addition, many Oklahoma newspaper editors were members of county units of the State Council of Defense and their place in the community, as such

²H. C. Peterson, Propaganda For War, 163. He says, however, "But at the same time that confirmation of the pro-Germanness of Middle Western papers seemed to be found in their editorial attacks on British naval policy, equal justification for the label 'pro-Ally' might be found in their news columns, which were filled with the identical pro-British dispatches published in the New York press."

³Ibid., 326.

⁴Letter to the writer, dated May 3, 1940. He also says, "In 17-18 I bought Liberty bonds and made schoolhouses speaking in behalf of their sale. I found good response everywhere."

demanded support of the governmental program for war.⁵

The Oklahoma press, as a whole, believed its role to be necessary in supporting the United States in wartime; the individual editor was, in a large measure, controlled by his desire for respect from his fellow newspapermen. At the annual meeting of the Oklahoma Press Association in Lawton on May 24 and 25, 1918, Walter M. Harrison, managing editor of The Daily Oklahoman "paid a high tribute to the patriotic service that had been rendered by the press of Oklahoma in its devotion to the Government".⁶ As early as May 1917, the Oklahoma press was evidencing its willingness to play a part in winning the World War. In describing the activities of the Oklahoma Press Association at its annual meeting on May 11 and 12, 1917 in Shawnee, J. B. Thoburn, well-known writer on Oklahoma history, writes:

The reports of the resolutions committee presented by Maj. Charles F. Barrett, was expressive of the keen anxiety which was felt by the people of America concerning the World War, and urged the duty of every citizen to support the President and aid the Government in the great struggle in which the American nation and people had been plunged, through no wish or fault of their own.

...

A message was sent to the Oklahoma delegation in Congress pledging the loyalty of the Oklahoma press,...⁷

Of the mid-winter meeting of the association in Oklahoma City

⁵The following newspaper editors are known to have been members of these county units; there were probably others: B. R. Cook, Indian Citizen-Democrat, Atoka; Jim Biggerstaff, Wagoner; Luther Harrison, The Wewoka Capital-Democrat.

⁶J. B. Thoburn, History of the Oklahoma Press and the Oklahoma Press Association, Compiled and Supervised by John Windsor Sharp. (no page numbers).

⁷Ibid. There are no minutes of the Oklahoma Press Association for these years available, according to Vernon Sanford,

and Norman on January 18 and 19, 1918, he writes:

The Press Association at the Friday morning session in Oklahoma City, went on record as favoring the publication of only those letters from the boys at the front which have been censored by army officers or publicity directors. The vote asking the editors of the state to take this stand followed a lengthy discussion of publication of such letters. It was stated that some papers publish all letters indiscriminately, some publish only those bearing the stamp of approval of a military censor and some publish none.⁸

There was another pressure by which the newspaper editor was influenced in the treatment of the news of the Green Corn Rebellion. There had been established by executive order dated April 14, 1917 a Committee of Public Information. This committee was charged with the responsibility of the two functions---censorship and publicity.⁹ The many activities of the committee have been told effectively by George Creel in his work, How We Advertised America, and by James R. Mock and Cedric Larson in their book, Words That Won the War. For the purposes of this study only a very few of its services are pertinent, since the time element between the creation of the Committee of Public Information and the Green Corn Rebellion is important: the one, April 14, 1917 and the other August 2, 3, 4, 5, 1917. Under the chairmanship of George Creel with advisers from the Departments of War, State and Navy, there was set up a bureau for the dissemination of positive news calculated to reach every channel by which the government's message

secretary-manager of the Oklahoma Press Association, Letter to the writer, dated June 3, 1939.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920, II, 7-8.

would be carried to the people of the United States.¹⁰ Mimeographed stories originating in any branch of the government, were "put on the table...where the news associations kept regular men,...These 'stories' were 'live news' meant for the telegraph-wire". Thus, the Associated Press and the United Press sent out stories from the committee to all member papers throughout the United States, including Oklahoma. Another activity of the committee which was aimed at the Press was the publication of pamphlets carrying the message of wartime and the facts concerning the war. The President's war message was issued in pamphlet form under the title, The War Message and Facts Behind It. Creel says:

We studied the newspaper directories and estimated that we could reach the press of the country with an edition of twenty thousand.¹¹

Thus, this first pamphlet of the "War Information Series" was issued to newspapermen. Another pamphlet was the National Service Handbook, carrying vital facts concerning wartime living and directing the reader to specific governmental agencies, within the reader's own state, through which he might obtain more information concerning the governmental program. There was also the Loyalty Leaflet, Ways to Serve the Nation: A Proclamation by the President.¹²

In the dissemination of its news stories and its special features, the Committee of Public Information found a valuable ally in the Western Newspaper Union, a national organization,

¹⁰Creel, How We Advertised America, 70-83.

¹¹Ibid., 102.

¹²These pamphlets were all issued before July 1917.

with branches in most states, which furnished either ready-print or plate material to newspapers.¹³ The exact number of subscribers to this service in Oklahoma is not known, but it is assumed, from an examination of the many papers for 1917 which show that the contents were set in type other than that in the local plant, that the subscription list was large.¹⁴ The Wisconsin branch of the Western Newspaper Union was supplied with many stories by college publicity writers who rewrote the information sent out by the Committee of Public Information.¹⁵

In spite of this information which was evidently coming into Oklahoma from the Committee of Public Information, Luther Harrison, editorial writer for The Daily Oklahoman, insists:

The Creel committee had nothing to do with my treatment of the Green Corn rebellion. My present recollection is that the committee had not been formed at the time of the anti-draft uprising. If it had been formed, I probably never had heard of it. In any event, the committee exercised no influence whatsoever on my treatment of the uprising or upon any other development of the war period.

...

¹³Ready-print material is that where pages of newsprint are printed on one side at a central point and sent out to the newspapers, the opposite side is to be used for local news. Plate material consisted of zinc plates which the editor might use, if he wished, to supplement local news.

¹⁴Letter to the writer from the assistant manager of the Oklahoma City branch of the Western Newspaper Union, dated May 1, 1940. He says: "We do not have records back as far as 1917 and consequently are unable to furnish you the list you request. We did supply editors, all over the United States, with considerable material during the World War but no files are left on what this material was."

¹⁵Letter from Grant M. Hyde, head of the School of Journalism, Wisconsin University, to the writer, April 8, 1940. Mr. Hyde had charge of the publicity service of the university during the war and "carried on many campaigns in connection with the war activities of the University". He also says, "My part in the performance was to make newspaper articles ranging from one to two columns each out of each of the series of pamphlets published by this group of professors."

Throughout the war period, I was in the newspaper business, but at no time was I ever influenced by the Creel committee. In fact my present recollection is the committee did not concern itself with the small town press---that it operated through the metropolitan press solely. However, I may lack correct information on that point. I do know that I was neither influenced nor approached by the committee.¹⁶

While there was no formal agreement between the small newspaper and the Committee of Public Information as there was between the committee and the metropolitan press, it can scarcely be believed that the transmission of war news which presented the cause of the government was not a factor in influencing the Oklahoma newspaper editor to support the governmental program so wholeheartedly.

¹⁶Letter to the writer, dated May 11, 1939.

CONCLUSION

As this is written (May, 1940), the war cycle in Europe is being repeated.¹ Each day's newspaper brings the people of the United States closer to the conflict in Europe. At this particular time, therefore, this study has been especially interesting and valuable to the writer.

The problem, as originally set up, proposed an investigation of the influence of the Committee of Public Information on the newspapers in Oklahoma as illustrated by the treatment which those newspapers gave to the Green Corn Rebellion. As the work progressed, however, it became evident that, at the time of the Green Corn Rebellion, the Committee of Public Information has not yet made any effort to reach small newspapers directly.² Nevertheless, there was evidence of an indirect influence by the C. P. I.; and it was also believed that the

¹Peterson, Propaganda for War, 327, says: "...there can be no permanent peace in Europe...The particularism and vitality of the European people makes war on that continent inevitable. It is not something strange and unusual and personal, but a natural outcome of Europe's political, ethnographic, economic, and geographical configuration."

²The C. P. I. was established on April 14, 1917 and the anti-draft revolt occurred in August. Until November of that year, there had been no definite action taken toward the non-metropolitan press. James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, Words That Won the War, 91. See also, Editor & Publisher, (November 17, 1917), 8. "To give the country publisher a Government news service of a type to meet his need, the Committee on Public Information, Washington, has established a war news and feature service for the weekly newspapers of the country. The idea is not to add another publicity service to the many now being used, but to give the weekly newspaper publisher a news service written to suit the small space he has available for this class of matter."

study could yield information on other factors influencing Oklahoma newspapermen in their treatment of the Green Corn Rebellion.

The procedure followed has been to study, from the newspaper files, the newspaper reports and editorials concerning the Green Corn Rebellion. As background for this study of newspaper files, a study was made of the social and economic causes of the revolt. At this point, the hypothesis was formulated that there were two distinct groups among the people of southeastern Oklahoma: the urban, literate class on the one hand, and the rural illiterate class on the other. By these stages, the problem finally resolved itself into an analysis of the influences affecting each of these groups.

One group, the dominant, urban class, was influenced by those social pressures which in our customary stereotype of public opinion processes are assumed to have an influence on the attitudes of a group; they were readers, and they exchanged ideas in conversation with others who also had access to newspapers and other carriers of the printed word. The tenant-farmer class, in contrast, read newspapers rarely; the farmers were economically unable to purchase them, and their relative illiteracy made it difficult for them to assimilate information through the printed word. Therefore, the tenant farmer's only avenue of contact with social pressures was oral. As is demonstrated above, the speeches of agitators from outside the community were the catalyst which crystallized the revolt.

In a study of representative newspapers in Oklahoma during the first five months of the World War, it was seen that the editors, in all parts of the state, did not give equal emphasis to the Green Corn Rebellion. In the western part of the state, it was believed to be of little interest to the reader. In southeastern Oklahoma, the revolt was almost completely ignored, because of the large number of persons in the community who were sympathetic with the anti-draft resisters. In the immediate area, newspaper editors published all the information they were able to secure concerning the activities of the citizen-possemen and the tenant farmers. In other instances, editors "played up" the fate of those who resisted governmental authority; the assumption is that in such instances, the editors were attempting to influence those readers, who were contemplating revolt.

Despite the evidence given by Luther Harrison, it is hard to believe that the editors of Oklahoma newspapers were not indirectly influenced by the Committee of Public Information. The editor received his wartime news from the stories sent out by the Associated Press and the United Press, which in turn had received much of the information from "handouts" prepared by the C. P. I. The pamphlets, issued by the committee for the dissemination of the aims and ideals of the government, were also aimed directly at the newspapers. There were cooperative agencies, in Oklahoma probably only the Western Newspaper Union, which distributed information concerning governmental activities to member papers through the use of

ready-print or plate service. This may not have been recognized by editors as having come from the C. P. I.

More important, however, the spontaneous denunciation of the Green Corn Rebellion, which is shown in the excerpts from newspapers, was probably caused by the unconsciously organized social pressures. These pressures, it has been seen, were, in the main, the desire of the editor to maintain an acceptable place among the citizenry, the desire to uphold his code of ethics as a newspaperman, and the desire to cooperate in a program which was being promoted by his fellow newspapermen. It is probably that in a future situation, the same control will be dominant.

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